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Fighting the Gravity: Settler Colonial Interventions in Land Based Memory

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Abstract:

This dissertation establishes a settler-colonial ontological frame work through the melding of Western storytelling genre conventions with Indigenous storytelling methods. Through a series of interconnected non-fiction stories, this framework demonstrates how to directly engage with a settler-colonial subject position by building a method of constellation of personal experience in order to understand options beyond capitalism and settler-colonial complacency.

This method is then applied to two geographic locations, the Standing Rock Reservation and Flint, MI. The author shares connections and builds stories through connections with the landscape and specific timeframes (the Water Protectors movement at Standing Rock and the Flint Water Crisis at Flint). Through the examining of personal relationships (framed as the metaphor of roots), communal relationships (framed as the metaphor of waterways), and global relationships (framed as the metaphor of mountains), there are specific moments highlighted where democracy fails and the options open for frameworks beyond are available. This work frames one of the options as decolonality.

In these moments of failure, settler-colonial Interventions become a possible lens for these options. Settler-colonial interventions are moments where it is possible to utilize emergence as a framework to understand one's position in settler-colonialism and work with it and beyond to imagine options beyond a settler-colonial future.

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by

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Stare at the Sun

I was getting tired; the straps of my backpack were digging into my shoulders, letting me know that I didn't have to do any of this. I could stop at any point, but I still continued on to see what was next. I was making good time, and every few hundred feet showed me new views, but the drag of gravity and lactic acid build up meant that beautiful views were silently punctuated by sighs and intentional breaths.

As I paused to sit on a turned over tree, I saw a break in the clouds for the first time. I sat, my body sinking two inches deep into the moss on the log, long enough for the wind to begin pushing the clouds from view and a brilliant sunrise could be seen for the first time this morning.

I had been on the Barr Trail since 5 a.m., making my way up Pikes Peak for the longest and most challenging hike I had experienced to date. I had lived in Colorado Springs the summer of eighth grade, and over the few months I had been there, my aunt and uncle had taken many people to the peak. I chose not to go then, being a teen and too cool for mountains, but the view of the peak had remained in my mind for over 15 years. When I set out on this trip, I wanted to visit a former home, a place that was full of torn emotions and difficult times to build new memories alongside those of stress and abandonment. I have been taking on the project of incorporating new memories for all of the spaces I had lived as a means of coming to peace inside myself and with the people who I knew across my history, and Colorado Springs was the last of my former homes for me to visit.

The most important part of this 'rhetorical' healing was that I was revisiting places that often had very few positive memories associated with them; this lack of positive memories was typically a result of being too young to have any real say in what my future held. My goal was to go back to these places during a period of my life where I had gained financial, emotional, physical, and psychological control of my future. This move to revisit with better understood coping mechanisms and strategies to calm the physiological and internal distress had brought a lot of closure and furthers my interest in memory as a rhetorical canon and the relationship between memory and space/place, and I wanted to put these lessons into continued practice as I made my way up the Barr Trail.

To prepare for this hike I had read everything I could about Pikes Peak, and the weather leading up to the hike was cause for concern as all of the hiking guides stated "Pikes Peak is one of Colorado's most accessible 14'ers, but also one of the most dangerous hikes due to 4 miles of summit that has little to no overhead coverage and thunderstorms are frequent at the peak". Having a vague memory of short but daily rainstorms, I began to doubt my efforts and preparedness. This was only the second mountain hike of the year, and the previous hike had been on a much smaller peak in Connecticut (Mt. Mariah, just east of the presidential range in Gorham, CN), and while I wasn't worried about the elevation gain, the thought of burning to a crisp on Pike Peak was hard to shake from my mind's eye.

I had strategically given myself a few days to adjust to the increase in elevation and less oxygen, and when I arrived at the base of the mountain, my weather anxiety peaked, but the breathing came easier than I expected. The lower half of the mountain was shrouded in mist, and it looked like I was stepping into a rainforest. The peak was obscured from view, and the skies looked ready to open with a deluge of rain and disappointment; I began to worry more. How

many miles up would I get before I would have to stop for the rain? What would happen if I had reached the alpine ridge before it started raining? Would I keep going or would I wait until the rain broke? What if I didn't have enough supplies to eat, drink, and stay warm? How far was too far to turn back and at what point did I have to commit fully to the experience of hiking Pikes Peak?

As these questions began racing on repeat, I slowly started to move my body toward the bus pick up spot that would bring me the last mile to the base of the Barr Trail. I paused to snap a picture of myself and the mountain before joining about 10 other people who were catching the first bus to the trails at 5:30 in the morning. My fellow hikers were various combinations of nervous, excited, silent, meditative, loud, young, old, and with a wide range of hiking experience.

Listening to the dull roar of my hiking companions and the bus moving towards the mountain, I sat in relative silence, preparing for the journey ahead and trying not to let my worries and doubts end the hike before it began. And while the ball of tension in my stomach was tight, I was slowly committing to the hike and the hours ahead of me.

I also found myself thinking about commitments. The commitments I have made and the communities I belong to. How the relationships to this trip are in many ways linked to the relationships with the field of Rhetoric and Composition. That I need to be moving, and what I need to be doing to understand the living theories I carry with me. I think back to the hours I have spent doing planks to strengthen my back muscles, so I won't hurt, while at the same time reading scholarship as to stitch it into my muscle fibers, and what happens when I forget this connection.

Time feels abstract in these moments. The only thing that is real is the ground beneath my feet and what I am carrying with me: conversations and stories, relationships, experiences, and histories both of my own and shared with me. I started thinking back to the beginning of this journey and what brought me to this slope.

I was heading out of Syracuse that morning, and I could feel the miles beneath my feet. When I was a young child, I would close my eyes and pretend that the car was invisible and that each human body driving in their cars would float for miles down the road, separate from the lands beneath them, but not so separate that the feel of the road was lost.

One of the struggles I have while traversing large distances during a short time is maintaining a connection to the geography around me while abstracting my own sense through a steel, plastic, and glass barrier. But for this drive, this barrier is a comfort. 4000 miles in two weeks' time. New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York. This trip represented a process of starting over and continuing on. A test of my mettle that I was both afraid and excited to begin.

I had set out on this trip to visit the Missouri River and to see how the lands remembered the struggle of the Water Protectors at the Standing Rock reservation some two years before. I had been following the news reports, the capitalist state enforced security and police teams utilizing water cannons on people as if they were vermin. That the only thing the Water Protectors were actually guilty of was protecting the land and water. The driving force of this movement centers around the fact that DAPL [Dakota Access Pipeline] plans had shifted some 80 miles south, so the pipeline no longer ran through Bismarck, after the people of Bismarck

voted to prevent the construction of the DAPL in a mostly residential area. Instead, the pipeline was pushed south directly into the sovereign lands of the Standing Rock Sioux[1]. This move was deemed as the riskier option by climate scientists, and the invocation of imminent domain violated the Standing Rock Sioux sovereignty, but the irony is that the Water Protectors fought for everyone whose life was directly impacted by water conditions of the river.

In many ways, this trip was symbolic of starting again and picking up the pieces of ideas that used to drive me, but now I am driving to remember why I wanted to remember them. Between the initial conception of this project and me getting in my car, a lot has changed. This is life, and while the transmorphic shift in intellectual terrain has become more dynamic as time progresses, the core of what I have done and am doing here has stayed the same. I am saying that the miles we travel become embedded in who we are, that movement over land binds us to the roots in the soil, that mountains are not obstacles, but that they are often the visual pieces of larger chains of ideas and relationships.

The thing about relationships is that they change as often as we do. Added layers create new ways of connecting, though sometimes additional means of connecting also sometimes show the limits of human capacity and connecting nodes of interest are often more complex than they seem. As I headed west this day, I found myself concerned with these limits of understanding. The route for this trip brought both new locations, but also a specific form of repetition that can only come from focusing between the lines of the lanes on I-90 heading towards my home.

[1] https://abcnews.go.com/US/previously-proposed-route-dakota-access-pipeline-rejected/story?id=43274356

This was a drive I had made countless times. From one home to another, passing four of the great lakes, three of them in view from the road, and seeing landscapes that grew trees similar to those on my street growing up and flowers I could name. And while these aspects brought comfort and a means of connection, it didn't change the fact that the road wasn't my home. Instead, I found myself longing for one of two extremes: to go home and bask in the everyday familiar or to venture to places I had never been before and breathe in the unknown. As I crossed the state line into Pennsylvania, I took a moment to reflect on how many of my experiences are filtered through a lens of opposing extremes. My choices and knowledge making process either looks like a tornado or a gloriously clear summer's day, and the deeper I dig into the process, the starker this seeming opposition appears.

My mind flashes a view of the "water is life" graffiti I had read on an overpass an hour out in New York. Mini wiconi is Lakota for "water is life." A thousand miles away from the Standing Rock reservation I am reminded of what I believe and the relationships that have helped shape these beliefs. Water is often utilized as a metaphor in contrasting ways: tranquil and devastating; the life that is brought by spring rains can just as easily be washed away. I find the meaning in water by listening. The movement matching the conversations I have. A soft rain is a lighthearted conversation in passing. A maelstrom, a passing passionate exchange. The creeks and streams are the secret conversations where we put forth new, or at least new to us, ideas and found connections. Rivers are where we dwell most often because these are the discourses we take up. They are the conversations that connect us to each other, but also to the larger conversations happening in the field: the seas and oceans. The thing about seas and oceans is that they are just as distancing as they are life bringing.

Water being life is easy enough to understand. Roughly 75% of each person is made of water. Access to, or lack thereof, water has been the cause of war. Irrigation and agriculture are often cited as the factors that established civilizations. For every water centric creation story there is a story of annihilation. There must be a reason our stories keep coming back to water. One of the most important stories of my life is guided by water. I will tell it briefly again here.

When I was a much younger man trying to figure themselves out, I was out in the northern woods of Michigan, but not so northern the accents changed, for a weekend with my uncle Jim. Jim is a controversial figure in my life, always outspoken, but never quite right, so it causes a lot of strife for those who take him too seriously. He was my main person when it came to The Outdoors and he never missed a chance to tell anyone who would listen that he was wooded Cree, a name that is a combination of two different first nations people (though I have never had the heart to tell him).

He is also controversial because when we went up north, I was a roaming feral child. Running to the water as fast as I could, 10 years old and ready. Jim had made sure I was ready.

“Zeke, this is how you know which direction you are going. If you can hear running water, you are going East or West; you can’t go North from here without going 20 or so miles East, and you will hit the bridge if you go west. If you can’t hear running water, you are fucked and are heading south for some gawd awful reason”

“Make sure you remember where we are, the Manistee and the Pine meet, but the current always runs to the larger body of water, Lake Michigan.”

“Do you have your gun, knife, bic, and $20 rolled up into your sock? Good. You are good to go. Don’t be gone too long, I will send someone looking for you if you aren’t back by dark.”

With my pump-action bb gun, pocket knife, red bic lighter, and $20 I headed out early, making it to the edge of the Manistee National forest just as the sun broke. This day I would let curiosity get the better of me and I followed a rare woodpecker deeper than I had ever been into the woods.

After 10 hours of dirt, swearing, and choosing the wrong direction, I made my way back to our campground, with a police escort and exhausted legs. I had been lost. I was lost.

Sometimes I am still lost. To say that this was one of the most important experiences of my life would be to sell short the years I have let my mind wander to those fiddle head ferns and close my eyes and smell that earth.

More importantly, I used water to guide my way. I started the journey running against the flow of the river, trusting my gut but not the lessons I had been taught by Jim. I started my journey off on the wrong foot because I had a feeling. In much of this writing, the tentative-ness of everything is much the same feeling. Trusting in a feeling, taking the time to dwell with the feeling, but more importantly, thinking about the feeling in relation to all of the other experiences I have had and making sure that if I am going to go on a feeling, I have a solid reason for believing it will work out.

Many years later, I would theorize this experience and develop an epistemological lens to help me navigate the rivers of conversations I was entering. For me knowledge can be broken down as follows:

Knowledge is understood through history

Knowledge is practiced through the land

Knowledge is experienced through story

Knowledge is built through relationships

In order to make sense of new conversations and concepts, I look to both the historical context of the field and also the histories that I have lived. One example of this came shortly after I saw Elizabeth Wardle[2] present on transfer in composition. The basic idea of transfer is both support for my claims here, but also an example where my personal history afforded me the space to see the connections I have brought with me through my life. Having a non-traditional undergraduate background, I actively brought knowledges learned on construction sites into how I understood homework. The thing about transfer that I get caught up on is how obvious of a theory it seems to me. Of course, I am going to draw from every experience in my life to make it through school, why would I not? But, as I say this, I can hear the running water in the background. I know where I am. I know my history. My history has taught me that there is a gulf of experiences and knowledges that have been denied the capital K in Knowledge. It is also important to recognize, what is a gulf for others, can be a stream for me.

[2] Dr. Wardle presented at the Spring Conference for the CCR department in 2016

After centuries of flowing water, the sandstone canyons can speak to the power of moving water. In many of my experiences I have found the banks of rivers to be where I come back to. My hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan grew from the banks of the Grand River. I grew on the banks of the Grand River. My first intellectual home, Michigan State University, prides itself for the autumnal views of the Red Cedar River, running through campus. My first two homes in Michigan reflected this relationship to water. Each day, in order to get from place to place I had to travel across, over, along rivers that afforded this land to support and push my knowledge further. When I moved to Syracuse, one of the major things that was missing from my life was the sound of water. In this space, my practices changed to include water, rather than my practices being shaped by the water around me. There is one specific place I think of when I think of Syracuse and water, and while the lake should be one of them it isn't. Clark's Reservation is a small plot of natural reservation land (not to be confused with Indigenous reservations) with a glacial lake at the bottom of a deep ravine. In one of our first real meetings, Brice Nordquist showed me this spot as we hiked the high outcropping of rocks that looked at the blue-green lake below. A few miles from my house, I would go to Clark's Reservation any chance I could get. Slowly, this became a practiced place for me.

We have to be careful of the stories we tell. Not everyone knows that stories are histories made easy. The difficulties faced in stories seem manageable because they are not our difficulties, but they are difficulties we can picture ourselves living with/through. I often fear that when people talk about stories it is assumed that stories only mean fiction, though through the recent work of cultural rhetorics and the historical works of our intellectual ancestors, this fear is lessening. The fictions we live, are of course part of this story, but the closest we can get to understanding where someone is coming from is the stories they share. Rather than tainted water,

story is the water that parched my thirst after trying on many other walks of life. Story is the water we add to stock to make nourishment. Most importantly, story is theory. The way we theorize who we are. The way we theorize concepts. The way we theorize being. We craft stories to relate to the unrelatable. We craft stories to understand our histories and experiences.

This project is looking at the multitude of "gray" experiences; experiences that with time gain depth and complications that consist of a full range of hues and emotions but are often limited by time (relevancy) and the ability to describe their meaning.

Additionally, this project is pausing to consider what the process of decolonization looks and feels like for a settler colonial person[3] engaged with land based rhetorics. This is an on-going endeavor that works to shed light and help others along this process. As the word "decolonization" becomes more common in the field of rhetoric and composition, and there is a continued need for conversations that engage settler colonial folks, two things are made clear: first, that decolonization is not a metaphor[4] or catch phrase for stepping outside of the norm and requires specific moves to de-link from the neo-colonial paradigms; second, that the emotional burden of decolonization for settler colonial folks is on the individuals to question and begin this process on their own (specifically engaging in critical ways how a positionality of settler colonial decent is not a hurdle, but rather it requires its own process that gives proper respect to the decolonial and often Indigenous scholars who have started this conversation while not asking these scholars to bear the emotional burned of a difficult internal process). Further, this project does not suggest it has within it answers for everyone; this is one person's process of

[3] Here I am using settler colonial person to indicate that my genealogy is that of European decent and I live in the continually colonized lands in the United States. This is the language that is typically used to describe someone like myself, within fields that look at the relationship between colonization and decolonization.
[4] See further conversation in Chapter 3 in the discussion of Tuck & Yang's "Decolonization is not a Metaphor"

decolonization, and with this sharing and acknowledgement, comes the caveat that the processes described herein may not work for every reader; instead, it should be seen as a beginning point in their own process.

As such there are many things that need consideration here. Why engage in a project of settler colonial decolonization? How to navigate the knowledge gained through this line of inquiry (see navigational epistemological lens conversation?) How are memories shaped and what does this process look like for non-human agents (specifically "the land" in this project?) How do our memories work to further/hinder our process of decolonization (a brief look at connections between genetic memory and land based memory?) And, what does it look like to adjust or find new meanings in relation to, or specifically within existing experiences/memories?

With these questions, I will share stories and gathered materials that will be supplemented with scholarship, images, and primary source documentation. Combined with a hermeneutic theorized and tested in my master thesis, a more detailed analysis of "navigational epistemology' will follow, this document proposes that decolonization is a possible solution to re-humanizing of oppressed peoples and a means to establish rights on par with human rights for lands, ecosystems, wildlife refuges, neighborhoods, urban centers, and waterways.

In decolonial studies, the notion of para-colonial/neo-colonial describes contemporary contexts wherein the process of colonization is ongoing, though the aesthetic of these contemporary colonial processes is hidden under the guise of capitalism and "progress".[5] This

[5] This is a concept that I discus a lot throughout this text, primarily in relation to "Demolition Means Progress" but it is a concept that I first starting to dig in with Sharene Razack's and Patrick Wolfe's work.

concept is important to understand going forward because it is putting forth that colonialism never ended. Often, since the world has drifted away from some of the more obvious forms of colonialism and exploitation, an argument is proposed that the colonial process no longer exists, but as we see from post-colonial studies, the structures of colonialism often remain as integral infrastructural components and the collective memory of colonized people live on. Additionally, I am arguing that under paracolonial contexts, colonialism becomes an extension of class warfare in which peoples perceived as "safe" from colonialism (poor, white land owning males, but not confined to just these folks) are actively experiencing unfamiliar forces that impact their daily life but due to the lack of familiarity, these forces are often not seen as the oppression they are. Rather, these actions (such as minimum wage below the poverty line or neighborhoods in direct line of carcinogen waste from manufacturing plants) are seen as the fault of other oppressed people, not as intentional structures built by governments to maintain the status quo for given socio-economic classes. This tension of perceived resource shortages and continued socio-economic oppression often leads to a situation of blame, however this blame is often focused on people experiencing similar structures of power and oppression.

This is one of those moments that I have been preparing for. To finally let go of the fear and inhibitions that have prevented me, for so long, from writing these stories. Stories can be difficult to share, a sentiment best explained by Cherokee scholar Thomas King who says that we should be careful with the stories we tell, for once they are told they are no longer solely our

stories. There are a lot of ways stories can go and ways that telling stories invoke more questions than they answer is something I have been weighing constantly in my mind.[6]

[6] Thomas King's *Truth About Stories* is a text often cited in Indigenous Rhetorics for the ways that it explains the methods of storytelling. What we gain and what we lose by telling stories by focusing on the ways that stories are told and retold for various audiences.

Chapter 2

The Melting Point of Wax: Bringing the Methods Together

My legs are consistently burning now. I know that I am approaching the halfway point, and I have to make it at least that far before I break for a small lunch. I paused briefly to look back at the trail, and below I can still see the clouds covering the base of the mountain, but the winds are moving faster now, and the sun is getting brighter and brighter so that the tops of the clouds that I see are a constant swirl. My body needs to rest, and the thoughts of the day have my internal dialogue swirling in a consistent motion as the clouds. I know that if I can keep moving, I will find a place for a short reprieve.

One foot in front of the other, keep moving, let the drums set your pace. I repeat this to myself until it becomes the background of everything else. The views are painfully beautiful, but I can't slow down.

The people of Flint, Michigan have been without clean water for at least two years[7] and I am here hiking a mountain. Keep going, push a little further, dig a little deeper. The Kalamazoo River[8] oil spill was a brief blip on the radar of Michigan media, however the importance of ongoing efforts of Water Protectors across the globe are trying to draw attention to the disappearing act that is capitalism. The songs of my youth are working with me to set a pace that feels familiar and walking, while still a struggle, is becoming an afterthought again. One

[7] This trip took place during 2018 at a time when the national attention for the Water Crisis in Flint was waning, but no real changes had been implemented yet.

[8] This was an instance that I learned about from my mother who lived in Kalamazoo at the time and was a continuation of the oil spill in 2010 https://kalamazooriver.org/learn/what-are-the-problems/oil-spill-2/

powerful storm in the straits of Mackinac would be enough to destroy the aging Enbridge #5 line, damaging (and potentially destroying) the ecosystems of Lake Michigan and Lake Huron.

Michigan has been my home for the majority of my adult life, and like many Michiganders, I am proud of the beauty in America's high five. The history of this land seeps through modern conventions, a land where its billionaires have for generations prioritized capital gains over infrastructure ecological safety. Michigan's economy was built on the back of working class factory employees— on the backs of my family.

Factories provided much of the income that developed the state of Michigan, and along with jobs and financial security came pollution. In my home town of Grand Rapids, there has been a fish contamination my whole life due to the chromium and mercury in the Grand River.[9] There is a solid foot of river bed sediment that is so toxic that when it is disturbed entire sections of the river are closed off from recreational use. The capitalist forces in the furniture center of the state went unchecked until relatively recently, though the stories of rampant pollution remain something of lore, despite Flint, MI being less than 200 miles away.

I come back to Michigan in my thinking and writing often. On the side of a mountain, I travel in my mind to Michigan because it is a land I can speak with. I have invested in the people here, the lands here, the history here, and the relationships here. While I wouldn't call myself a Michigan historian, I would call myself a learner of Michigan's landways and waterways. I have always come back to Michigan, and I think that there is a reason for this. Michigan is in my bones, whether it be literally as could be found from strontium tests of my teeth and long bones

[9] https://www.lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/2017/10/02/safe-eat-fish-grand-river-fishing-mercury-ddt-pcb/706006001/

or metaphorically in the colloquial sense that I have a deep affinity there. I carry memories of the land with me. Wherever I go I look for similar trees, waterways, and cartographic similarities. No matter the place I am navigating, I pause and remember the skills of orientation learned in Manistee National forest so many years ago.

Even more importantly, Michigan is where I learned to ask questions. Questions of who can do this work? Why is one person's process of settler colonial decolonization important to others? How does the land heal, and how do I heal with it?

My feet began to stumble, I had become so enwrapped in thought and reflection that I could, for the first time, forget the pains in my legs and arms and just move. Movement became an almost instinctual body function for a while, and while my brain was engaged in mental Olympics, trying to tie meaningful connections of my home with my current journey, I let my body guide my interactions. My legs are jelly and I am starting to worry now; I should have seen the sign for the Barr Camp which is the halfway point and in my deep thought I was worried I missed the sign.

As I had made my way up Pikes Peak, I had been paying attention to take note of any trails branching off of the Barr trail. The last few miles had no offshoots, so I knew that the next pathway I saw would be for the Barr campsite, just over half of the way to the summit.

When I saw the pathway, I still looked for a sign, but there wasn't one. I suppose that it was obvious enough what the options were, and the campsite path was parallel to the peak; with no clear elevation gain. As I got closer and found a place to eat lunch, I saw the fresh water refill station (a water filter was needed to safely drink this water) and figured the moving water would have less bugs nearby than any other place.

I sat down and felt the full rush of fatigue. I could barely move my bag off my back and while I was sure I was slowly eating and drinking all of the contents of my back pack; the bag felt heavier than when I had started.

The few hikers I had passed along the hike slowly made their way to the Barr camp. Every one of them peeled off and headed away from the ascending trail, heading deeper into the campsite. As I watched each person head closer to the campsite and further from the climbing path, I felt the pull to follow them; to feel the flat ground on my aching muscles and be comforted by the sand underfoot. I knew that if I didn't follow the path towards the campsite it would be a long time before I would visit again. But I also knew that if I lost sight of my goal to scale the summit, I may not make it up to the top.

The last few years I have been struggling to prioritize which goals to focus on, and while I sat, dead exhausted, I made up my mind to focus on scaling the summit. The food is breaking up some of the lactic acid build up in my legs, and this is one of the few times where a break in the middle did more good than harm. I checked the time, it was approaching 9 am and I had been hiking for 4 hours. The major points of concentrated elevation gain were behind me, and it was relatively small inclines until the last mile push. My bag was heavy, despite dropping at least a pound of weight. I had prepared for every scenario I could imagine as I got ready for the hike and despite eating and drinking a constant stream of calories, my bag was oppressively heavy. I tilted my head back and finished off the protein shake that I had been drinking, threw my trash into a small bag I had brought with me, hoisted my bag up onto my shoulders, hit play on my Mp3 player and let the snare drums of Travis Barker set my pace.

The music I chose on this second leg of the journey would gradually become more and more important as the focus of my tired muscles. Despite my muscles struggling forward, my brain was alive and making connections. I had started off with one of my favorite bands, Blink 182, and was listening to an album from my youth, *Take Off your Pants and Jacket*, in a state of continual surprise. An album I had found funny and slightly meaningful at 15 now made sense in ways that 15 year old me didn't know were possible. The struggle of youth. The struggle of feeling miniscule amongst the mountain. The struggle of gravity, pushing every way. These struggles were what I took up as I resumed my ascent, but quickly these struggles became networks of communication across my neural connections, my muscular system, and conscious thought.

Every bit of struggle was amplified, then multiplied, on the mountain for me, but I was learning ways to let the struggle go and let the difficulties become part of the experience. If I lengthen my stride and flexed my hips at the push off each step, gravity worked with me to move forward. If I resisted, each step felt like a mile. If I concentrated on my breathing, taking as deep of breath as possible through my nose and exhaling as long as I could bare, my body felt like a warm comforting fire rather than a pile of fire ants. Each step stitching Pikes Peak into my muscles; the fibers intertwining theory and practice. I wanted the flex of my calves to take me back to this spot. Life has never burned so good.

The sun is unbearable now, 2 miles from the summit. My legs have shifted so past jelly that slabs of concrete take their place. The last few hours have been a struggle, but the time of movement isn't over yet. My bag is the weight I carry, but the drag of gravity amplifies this weight to unbearable levels. The backs of my elbows are sunburnt, and the backs of my calves were lobster hued.

I began to doubt myself. I began fighting the gravity. I began fighting everything. To stop now, even for a break, meant it would be a long time before I could continue, but my legs and chest were heaving with lack of oxygen and lactic acid. Each step became a mile, the weight of my bag increasing in my mind and on my spine. I told myself to keep my head down and just to focus on moving. I had to mix it up. I had to stand still long enough to change my music, gather my breath, and push forward. Dig deep, go further. Dig deep, go faster.

The crashing intro to "The Melting Point of Wax" filling my ears, lungs, hopes, and legs with the will to move. "I will touch the sun, or I will die trying", a cautionary tale of risking it all to escape cycles of abuse, that the unknown is better than destruction, to take the chance. "But how I will know limits from life, if I never try", the tears begin to well in my eyes. In this moment, this hike means everything. I have never felt so alive. Barely breathing, stumbling up a consistent slope toward more pain and more breathless moments.

My pack is becoming unbearable, I had packed everything. Everything. And now… now I am carrying too much weight. I prepared for every situation imaginable at the time only to carry the baggage of these choices miles up in the sky. "There is no promise of safety with these secondhand wings, but I am willing to find out what impossible means", but this is my baggage to carry. It is the weight of my life and for the last few years it has felt smothering. It slows me down and stops me from seeing the growth and things I have done. It is gravity, and every time I fight it, I lose. I made the choices too early, without enough knowledge or experience, to batten down the hatches and roll Pikes Peak prepared for anything… anything except for the possibility that I could in fact hike this mountain, and that I wouldn't need all of this weight.

The last mile or so took more time than the previous 4 miles. It was a steep climb of 2,000 feet of elevation gain, much of which consisted of laughing at the irony of too much weight and crying at the reality of this metaphor. Learning to stop fighting gravity and to trust my abilities has been an ongoing life work, but here at my brief resting place I let the feeling of exhaustion rush over my body, finally admitting that I was the one in my own way the whole time.

Some days the struggle feels noble, while others I question if it is worth the hassle, but I am learning slowly that making meaning requires a process and both sides of the question are relevant to understand how and why internalized colonization gains traction in one's psyche. Further, that the process of internal decolonization will look different for everyone and that the journey will turn mountains into molehills while remaining a summit in the distance.

I brought these lessons with me as I moved on to Wheeler Peak, the highest peak in New Mexico. I intentionally dropped all of the weight from my bag and brought the bare minimum supplies; a little lunch and two 32oz water bottles. I was not afraid of what I could do as I started up the path towards the peak. This time I was not alone, my close friend Michael joined me for this argument with gravity.

At 12,000 feet of elevation, these revelations come hard and fast, and my heart lightens as I process the truth behind this metaphor becoming real life. One of the most difficult things about doing decolonial work are the questions of *why*. Why do I do decolonial work? What does this work look like? Who gave me permission to do decolonial work? The questions go on, but what seems to be at the heart of these questions is a disconnection from appearance and expectation.

Engaging in decolonial practices does not make one decolonized. Arguably, as a person approaching this topic from a settler colonial perspective, decolonization may not be possible by current definitions and understandings. My focus here is to not dwell on the claim of whether or not settler colonial folks can decolonize their lives because in a paracolonial society the possibility of fully realized decolonization may be difficult if not impossible for anyone; however, I am focusing on the claim that through embodying an intentional practice to de-link from paracolonialism is a start towards this
path.

In the original envisioning of this project, I imagined mountains creating my spine, with each curve and summit a vertebra in or out of place depending on the day. The spine of my world determines how I move through space and time and I have found that along the way mountains achieve a strange status of something both unsurpassable yet conquerable.

As I hiked Mount Mitchell, the tallest peak east of the Mississippi, I felt the moisture. The Appalachian Mountains, while older and shorter than the Rockies, have been more difficult to put one foot in front of the other. The baggage I have carried through this eastern climb has also come with the deterioration of many ways of being for me.

After realizing how my tendency to over-prepare (read: overthink, obsess, and self-destruct) slowed me down to an agonizing crawl, I hiked Mount Mitchell with a Gatorade, bottle of water, and a few granola bars. Total weight including the bag was 8 pounds, literally a fifth of the weight I carried up Pikes Peak. Despite this shedding of weight and burden, Mount Mitchell was the most difficult climb in the four mountains traversed over the course of this project.

At the top of Mount Mitchell there is an overlook and a parking lot for folks who drive up the mountain. Through the course of the hike, I had seen very few people, passing a few and being passed by a few others, but the relative number was small. When I reached the summit, it was packed elbow to elbow with folks who had driven up the mountain. The thing I had always looked forward to most on these hikes was the view from above and the way the earth seemed to spread like frosting (each mountain was a different type, from royal icing to the buttercream landscape seen from the peak of Mitchell).

But it was as I was waiting in line to see the view that I realized why this had been the most difficult hike yet. The air at the top of the mountain had as much humidity as the bottom. Where I had been walking through an alpine rainforest while on Pikes Peak, here I was hiking through what felt like a rainforest and bog combined. I desperately needed every one of the electrolytes from the Gatorade I drank after I took my pictures and headed back down. Where every previous descent had been more painful on my legs and feet, I was practically running down Mount Mitchell. The dripping of my own body was too much of a sensation to be able to do anything but run. A three and half hour trip up, took an hour and twenty minutes down.

Weight shed, lesson learned, soaked from head to toe with Ezekiel, I looked back at the path I came from and only saw trees. From this view it was impossible to see the peak in the distance, but my legs and toes knew it was there.

For early European colonists, the Appalachians were one of the first major geographic boundaries that prevented western movement. The conquest of Hannibal foiled by the Alps. The Donner Party. For every conquest there are failures. These failures become reframed in time. Sometimes they are lessons to be learned. Other times failures become the first steps to victory.

More importantly, failure is often storied over time in such a way that the focus is no longer the failure but the story itself.

I found myself wondering what are our stories? How do we reframe our failures?

One way failure has been reframed is through the narrative of progress. Progress becomes codified and storied. These stories become expectations. Progress is expected.

One of the more interesting situations I have found occurring many times over the course of my academic life is the situation where every mentor, professor, peer, or academic affiliated person shares the secret that progress isn't linear. For some, making sure that others know that progress isn't linear, and that fact shouldn't be a secret defines their career. For others, it is the shared sense of not knowing that affords the space to know. Progress is an extremely difficult concept to consider, especially when the harm done in the name of progress is scattered so thoroughly through our histories that it becomes difficult to even consider ourselves.

Progress is one of the few things that can destroy mountains. Progress is one of the many things that can destroy a people. Progress is the language of neo-colonialism; that asks us to sacrifice our rights to live and breathe so that this sacred mountain can look like "our" presidents. Progress in a line means there are no days where communities that are crying for justice are unheard. Progress means I will be a billionaire one day if I stand silent when another black person is murdered by police. Progress means I will be a tweed-outfitted professor when the pipeline under the Missouri river bursts. Progress means I will stop being anxious. Progress means that as long as I work hard, I will be able to have what my (grand)parents have.

Sure, I could have driven to the top and seen the views at almost each of the mountains I talk about here, much the way the narrative of progress affords the status quo, but I chose a different path and it is in this choice that I am arguing there is a decolonial option. Gravity can be a cruel mistress, but there are some things that are just stupid to fight. The choice of difficulty, the extended metaphor that is the Pikes Peak hike in this narrative is framed this way because decolonial options are often hard. They require an honesty of what we can and can't actually do. The difficulty here is not set in juxtaposition to other types of difficulties, the difficulty I am describing here is the difficulty of stepping away from cultural values that ask me to value anything other than human life.

In this writing I am laying out a pathway that I took to step away from this form of understanding the world. Walter Mignolo writes of decolonial options in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*; what is often the case is the ability to understand what options are. Not just what *the* options are, but a larger sense of options themselves. The ability to see the options in ways we always have takes time and experience, the ability to see new/different options that are outside of our personal norms often takes a different set of developed experiences.

In my work, where I outline the various ways I interact with knowledge, I am pushing against "standard" sets of knowledge. This push is due to my inability to fully understand what the "standard" is. Lee Maracle describes the process of removing the human from theory as a complicated intentional endeavor; one that requires authors to write themselves out of their own experiences and contexts. Maracle is important to understand here because she demonstrates the ways in which the human creeps back into theory and proposes that it is through our sharing of stories that our orientations shift (Maracle). To this end, I am describing two different (western) orientations to knowledge. One orientation, arguably the "norm", seeks to create Knowledge

with the end goal of "owning" the day-to-day structures that grant institutions like government power. The orientation that I am proposing utilizes knowledge to inform/inspire action and seeks our own experiences as starting points for action and growth.

In a fitting figure, I am utilizing mountains to represent the ways that knowledge connections to community and the whole while establishing set boundaries for the following discussion of orientations because there are many factors that are typically personal and in practice need room, but this is not the space to attend to all of these. There will be instances that are beyond the boundaries that I am setting, and that is a very good thing. The fact that at any point during these descriptions there is a moment of pause, a statement that goes completely against your own experience, or any other hesitations serves to prove the point that there are more ways of approaching any and all instances of knowing.

The model I am proposing requires a few notes upfront to understand. In this model there are truths, no Truth. I am presenting all knowledge as lower case "k" knowledge and am providing an informed model by experience and conversation. This model also requires a truth-to-self in order to be operationalized beyond abstract text on a page.

The starting point for this model is the self. An honest look at what we can do and what we can't do. A self that has asked questions but has been unhappy with the answers thus far. A self that is able to take criticisms that are for growth in stride with those that are uninformed. A self that is open to finding options that humanize our thoughts and interactions because the first and largest section of this triangle is what we think we know. These are the values and morals that shape who we are. These are the reasons we provide as rationalizations of who and what we are. These are things that the world sees but aren't true. These are the things we wish the world

would see but are not yet able to show them. These are the informed and uninformed opinions we have about the world based on our lives up to this point. It is all of the bad and good. It is who we are at the beginning of trying to learn anything, because this model considers knowledges.

Another aspect of this model is what we know for sure. Those ways of being and doing that have been tried and true. Often, these truths are contextual and drive what we want to know. What we want to know is a section of this model that is proportionate to the concept being learned. More specifically, what we want to know is informed by the areas where our own lives have failed to provide structure or opportunity for learning. After figuring out what we want to know, I propose we then consider all of our personal history that would inform our actions and choices. Are there experiences from the past that relate to what we want to know? If not, should there be? In this self-examination of our personal histories we draw connections to the things we already know and begin to understand what we want to know. After we examine our personal histories, we then need to consider how do our own cultural experiences inform the outcomes so far, but culture is contextualizing, and while it is impossible to know from a different cultural perspective, it is not too much to ask to pause and think about if the pursuit of this knowledge will harm or go against any other known cultural values. This is represented in this dissertation as metaphoric roots. The rhizomes of ourselves and our orientations that reach out to others, sometimes unseen hidden under the dirt, to build nutrients of the whole (community). This means I am shaping people and relationships as root networks, connected and intertwined.

One of the reasons I am drawn to root networks is a memory from when I was young. It was one of the first times I remember going to the doctor, and they had basic charts and illustrations that showed all the different systems in the body. I had spent the morning replanting

tomato plants with my grandfather and all I could see within the outlines of these generic body shapes were the coiled roots of tomato plants. The way our veins and nerves were connected looked like the roots of grass we had cleared to plant the tomatoes. I also find the varied ways that roots have been used to understand family history/memory to add dimension to my approach. To talk of one's roots means various things, but typically relationships, locations, families, religions, ethnicities, occupations, and ways of being are the ways these stories unfold. I am drawing from a wide range of relationships to establish my root networks, but my primary focus with this metaphor is to provide a visual representation of human relationships as interconnected and dependent on each point of connection.

To further these connections, I understand the connections of the self to community as waterways. Further, waterways are the methods of communication on an individual level with others and also community/cultural ways of communication informed by experience and the histories/stories told by a community. The snow melting off the mountains (the visual and larger implications of theory and practice) shape the ways that we communicate amongst our communities and communities communicate with each other nourish and provide life to the roots that connected us. Waterways represent the meso level of interconnectedness in that the rush of the water is the values collectively agreed upon that determine how engagement is determined and transferred across time and space. Waterways are also one of the few geographic features that consistently demonstrated the interconnectedness of the system itself. All water on earth is connected to itself, whether that means a tributary is dumping fertilizer causing blue green algae to strangle out the oxygen further down the river system or utilizing purification to provide safe water for human consumption, thus furthering human life. Much in the ways that *Mni*

Waconi shows that water is life, waterways in this dissertation represent the interconnectedness of ideas and communities.

In the next chapter I look at "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" by Even Tuck and K. Wang Yang which positions metaphor as a destructive device when they (metaphors) abstract lived experiences and cultural knowledge in relation to decolonization and the struggles of indigenous folks. This text has had a huge impact in how this dissertation was shaped and at this point it feels like there needs to be a direct addressment of why I am using metaphors here in my work.

I am using a story framework to provide a means for folks to understand themselves in relation to the world around them. In this ontological framework I am weaving multiple stories to show and demonstrate the process of coming to know oneself and state of being. This state of being is in relation to the whole and I have found that having ways to compartmentalize and focus aspects of these relationships affords the ability to examine and make connections that are always already functioning on multiple levels of knowing. It is impossible to separate the self and our immediate connections (roots) from the ways that we interact with each other and learn from each other (waterways). Further, it is impossible to exist in a vacuum where our individual and communal connections have no impact on the world and society around us (mountains). The biggest distinction here is that these geographic metaphors are designed to understand the self and our stories in relation to the world around us. This act of storying the self and our experiences means that we can borrow whatever storytelling conventions we need to understand our experiences; however, this is a distinct line drawn throughout this dissertation that shows that the only experiences that we can story are our own. These metaphors are not intended to be applied beyond the self. These metaphors are situated as familiar literary devices for western

audiences and are used to group like thoughts together and put them in relation to the various other systems and networks our experiences are understood through.

I am using metaphor as a means of organization, akin to the ways that Angela Haas connects Wampum to Hypertext. These metaphors serve as a device to recall and shape relationships of memories, they are used to connect the loose ties of experience. To this end, the interwoven dynamic of this kind of mnemonic device affords me to draw maps of connection that function on various levels as demonstrated by the purpose of each metaphor. The most important distinction here is that these metaphors are contained to ideas that are confined to my own experience and emergence. They cannot be applied beyond this scope in any real way and this move is what makes these metaphors distinct and different from the structures Tuck and Yang discussion in "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor".

Additionally, there is a precedent for geographic metaphors in our field. Nedra Reynolds' article, "Composition's Imagined Geographies: The Politics of Space in the Frontier, City, and Cyberspace", calls for a challenging of the "transparent space" rhetoric often taken up by composition studies. Transparent spaces occur when there is a flattening of space and time (space/time) until the point of abstractions where the space itself loses its meaning and becomes "transparent". The argument here is that without attending for space/time, the stories that are beyond the status quo, or normalized overly general falsehoods, are removed.

This article provides a lot of language for understanding how the larger field of rhetoric and composition have used spatial metaphors both with intentional awareness and accidently by focusing on three "spaces": the frontier, the city, and Cyberspace. Similarly these three spaces are representative of specific times in the development of Composition as a field, with the

frontier being framed as "wild, unexplored, etc.", the city as the loci of knowledges (intentionally pluralized) that intersect and build on each other, and cyberspace as an attempted postmodern third space that essentially brings the knowledges of the city to the unknown of the frontier. While there is a lot to digest here in terms of how terminology is couched in colonialism, and I will come back to that, I would like to take a small moment to reflect on this move to expand Rhet/Comp's space/time.

These specific spaces/times are being used because they present a progression of understanding. Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* is highlighted as a canonical text that explores the spatial metaphor of the frontier, highlighting the author's life in the "West" and contrasting that to City Colleges' urban college reality, to expand on what Reynolds' claims is the first imagined geography of composition. Going further to frame this metaphorical work as one the first effective arguments for composition as a discipline. (22) The post-modern turn is framed through the cityscape, pushing "new" boundaries for how/who/what/when/where/why composition is happening. The city affords the intersecting of multiple sets of knowledge to coalesce, but within a framework that affords compartmentalizing where various types of knowledge intersect if necessary. Cyberspace affords the unknown, and for 1998, this makes a lot of sense. Scholarship on just what functionality cyberspace may have was theoretical and based from a relatively small data set if compared with today. But this knowledge is necessary because as Reynolds' claims, space/time without the functional means of looking at the past, present, and future effectively prevents building new knowledge (30).

While the narrative of progress is heavy handed here, the refusal of composition as "geographically transparent" complicates how these metaphors function. The frontier is brought through a post-modern turn to reinvigorate the cityscape, and this is an intentional move to point

out the ways that the literacy crisis was still having a rippling effect in 1998 and that the need for the newest techniques to teach writing is still present and wanting. It also doubles down by providing an example of a multi-layered analysis of geographic metaphors in Rhet/comp by using geographic metaphors to analyze a robust history in the field.

With that said, it is difficult to miss the ways that colonial language is let off the hook in this analysis. In a self-aware moment, Reynolds' states, "The frontier metaphor endures because composition's professional development was dependent on sounding 'new', bold, untamed and exciting without really changing the politics of space at all. Frontier was an important imaginary space for the early days of open admission..." (24). This analysis, when considered through a cultural rhetorics framework, would continue this push of critique to make clear, under no uncertain terms, this language is an unacceptable way forward because of the ways it abstracts people and the land. By framing composition as the frontier, the field maintained a colonial status quo, and these are the very types of examples that I am pushing against in my analysis.

However, Reynolds does provide a way to map my geographic metaphors that are established narratives in the discipline. Where the reader would be expecting an argument for the use of geographic metaphors to map out a settler-(de)colonial memory analysis; drawing from Reynolds, this is not a precedent I need to argue for. Rather, this history provides support that notions of metaphor in Rhet/comp need to be critically investigated for dimensionality and topography in order to be utilized, but they can indeed be utilized.

I have been overwhelmed with gratitude lately. In a weird turn of events, I am sitting in the home of one of my closest mentors. Living inside a house I have spent many hours bringing to life on the outside. In the midst of quarantine, my partner and I had to ask for the deepest level

of help I have ever had to ask for, to temporarily move into their vacant home in Michigan before Catheryn and I moved to Minnesota. Why this was a needed move, neither of us are sure, and it doesn't matter right now. What does matter is that I sit where I have been for little over a month, at the dining table with a portrait of Malea behind me, giving me a small sense of comfort and belief. She has always said that if I follow my heart things will always turn out okay. I draw on this feeling when things are seeming out of control because it is something that provides a center and focal point. It is through practicing. At the end of the day, it is always about practice. I am trying to theorize a series of practices that are invoked through doing and I am getting stuck because it is impossible under the current conditions to continue some of these practices. But I am also stuck because I am essentially drawing from geography and psychology as a way to support how this process can be rhetorical. The need to know more in these fields seems like a road block, but I am also using that as an excuse to be stopped. What do I want to say? I want to say that day to day relationships are networked like roots. Why do I want to say this? Because there is a need outlined by cultural rhetorics scholars for attention to relationships. I also want to say this because all of the intersections of root networks bring together a wide range of relationships within plant families, and there is a precedent for this kind of metaphor to be representative of the wide relationships we develop and embed into our memories. Is this a needed comparison? It is needed for the larger framework of this project where I develop Roots as the day to day human interactions. Waterways as the larger conversations being had in relationship to the previously detailed relationships. Lastly, setting up mountains as a canon of thought (similarly to how Reynolds does). Could I use a different metaphor? Sure, but the image of rootballs will haunt me for the rest of my life. Not joking. What is preventing me from going for it? It feels hokey. Because of the convenience of the colloquial use of roots meaning such on

the nose comparisons. I am also scared. I am not sure how to show how relationships, specifically the relationships I have developed, form. I don't have the words yet, and I am not sure if I should draw out my relationships and use them as frameworks.

If I say I am theorizing relationships, is that good enough?

I am afraid of writing about my grandmother. I am afraid of that sadness. It was through my relationship with her that I came to know myself, and I am still grieving for both: her, and the child me who never had any chance except those she offered. The years of shame and separation from her as she came closer to death and how I lost my chance to say goodbye. My family told me not to cry in the hospital as the most important person in my life slowly drowned in her own lung fluid. This killed me. It killed me. I have boxed up these feelings because the last thing we did talk about she gave me a mission to follow my dreams, and since I had no idea of what my dreams were at the time, it took a while to put something into motion. But fuck, once I did, there was no stopping. I rode this momentum through two degrees and now I am just tired. Tired of feeling like I am death. Like death should be me. And it's hard to talk about because I think everyone else thinks I means suicide but that isn't really it. It's just depression. It is depression. It is probably one of the only things I regret in my life. That is okay. All of these things are actually okay. I write about concepts like ecological metaphors because it affords stories to be the path of memory. I understand stories. I have had to lie too much to not understand stories. Stories can be the here and now, or they can be any other time frame that it needs to be. I afford shame too much space in my world view. I do not want this. Because of this need to purge shame, I have often found myself disagreeing with what I have been told to do. This is something I also have to do my way. That is okay. These storied experiences cannot exist in the same way any other story in this dissertation exists. These experiences need a multi-woven

set of connected ideas where there are various ways of finding connections for the audience. No one story could encapsulate being and human understandings of existence and connection. The pieces of relationships, community, and knowledge crafting must exist in various forms of story.

Chapter 3

Wishing Well: Dreaming with my Connections

The mists were clinging to my body. I was walking through clouds, slowly making my way up the side of Pikes Peak. I turned on my MP3 player and chose an album to walk to, letting the snare hits set my step pace, trying to find a sustainable rhythm. Over the last year, I had let myself get away from a lot of things I knew helped me. I had stopped doing physical exercise, and my congenital spine condition was getting worse. I had stopped believing in the work I was doing, and I hadn't written anything beyond comments to my students. The irony of this situation is that both these situations, not maintaining physical fitness and not writing, are two of the most important factors in maintaining mental health for me, but I didn't have the will to continue these practices.

I had decided that this trip would be when I started to transition back into doing the things that helped me feel better. I read an article once that led me to a TedTalk[10] where the author was describing what happened inside of the body when we choose to engage in physical exercise: our body produces the stress hormone cortisol anytime there is a peak in stress, but there are many types of cortisol and when we choose to stress our body through physical exercise we release a form of cortisol that is healthy for the body. The active choice of the stress changes the amino acid chain enough that the cortisol from chosen stress actually increases an individual's tolerance for all forms of cortisol. This is the basis for the argument that exercise

[10] https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend/transcript

can serve as preventative care for some folks, and personally I know that this works for me. The more consistently I exercise, the more stress I can process and work through.

This doesn't mean that this process is easy because it takes a lot of time to build up a resistance to negative types of cortisol, but it does offer a way out when I am feeling disconnected from the world around me. As I hiked Pikes Peak, I reflected on the repetition of footsteps, the ways the earth felt beneath me. The subtle spring of gravity pushing back against the force of my foot connecting with the earth, the slight twitch of my calf muscles as they communicate with all the other muscles in my legs, the weight of my pack slowly decreasing in actual weight but feeling ever heavier.

Each step was a choice. Each choice has a consequence. While there, the consequences were tired legs, sore shoulders, and a drive to keep going. I found myself thinking back to the previous day when I had visited the house that I had lived in many years ago. Each step was a new memory, now, but the months of not knowing where I would live come August came creeping back into my body. I couldn't tell if it was the mist breaking or the repetition of these thoughts, but I had chills running through my body.

Vague memories provided distinct emotions, and the relationship between the pain I often felt in my body and outside stressors came a little more in view. The smooth repetition of footsteps provided a steady backdrop to meditate on the often less tangible relationship between bodily movement, memory, and land based practices. Often during coursework, a time where I was consistently active and consistently adding new/additional information to my knowledge stores, I wondered how I could stitch theory into my muscles; I wondered if I could recall sections and important details from scholarship by small movements. Could I recall details if I

made small movements like flexing my legs if I had mentally worked through a reading while running or riding my bike.

On the side of the mountain, I was meditating on how to move with gravity. The language regarding mountains, specifically, is often that of conquest. The very notion of how most land based barriers are that of conquest. To settle the west, to trailblaze, to conquer the peak, scale the summit, etc. The inherent language of conquest lead me to thinking of the conversations I usually have with gravity is situations like this, “Fuck you, lungs, it’s just gravity,” and how my current predicament doesn’t quite fit a situation to trash talk one of the most consistent forces in nature. Usually I find myself climbing the drumlins just outside Syracuse’s urban center, pushing my body to beat my previous times and expending tremendous amounts of energy over short bursts. In these situations, I have to push myself, but in these raw moments, I don’t always like who I become. There is this move I make where it becomes me against the world, but when I am alone, the world becomes an abstracted idea that I can use as my foil to keep pushing. For this hike I wanted to resist this abstraction; I recognized early on that I had to work with gravity if I wanted to make my way to the peak.

It is in this move where I see decolonization taking place. To acknowledge the societal norms that inform my world, to seek to understand them, to ask critical questions about how these often unthought about factors inform who I am and how I act, and to adjust the ways I am thinking to be aware of my person and the lands around me. While it is a small act, choosing to step away from colonial structures and understanding my consciousness as the interface with knowledge creation.

Knowledge recognition becomes a combination of thoughts, emotions, bodily signals, lived experience, the stories that have been shared with me, the known history of a place or concept, and through the relationships that have taught me how to know. Three and half hours into the hike, these connections become my place of dwelling as I move out of the cloud cover and see the top of Pikes Peak for the first time

The following chapter is a breakdown of the foundational texts to this dissertation. I have struggled with how to shift the theories and practices that have become so embedded in who I am personally into something academic. To me, the scholarship of these texts has become more life lessons and ways of knowing and doing instead of simply scholarship on a page. Through this consideration, I have broken the materials down in the following way:

Adrienne Brown's *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* is first to show the ways in which this text has fundamentally shifted the ways in which I know and understand myself and the research I have done. Drawing from emergent strategies to ask some really hard questions and to be able to have a framework to understand what is appropriate to put out there and what do I need to sit with for longer, has truly shifted the way I understand this scholarship.

Next, Tuck and Yang's "Decolonization is not a Metaphor" and Tuck and McKenzie's *Research in Place* are used to contextualize and provide a deeper look at how I am understanding the relationships to this research and from what perspective I am approaching decolonial theory and cultural rhetorics. These texts also provide a lot of important definitional work where many of the terms that I have struggled to define on my own are defined and put in relation to the larger network of folks in the field and doing similar work.

Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony*, Lisa Brooks' *The Common Pot*, and Mishuana Goeman's *Mark My Words* are all included as texts I have worked with a lot and they have provided the grounding for where this research began and how it has progressed. While they are the texts I have worked with the most in this dissertation, they are also the texts that I have come back to and consistently found new ways of making meaning with them. Here, Wilson is specifically informing how I am approaching relationships to research and this is a new way for me to draw from this text. I have included a brief story that for the longest time was one of the main stories I planned on using in my conclusion, but I have found a drastically new relationship with it through the reread of *Research is Ceremony.* Lisa Brooks is specifically coming through to establish a connection/relationship with one of the few academic texts that theorizes how I understood relationships with the land since I began this process at 8 years old. While my previous work focuses on mapping and how storied maps shape the process of knowledge construction, in this dissertation, I am specifically homing in on the relationships she establishes in world view to the land in *The Common Pot.* Goeman's work is put in relation to mine in two distinct places: here in this literature review where I draw from the foundations she builds in understanding contemporary relationships with the land and in the Standing Rock chapter where I draw more specific connections to Indigenous theory and the lands as a rhetorical agent of memory. Goeman specifically provides a view into what is and what could be in relation to the land and it is something that I have often struggled to articulate so I am creating a conversation with Goeman, someone who establishes her own contextually complicated relationship with history and Native theory as a way to make connections to my own contextually complicated relationship with history and a settler colonial identity that seeks settler colonial harm reductions strategies.

These are the texts that make up the backbone of this work and while I may briefly bring in others throughout the theory building sections, those connections will almost always come back to these texts. This is not an exhaustive list of texts that have informed this research, but they are the ones that deserve this kind of focus. Additionally, it is important for me to let everyone know that I will be drawing from other texts in the content chapters that are not on this list as they are contextual to the chapters themselves and are not overarching themes or theories drawn from at every step of this document. I have structured this chapter in this way to establish some fundamental approaches and theories that are always already woven into how I understand mine and other's relationship to the land.

One of the things I have struggled with the most throughout this project is hope. There have been moments of gleaming light and utter despair in this process, which I hear is normal for a dissertation, and the grieving of moving on to the next life goal has been difficult. Deep in this struggle, after moving to Minnesota and staying safely indoors and avoiding COVID, Collin suggested I read Adrienne Brown's *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. This suggestion came after we had talked through that a lot of the problems I was facing stem from a complex positionality that is as much about aesthetics and performance as it was the difficulties of digging through and making sense of complex structures like settler colonialism.

For much of my academic life I sought to keep things simple in action and complex in set up. I learned that I would be labeled before I would be able to find the labels that I wanted to be known as and once this connection was made, I more or less did my best to only show and express the sides of my feelings that aligned with the labels I have been given. Things like whiteness and masculinity were concepts I never had for myself, and for good reason. My family is mixed, and I grew up separated from my mother's side of the family by 1000 miles. My step

father's family was closer at 300 miles and for most holidays that we did not spend together, we went to Stuttgart, Arkansas, ate soul food with our massive extended family (94 grandchildren, 14 kids, their spouses, and who knows how many cousins) and my mother and I were often the only white folks at the tables. When I moved in with my aunt and uncle for high school, those four years were stratified by economic class as I went to a private Catholic high school for free or drastically reduced tuition (depending on the year) because my aunt taught there. My aunt and uncle were not quite middle class and due to health and politics the only period of these four years where both adults were working was the first year. I got a crash course in what it meant to be white, but I didn't have that language yet, during this time. The aspirations and the temporarily embarrassed millionaire stature of everything didn't really make sense to me while I was desperately trying to survive all of the changes that had happened in such a short time frame in my life.

Masculinity was something I learned to define through college. My primary family has been strong women, and my models of who I wanted to be were based on these strong women. When I was making my way through college, I started to realize that the way emotions were described didn't quite fit what I felt inside. The structural aspects of masculinity didn't really fit how I felt, but my survival instincts provided just enough cover that I felt it easier to allow masculinity to be the label I was given, and later to engage with toxic masculinity with a tenuous relationship. College was my life savior, but it also came with a lot of baggage that didn't really fit who I was, and now I often feel like it is too late to change these things. Deep in these feelings I read *Emergent Strategy,* and I saw my hope on the page. Brown was capturing the essences of what I was feeling and breaking the ideas down so masterfully that it built a pathway for me to figure out how to re-engage with this project and to frame a lot of my concepts in ways that

allowed complexity, invention, imagination, memory, embodiment, and messiness. Brown showed me a way to understand who I was and who I am trying to be and why this research could be important.

Brown starts us off with, “Wherever you are beginning this, take a deep breath and notice how you feel in your body, and how the world around you feels. Take a breath for the day you have so far. And a breath for this precious moment, which cannot be recreated” (1) From the beginning I could tell that this would be a different way to engage with scholarship and scholarly concepts. How rare it had become, despite having many folks as professors who made these moves, that I paused to know what was going on inside. To find my emotions and my feelings and to breathe into them and just be. The hokey new-age vibe didn’t come in my COVID isolation, but the breath did, but the awareness did. Every time I picked the book up after taking a break I came back to this passage as it seemed so critical to understanding what was unfolding in the pages.

With this awareness creeping its way back into being, I opened who I was to read these engaging words, “I began to realize how important emergent strategy, strategy for building complex patterns and systems of change through relatively small interactions, is to me– the potential scale of transformation that could come from movements intentionally practicing this adaptive, relational way of being, on our own and with others.” (Brown 2) I saw so many of the ideas I was struggling with articulating fit into this framework of complex patterns and systems of change, whether it be understanding my positionality in relation to my work or understanding what exactly the barrier for entry was to anti-capitalist approaches to knowing the land. I also saw connections to the scholarship I have dwelled with the most in the turn to relationality, but here there is an extension of the idea that is at the heart of this work, building oneself into a

whole person in order to bring their whole self to the work. This was furthered for me when Brown shared the words of her mentor, Grace Lee Boggs, "Grace articulated it in what might be the most-used quote of my life: 'Transform yourself to transform the world.' This doesn't mean to get lost in the self, but rather to see our own lives and work and relationships as a front line, a first place we can practice justice, liberation, and alignment with each other and the planet." (Grace Boggs quoted by Brown 55) At its core, this dissertation is providing a framework for others (as well as myself) to work through this process, to heal the wounds of trauma and expectation in order to align with empathy and mutual respect to build social change. My route has been through the lessons taught to me, but here Brown provides some very important additional considerations to this path by bringing the body, emotions, and relationships to the foreground, "Emergence emphasizes critical connections over critical mass, building authentic relationships, listening with all the senses of the body and the mind" (Brown 3). By connecting all of the various aspects of emergence, it is clear that knowledge of oneself is critical to engage with social change.

In a very succinct way, Brown lays out what this book is about, "This book is for people who want to radically change the world. To apply natural order and our love of life to the ways we create the next world. To tap into the most ancient systems and patterns for wisdom as we build tomorrow." (Brown 4) The connections to the metaphors for knowledge that I have created in this document to ground these approaches to the natural order of things shows that this approach isn't unfounded, and more complexly, that these approaches are not contingent on racial/ethnic identity, rather that they are grounded in love and the desire for the future. This is something I have struggled a lot with while trying to understand the almost militant approach found in Tuck and Yang's "Decolonization is not a Metaphor" (albeit, this has subsided a fair

amount since reading *Place in Research* by Tuck and McKenzie, see the corresponding sections for further analysis of both pieces) where the seeming takeaway is that there is no space for settlers to engage in decolonial processes. My approach is grounded in love and the deep desire for a future where the land and its inhabitants are secure in the ability to continue. Brown further supports this approach while not shying away from the complexity, "I want to understand how we humans do that–how we earn a place on this precious planet, get in the 'right relationship' with it. So, I am focusing on the ways creatures and ecosystems function together in and with the natural world." (5) and "The resilience of these life forms is that they evolve while maintaining core practices that ensure their survival." (Brown, 9) Much of my life comes back to being in the woods and taking the lessons my uncle taught me to observe how nature responds to trials and tribulations. The Manistee National Forest has survived near clear cutting[11], but in watching each year as the trees continue to reestablish their connections and spread I learned that it is through persistence and resilience that causes the changes in me, by finding what I believe and love and following it with my full heart is what heals me, it is the beginning of getting in the "right relationship" with the world around me. Brown states, "One thing I have observed: when we are engaged in acts of love, we humans are at our best and most resilient." (9) and furthers the idea with, "Perhaps humans' core function is love. Love leads us to observe in a much deeper way than any other emotion." (Brown 9) The compounding sadness of isolation and death brought through the COVID response has, at times, caused me to question if this is the right time for this work, if there is enough love to go around and to change towards a bigger sense of togetherness, and while I don't have that answer right now, the amount of hope of an ontological shift towards love is enough for me to thug this out and share these approaches with you all today. One of the

[11] https://www.lakecountystar.com/local-news/article/DAYS-GONE-BY-The-history-of-the-Manistee-14393775.php

biggest takeaways from Brown's work, at least for me, is that it requires a fair amount of soul searching to find the internal truth needed to know if an approach is grounded in love or not, but once this has been practiced enough to know if love is at the core for sure or not, love becomes the grounding factor in existence and social change.

And this is where things start to get difficult, how does one know if love is at the center of their approach or a core ontological aspect of how they are? Brown states, "But I know that to truly understand, to truly be able to transform myself and develop that own unflappable core, I cannot vicariously live their spiritual lessons: I must walk my own path." (Brown 12) For me, this means that it takes work to know what your own path is and how it can shift and change over time and at times this can be one of the most difficult things to do. "To write this book, I have had to get intimate with what I don't know, with my fears and doubts, with my restlessness." (Brown 12) What all of this means is that that uncertainty is both the space where growth and change happen, but also the space where we are most apt to get stuck. While I want to believe that I am intimate with my fears and doubts, it is my fears and doubts that have prevented me from moving on and finishing this project and it is my restlessness that has brought me back to it. The fear of what I don't know or am unable to clearly articulate has at times subsumed everything about who I am, and it is through this process I have come to turn to emergence. Brown defines emergence as: "Emergence is the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions" (Brown 13) and elaborates further, "Nothing is wasted, or a failure. Emergence is a system that makes use of everything in the iterative process. It's all data." (Brown 14) The seven years it has taken me to get to this point where I am putting words to paper demonstrates the process of centering love and the time invested to understand the emergence of these ideas. As much as I wish this document was easy to write, it has been

difficult to see the forest through the trees and to accept that all of the experiences that have happened along the way are data that reinforce the need for love and further acceptance of who I am. This process is emergent. The best way I have found to phrase it is: “Our ideas of right and wrong shift with time– right now it's clear to me that something is wrong if it hurts this planet.” (Brown 17) and anything that prevents maintaining the natural relationships that afford the planet its survival needs to shift, whether it be in myself, in others, or the structures that go unquestioned in their oppression.

Brown states, “Many of us have been socialized to understand that constant growth, violent competition, and critical mass are the ways to create change. But emergence shows us that adaptation and evolution depend more upon the critical, deep, and authentic connections, a thread that can be tugged for support and resilience. The quality of connection between the nodes in the patterns.” (4) and in relation to the socialization previously discussed Brown provides a counterpoint, “I thought then, and I think now: This can’t be all. No one survives this way, not long term. This can’t be the purpose of our species, to constantly identify each other as ‘other’, build walls between us, and engage in both and formal and informal wars against each other’s bodies.” (16) This is the space that this dissertation is engaging with, the space where we look for other options to tear down the walls and stop the wars against each other’s bodies. If anything, I have learned over time that this is something that will require multiple approaches and it is a conversation I have sat with for a long time, long enough to believe that there is space and a need to share what my approach has been. This has required me to peel back a lot of my personal walls and to acknowledge here, in this space, the places where the labels I have long embraced don’t actually fit who I am and that the path of least resistance in relation to identity, at least for me, won’t cut it anymore. The answer to all of these things is an earnest love and I

believe this is indisputable, but the difficulty with this answer is how to find the place of love within ourselves and to double weave our outcomes to each other; my success and wellbeing is contingent on the next person's success and ability to exist as their full self, again linking back to the transformation of self to transform the world. (Brown 55)

One of the more difficult to place concepts I am working with is paracolonialism. One of the ways I see to resist continual engaging in paracolonialism is to find other options to exist but due to the ongoing nature (implied by the prefix para) it is very difficult to find these pathways. Brown succinctly asks this question: "How do we create and proliferate a compelling vision of economics and ecologies that center humans and the natural world over the accumulation of material?" (Brown 18) The work of all scholarship dwelling with these ideas come back to this question, how do we create something that currently doesn't exist on a broad scale that values the land and the lives that live here over materiality? There is no one answer, as you will see from the scholarship gathered here, but it is the repetition of this question and its various forms that will proliferate answers. Brown further states, "All of this imagining, in the poverty of our current system, is heightened because of scarcity economics. There isn't enough, so we need to hoard, enclose, divide, fence up, and prioritize resources and people… We have to imagine beyond those fears. We have to ideate– imagine and conceive– together." (18-19) While in simplistic terms, I am heeding this call and imagining alongside Brown, I am also providing a starting place for your imagining, or middle ground for your imagining, or, even a joined conversation of imagining after this internal work feels done for the moment. This is one of the places where the wisdom of hope must override the fear of the present, which in and of itself becomes an emergent strategy. Brown outlines the evolution of emergent strategies as follows:

· (Emergent strategy) was, initially, a way of describing the adaptive and relational leadership model found in the work of Black science fiction writer Octavia Butler (and others).

· then it grew into plans of action, personal practices and collective organizing tools that account for constant change and rely on the strength of relationships for adaptation. With a crush on biomimicry and permaculture.

· which evolved into strategies for organizers building movements for justice and liberation that leverage relatively simple interactions to create complex patterns, systems, and transformations—including adaptation, interdependence and decentralization, fractal awareness, resilience and transformative justice, nonlinear and iterative change, creating more possibilities.

· and now it's like…ways for humans to practice being in the right relationship to our home and each other, to practice complexity, and grow a compelling future together through relatively simple interactions. Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.

· and maybe, if I'm honest, it's a philosophy for how to be in harmony and love, in and with the world. (Brown 23-24)

Much of this work relies on imagination as a way to operationalize emergent strategies, one must be able to empathize, arguably the largest every day instance of imagination, by drawing from their memories, their feelings, and their bodies to determine ways of being that support and build the larger networks they are in. One of the biggest draws to me here is that Brown's approaches are focused on social change and due to this focus, these concepts are not overly culturally specific. This is an idea that can also be found in the work of Wilson, Absolom, Tuck, Kovach,

and Smith, but, understandably so, the aforementioned authors ground this work of empathy and social imagination within highly specific cultural contexts. Brown, while not saying the exact same thing, is presenting these concepts from a different perspective. Brown specifically draws on two major experiences, Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street, and I believe this is an intentional move to speak to a wider audience. This approach affords folks like me, white settler colonial, a space to enter the conversation and additionally it provides a lens to be able to read the work of Indigenous scholars in a culturally aware and non-appropriative way.

I am adding to this conversation by providing a framework for an internal investigation of these concepts through emergence. My frameworks here require an explicit inward look that makes distinctions between what is okay to share outwardly and what is okay to do internally. For instance, settler colonial interventions are highly contextual specific moments where the questions are allowed to come freely, and connections are allowed to be made as needed. I often see folks struggle with this by either assuming that none of this work or exercises are intended for them due to their ethnicity; however, without an imaginative perspective it would be impossible for settler colonial folks to even understand why a concept like decolonization is important. To this end, there is a slippery slope of appropriation that also has to be contended with, which is where I am making my distinctions. It is okay to imagine a decolonial future no matter your subject position. It is okay to imagine an anti-capitalist future no matter your subject position. What is not okay is to assume that these concepts should be actualized by every person. There are aspects of decolonization that are impossible to understand without being directly colonized and it is at no point okay to claim to know/understand this colonization on an ontological level without directly experiencing it. Class violence is not colonization, though it is akin to it and it is time to look at and understand this relationship in order to build cross-cultural

connections that work for liberation of all repressed peoples. Brown states, “One major emerging lesson: We have to create futures in which everyone doesn’t have to be the same kind of person. That’s the problem with most utopias for me: they are presented as mono value, a new, greener, more local monoculture where everyone gardens and plays the lute, and no one travels… And I don’t want to go there!” (Brown 59) and more specifically to my points above, “Change is coming—what do we need to imagine as we prepare for it? What is compelling about surviving climate change?” (Brown 60) While I have struggled with the terminology, one thing has always been clear: it is the overlaps and similarities that bind us far deeper than the differences, but differences are often easier to see and are the source of disconnection. Due to my relationships and social awareness awakening, decolonization has been the framework I have used for a long time, but times are changing for me and the social turn to decolonizing everything has forced me to dig deeper and question if the cultural context of decolonization is right for who I am (see the discussion of “Decolonization is not a Metaphor” by Tuck and Yang in this dissertation for a further delve into this). I see a lot of things that I deeply agree with in a decolonial framework, but the one thing that has always felt a little off for me is that I cannot point towards a single instance of being colonized and this work is actively finding the ways to engage with core beliefs that I agree with from decolonial theory in relation to what my actual experiences have been.

This is work that needs to happen. Brown situates this perfectly for me, “I learned in school how to deconstruct—but how do we move beyond our beautiful deconstruction? Who teaches us to reconstruct?” (61) In the route of reconstruction there needs to be a space and time for the endless possibilities. No idea should be off limits, but there needs to be a lens to determine what can and should be shared out loud. The things I fear about where I see social change going is that too often concepts are gatekept as they are siloed into specific contexts but

there are pieces within these concepts that are not done being developed yet and there are still connections to be made outside of their silos. That is what this work is doing and the reason why Brown's concepts/theories become such a focus for me. Emergent strategy affords the space to dwell in places of discomfort and growth to understand that even if some concepts are not home, they shouldn't be dismissed out of hand and that if the concepts being considered are working towards a social wholeness then there is space to understand and think about them no matter your positionality. The tricky part becomes understanding how to engage with these conversations with others, which is where empathy comes in for me. If we engage with concepts that are outside of our cultural purview, then it has to be intentionally and from a place of love. Further, it must entail an understanding of why. Why are their culturally specific approaches to ideas of change? Why are these specifics important to understand to the best of our abilities? Why does the practice of social change look different for everyone? Why is it necessary to have so many approaches towards a unified goal of existence?

These questions are very difficult to have definitive answers to and I believe that is one of the biggest barriers to fully understand them. People like definitive reasons. People like when things make sense, but one of things that Brown is pushing for (as am I) is that we are the ones that make sense of these complexities, sense doesn't just happen. In reference to the process of making sense, Brown states, "We have learned that such a fundamental shift requires many small steps—having massive visions and making them attainable with specific goals that can be measured and felt both internally and by those who participate in the network and in our trainings." (Brown 67) and further, "Intentional adaptation is the heart of emergent strategy. How we live and grow and stay purposeful in the face of constant change actually does determine both the quality of our lives, and the impact that we can have when we move into action together."

(Brown 72) The stakes are intense and difficult to fully understand, but if we take Brown's suggestion literally here, it means that no one person is responsible for the whole, that the various perspectives and intentions weave together to shape the tapestry of change. The individual ability to adapt informs the spaces that we look for connections to achieve fundamental changes. This is one of the best features of what Brown is suggesting, there is room for just about everyone to come to and see what their own understandings of love and emergence look like. I say just about everyone because there will always be folks who don't want these revaluations to happen, and I don't really think they are the audience for this work as they would not choose to read it and take these ideas as informative to their own identity. But, for those open to these adaptations, there is the space to approach these ideas with openness and willingness to shift what the meaning is. Brown writes, "Grace taught me dialectical humanism– the cycle of collective transformation of beliefs that occurs as we gather new information and experiences, meaning that over time, we can understand and hold a position we previously believed to be wrong" (29), and I think this is at the core of what I am discussing here: the ability to take in information from various sources to shift what we previously understood in relation to what we now know. This early quote is put into further perspective by considering the following: "The easier "being wrong" is for you (the faster you can release your viewpoint), the quicker you can adapt to changing circumstances. Adapting allows you to know and name current needs and capacity, to be in relationship in real time, as opposed to any cycle of wishing and/or resenting what others do or don't give you." (Brown 96) This is one of the hardest things for me to do in my personal journey through these ideas, but it is at the heart of why it is important. Adaptation affords the space for feelings but keeps the focus on the present so as new information, or even a new take on old information, presents itself we are able to be in the present.

Brown explains why these steps are difficult: “Most of us are socialized towards independence—pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps, working on our own to develop, to survive, to win at life.” (Brown 90) and “Humans are unique because we compete when it isn’t necessary. We could reason our way to more sustainable processes, but we use our intelligence to outsmart each other. We compete for fun, for ego.” (Brown 90) I have spent most of my life pulling myself up from my bootstraps and surviving, but in the last few years or so my life circumstances have changed enough to where I am finally able to hear these words. I recently had a very deeply seated disagreement with a former really close friend and at the end of the conversations I realized that the impasse we were at was because I was no longer competing or trying to outsmart them, and it changed the dynamic so much that it became impossible for us to find common ground. While this is unfortunate, it is also part of life. One day we may grow closer to each other, but at this current time it means we are speaking two different languages. My process of healing myself for the whole means that misunderstandings have to be ok. They cannot stop this process, nor can they shift the focus away from adaptation and love. Brown frames this situation as existing in interdependence. (90) Brown asks, “Are you actively practicing generosity and vulnerability in order to make the connections between you and others clear, open, available, durable? Generosity here means giving of what you have without strings or expectations attached. Vulnerability means showing your needs.” (93) I really appreciate Brown’s optimism here, but I would also like to add to this that all parties must be working towards this same goal in order for interdependence to be truly reached and that there will be times where everyone struggles with this. Brown is outlining a crucial idea and in her usual fashion is an aspirational goal with various levels of success. The hardest part of interdependence is: “On so many levels, interdependence requires being seen, as much as possible, as your true

self." (Brown 95) There is no way to ensure that you are *seen* as your true self, the best we can do is to continually bring that self forward to the conversation. This has been particularly difficult for me as I have worked through finishing this project. As I stated earlier, most of my life I let the labels placed on me be the only self that others saw, but post-lockdown, I am too tired to do this anymore. I have to repeatedly remind myself that "Transformation doesn't happen in a linear way, at least not one we can always track. It happens in cycles, convergences, explosions. If we release the framework of failure, we can realize that we are in iterative cycles, and we can keep asking ourselves—how do I learn from this?" (Brown 106) The pandemic has shifted a lot of things for me: I am finding it much more difficult to engage in scholarly conversations because what I value has changed. I have reached most of my biggest goals during this time, a home that is mine and it would take a pretty enormous situation to lose this home and a meaningful relationship that is fulfilling.

Until the last year or so, I always believed there was a specific order for these achievements: Graduate with my PhD from a prestigious program, get a tenure track job and become a rock star scholar, fall in love, make a home. I now find myself with love and a home, meaning I "achieved" my last two goals before the first three. On this side of these goals, the first three mean a lot less and I have the space to really think about what I want to do. I want to finish my PhD, so I don't have the burden of student loans with nothing to show for it. I want to make a living wage. I no longer care if I am remembered for my contribution to the field or not. These shifts are what have allowed me to come back to this work in earnest and with love. I see now that I wouldn't have been able to be my true self with my previous goals. I also see now that I was using education as the only way out of class hardship, but there are other ways that are more meaningful to me now. So many of my life experiences as an adult have been grounded in

survival, and I have done just that, but I am tired of just surviving. “I fight until I am exhausted, and then I finally surrender to the inevitable.” (Brown 75) This quote from Brown succinctly describes my feelings over the last few years and reengaging with this project is me surrendering to the inevitable. I am working towards the grace and forgiveness Brown describes. I am working to forgive myself, which has been the hardest, and I am working on letting go of my grudges to live this work. It is hard. It often hurts. But I have imagined for a long time what I could look like as a whole person in the darkest of nights.

What I want from this is imagining is summed up with this quote from Brown, “Imagination is one of the spoils of colonization, which in many ways is claiming who gets to imagine the future for a given geography. Losing our imagination is a symptom of trauma.” (161) and further by: “How do we shift into a culture in which conflict and difference is generative?” (Brown 131) While Brown is specifically invoking imagination in how it relates to her community, it is the point of loss that gathers me in so deeply. In all of my scholarship up to this point, I have sought ways to understand differences as the space where change can happen, with a steady eye on finding the connections/relationships of thought as the primary feature of the work together. This work has the potential to heal traumas to build a new foundation and it is one of the reasons why Brown’s work will be featured so heavily in my dissertation. Brown positions hope and love as primary aspects of emergent strategy. She builds frameworks that are realistic in these positions as well as affording the space for folks to sit with these ideas and for those who are not yet ready to engage with her concepts in earnest.

In Tuck and Yang’s “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” the conversation of how and when decolonization can act as an intervention, specifically in ways that include community, personal health/growth, and, are proposed and discussed in contrast to the uptick in the use of the

word “decolonization. Additionally, Tuck and Yang present decolonization as an always already operationalized theory that can only be understood though a community context. Tuck and Yang also challenge the uptick in the use of the word decolonization, drawing connections to other theories that have, in some ways, lost their meaning through over and inaccurate use (a la Queer theory in the 90’s and early 00’s).

In conversations with my friends and colleagues, Tuck and Yang are often lauded or accused of framing decolonization as more than a theory, it is also a state of being. This state of being attempts to understand the locus of communication that leads to knowledge creation that steps away from colonial ways of being. Tuck and Yang join the conversation by incorporating a solid critique of the appropriation of the language of decolonization, stating: “…there is often little recognition to the immediate context of settler-colonialism on the North American lands where many of these conferences take place” and “When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks.” (3) Tuck and Yang utilize the language of decolonization to specify and define what decolonization is and is not. Specifically, these authors push against the notion that decolonization can be used as the newest and shiniest theory since there are distinctive characteristics of decolonization (the examples provided by the authors are wide ranging, with one of the major consistent factors for North America being Indigenous worldviews and focus) that extend themselves to a way of being linked to future, present, past, and settler-colonialism.

It is from these relationships that the goal of Tuck and Yang comes into focus. Tuck and Yang push for an understanding of decolonization that focuses on action and ontology. The state of being decolonial can be enacted in settler-colonial paradigms only in-so-far that the practices of decolonization are rooted in Indigenous' worldviews (in the argument presented by Tuck and Yang, the focus is on North America). Tuck and Yang's claims and arguments are about settler-colonial discomfort. Settler-colonist cannot become decolonial, the settler-colonial paradigm, by the nature of its functionality, can be anti-racist and can resist nationalist hegemony; however, a decolonized North American continent would require repatriation of native lands, therefore a person of settler-colonial decent can never be 'decolonial'.

At any point where authors specifically invoke my positionality (here it is: white male), I realize that this invocation requires an earnest search within myself. While Tuck and Yang explicitly state that settler-colonial descendants cannot *be* decolonial, my life and relationships have led me to understand the truth of this position, but to also complicate it a bit. As a person who was raised in a multi-cultural family (my mother is white and stepfather is Southern Black), the notion of whiteness has been, conceptually, hard to understand at times. My orientations were just different enough from my peers and my faux middle-class family (my mother's side), that when I made the transition into living with my aunt and uncle, I had no understanding of the implications of settler-colonialism. While I developed and grew relationships through high school, the difference of my orientations continued to become starkly different from my peers. I didn't make racist jokes and refused to engage in cultural practices that furthered racist beliefs. Anti-racism did not make me very many friends in a private catholic high school.

It was during this time that I also began learning how to be. I had a close relationship with my uncle Jim, whose story is complex and difficult to understand at times. Jim is a

descendent of the Wooded Cree, whose family made their way south, literally following the lumber boom in southern Canada and Michigan. Jim's parents were of the generation where passing as French Canadian Catholics was preferable to being known as Indigenous. Jim was the first generation of truly non-speakers and learned how to be 'native' from Anishinaabe folks around Grand Rapids, Michigan. Jim was one of the few people I shared my thoughts with, and he knew me. He saw the difficulties of not really fitting in, but also that I had reasons for resisting ways of being that devalued life and freedom.

As I have shared many times, Jim was my first teacher of the land. He will always be with me, and I utilize the lessons he taught daily. I bring this up here because the discomfort with Tuck and Yang is real and this conversation, in many ways, forces me to consider what my relationships are and how/why I identify with decolonial ways of being as understood through text and theory. I know that in practice, there is a marked truth to Tuck and Yang's forward description of settler colonialism, and that anti-racist work is not inherently decolonial. The focus on metaphor seeks to ground decolonial theory to the land, peoples, and practices and the ways that metaphors distract from the real relationships around us. These orientations shape a specifically Indigenous ontology and axiology. While I, in my settler-colonial male body, cannot *be* decolonial, I can seek relationships that help build empathy and understandings in an earnest and meaningful way. After dwelling in an intellectual space that affords time to "take" on theories and practices, I have come to understand empathy as one of the most rhetorically powerful moves. Rhetorical empathy is empathy that is operationalized through contextual interactions that determine connection to one's stories and practices. While rhetorical empathy is not a perfect model, it is a constantly scaling model that understands the limitations of application. Engaging with rhetorical empathy does not mean that by reading and experiencing

story with a speaker/storyteller that it is possible to know their Truth. Rather, rhetorical empathy seeks a foundational understanding that truths are not easily dismissed, nor are they understood as applicable beyond individual instances of shared experiences and time, but they are the specific interventions where through the relationship with the storyteller and a temporary suspension of an individual's worldview it is as close as possible to stepping in someone else's shoes.

Tuck and Yang provide more than enough information to understand. For instance, the notion that only through repatriation of colonized lands can the North American continent become decolonized is one of the major points of resistance to this article. While seemingly hyperbolic when considered on the surface, there is a truth to this statement that can be understood when I consider the hyperbolic nature and practices of settler-colonial paradigms. In a move to understand the overwhelming impact settler-colonialism has had in the North American continent, Tuck and Yang provide a contrasting claim that seeks the same level of impact.

Tuck and Yang's line of reasoning has been in the background of my mind through much of my life, though I was unsure how to name it. The notion, or rather, the question of how to understand a culture that isn't mine, but I have been taught aspects of that have become part of my human experience is something I consistently worked to understand. In much of my earlier research, this work took the form of creating a Navigational Epistemology in order to understand how I shape and come to know knowledge. This epistemological framework is a distinct attempt at creating an understanding that took into account the lessons Jim taught me. It was a move to understand the academic lineage I was descending from in relation to how I walked through this world as a white man.

The move to understand but find my own orientation is a direct result of the relationships that I have formed along the way. The mentorship of Malea Powell and the American Indian Caucus showed me that it is okay to recognize the lessons Jim taught me in the books and theories I read, but the relationships also pushed me to better understand the always already contexts that exist in colonial violence. In my work, I have always struggled to understand how I could empathize with an author but also have a clear understanding that my empathy was with the specific person writing the text and that the generational trauma experienced through genocide and colonization was something beyond my reach. This fine line of understanding provided the theoretical understanding of re-visiting places of trauma with new context to re-shape the memories that existed in these spaces for me. I was dwelling in spaces of trauma with the safety of perceived control of my context; I had my own money, transportation, and the ability to determine how I would engage in spaces that were so thoroughly and negatively embedded in my mind. While clearly a privileged place to come from, for I knew that I would be just another person in the spaces now and that my white male body would afford certain abilities to move fluidly in these spaces, these experiences afforded the space and time build understandings that are my own; informed by scholars who have mentored me and have shown me ways to move parallel, at and times in sync with, ways of knowing that are informed by culturally situated contexts that are not my own.

Walking with my mentors along the river in Indianapolis, feeling the breeze and hearing their conversations. A group of 4 native women who welcomed me to walk alongside them, talked about the goings on at their universities. Learning to listen and hear the good with the bad, to understand what was structural and what was interpersonal was difficult at times, but these women were (are) my friends and aunties. They showed me how the academy can be, while

helping me to understand how to exist in these spaces. As the water flowed, I watched on as a sacrificial cigarette became an offering of *sema* (tobacco) and in that moment on the river the differing in our experiences became hyper-focused but also brought every one of us closer together.

I found myself asking how could I understand the ways of being that I have been taught, without adding to ongoing paracolonial trauma? What about more specifically in the context of an academic conference? I started to map myself in this space, I started to see that nodes of intersection make and create everyone. Like the river we were walking, our stories began small but quickly connected us. The water becoming as much of the way we spoke and cared for each other, as it held the potential to drive us apart. I was both a person of safety and embodying the very essence of coloniality in this space,

Now, if I were to ask any of those folks which they felt that day, I feel pretty confident that they would focus on the giving (of the lessons, of the time, etc.) and mention the obvious, a 6 foot tall white dude walking with a group of women of various ages in a big city meant that every internal alert system they had developed over the years could take a momentary pause (though those feelings could never truly go away). And, when I look back, this knowledge helps me to know I have done some things right. But that isn't the only thing when I think back to this moment, it is because of my relationships with these folks that they were willing to share. Because they had chosen the path of teachers, it felt at times that the sharing was in discriminatory, though I can't help but think about how, even then, I understood these lessons as gifts to inform my navigation of self and the kind of teacher I should be. They showed me how to understand how easy it is to meet people where they are at, until there is a reason not. The cost of

empathy is often steep and filled with missteps until there is a better understanding of how empathy can function.

I see Tuck and Yang's article as a clear way to build and understand rhetorical empathy as decolonial intervention. Here, what I am calling a decolonial intervention is an intentional moment of pause to consider how one's (inter)actions furthers the violence of colonialism as described by many scholars from continuously colonized spaces (para-colonial) and previously colonized spaces (neo-colonial or post-colonial depending on the timeframe). This moment of pause will not always lead to ways to resist colonial paradigms and requires practice, because oftentimes the pause happens whether we want it to or not and it becomes more of a task of recognizing these pauses and identifying in them the space for (re)cognition and (re)orientation. A seemingly invisible structure that establishes systemic tactics of separation, colonialism has never ended insofar that Tuck and Yang are only scratching the surface for the ways in which internalized colonization impacts and affects issues such as sovereignty, class, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and many other issues whose negatives are shaped by –isms. A decolonial intervention is a move to both understand one's complacency or active participation in colonialism and to consider options that resist/change/build a new orientation to actions that resist colonization and the devaluing of human/the land's life.

One of the very few positive aspects of this project taking so long to finish is that there have been a few major additions to the corpus of text relating to the topics I am covering. *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods* by Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie is one of those texts that provides some long needed definitions and makes a lot of the connections I have been struggling to articulate since I began this work.

Tuck and McKenzie expand on the methodological practices laid out by Linda T. Smith and Kathleen Absolon.[12] Grounded in the social sciences, *Place in Research* takes a wide approach to understanding how concepts like neoliberalism relate to the understanding and construction of place, stating, "Our more recent searches for this book indicate a maintained relative lack of focus on the relationships between neoliberalism or capitalism and land or environment, particularly in meta-analytic discussions." (Tuck and McKenzie 4) Tuck and McKenzie are providing a methodological framework within this text that affords Indigenous knowledges and methods to be self-constitutive in relation to Western frames. They are drawing attention to the ongoing always alreadyness of Indigenous methodologies while simultaneously pointing towards the spaces where existing frameworks intertwine with current understanding of place. As can be seen in the following, "A second aspect of problematic relationships between dominant political systems and the land are the historical and ongoing land based practices of colonialism, and in particular settler colonialism." (Tuck and McKenzie 4) Tuck and McKenzie point towards the rhetoric of settler colonialism as the location of schism that drives Western frames of place relations. Much of Eve Tuck's work focuses on these relationships, but what is most important about this text is the way that the methodological framework provided by Tuck and McKenzie demonstrates how critical place inquiry can provide a framework when Western notions of place research breaks down.

As seen below, Tuck and McKenzie outline critical place inquiry as equally focused on human interpretation as materially constituted in the land itself: Critical place inquiry:

[12] Absolon's *Kaandossiwin: How we Come to Know* shows how to gather stories and specifically highlights this method for use in the social sciences as a way to understand the role of indigeneity in the larger social workings of communal care.

- Understands places as themselves mobile shifting over time and space through interaction with flows of people other species social practices
- Entails at a more localized level understanding places is both influencing social practices as well as being performed and re-shaped through practices and movements of individuals and collectives
- Conceptualize this place is interactive and dynamic due to time space characteristics
- Recognizes that desperate realities, determine not only how places experience, but also how it is understood and practiced in turn. (e.g., in relation to culture, geography, gender, race, sexuality, age, or other identifications and experiences.
- Addresses spatialized and place-based processes of colonization and settler colonization and works against their further erasure or neutralization through social science research.
- Extends beyond consideration of the social to more deeply consider the land itself and its nonhuman inhabitants and characteristics as they determine and manifest place
- Aims to further generative and critical politics of places through such conceptualizations/practices and via a relational ethics of accountability to people and place. (Tuck and McKenzie 19)

For Tuck and McKenzie, both the physical locations and those conducting the inquiry act upon each other and this action is a complex interwoven web of relations to what is there, what constitutes reality, and how these actors inform the research in relation to settler colonial notions of land ownership and empire. Tuck and McKenzie state, “The agency and interactions of materiality unto itself and including in relation to humans (e.g., the effects of different objects and species on one another) has been increasingly addressed in work in areas such as feminist

theory, actor network theory, non-representational theory, speculative realism and other 'objective oriented ontologies" (41-42) For my research, I have sought the space between Western object oriented ontologies to better understand the ontology of the land, to better understand the relation between human existence, the awareness of consciousness, and the way that memories are constructed after the fact to relinquish responsibility for the ongoing abstraction of the land as seen by the reduction of habitats to resources and raw materials. Tuck and McKenzie state, "Returning to Massey's (2005) lexicon, this suggests a meeting place, not only of human histories, spatial relations, and related social practices, but also of related histories and practices of land and other species. Mobile and practiced in a multitude of ways, including in and through the sedimentation and manifestations of power relations…?" (43). As Tuck and McKenzie are focused primarily on making space for a critical methodology situated in relation to Indigenous knowledges the multi-tiered understanding of relationality as described Wilson, Smith, and Goeman become necessary to understand how the histories of the land constitute the space for human histories to begin with.

One of the things I have consistently struggled with in this research is to understand the complexities of my positionality in relation to land-based scholarship. As stated at length elsewhere in this document, my orientation to the land is grounded by a second hand Indigenous framework as taught by my uncle, who showed me to see the relationships within an ecosystem as the primary factors that constitute the reality of a space. "Thus, to *practice* place or land productively towards versions of critical Indigenous and environmental politics will mean different things to different people and communities." (Tuck and McKenzie 43 emphasis in the original) As a white scholar, this is where I see the connection to emergence (Brown) in that the different "things" can mean that the dynamics of my relationship can exist in this space. While I

will never be able to fully understand or conceptualize the stakes involved from an Indigenous perspective, my views on the land are not fully shaped by Western understandings either. This quote from Tuck and McKenzie shows where these spaces can intersect, it is in the practice of place.

Further, Tuck and McKenzie draw attention to the differences in these approaches to demonstrate a critical awareness of the land and the ways it acts upon humans situated in an Indigenous focused paradigm. “Indigenous philosophies of place represent significant epistemological and ontological departures from those that have emerged in Western frames. Yet, in Indigenous worldviews, relationships to the land are not overly romantic– it might be more accurate to say they are familiar and if sacred, sacred because they are familiar” (Tuck and McKenzie 51) By deconstructing the notion of the “noble savage” through an exploration of these differences, Tuck and McKenzie show how these epistemic and ontological departures are circular in that the mysticism prescribed by the West is not, in reality, the nature of the relationship. The move here is to understand that these relationships are not metaphorical, they are material and exercised every day. “When decolonization is allowed to stand as a metaphor it papers over this complexity, backing away from the very aspects of decolonization that are unsettling… Thus, when we discuss decolonizing perspectives of place in this chapter, we are doing so with an understanding of decolonization as always involving recalibrations of human relationships to land” (Tuck and McKenzie 53) At the very least, this dissertation is seeking ways for this recalibration on a personal level. To provide a structure to identify when recalibration is necessary and to rely on emergence to find what this process looks like for each individual, specifically those who dwell in the spaces between decolonization and settler colonialism.

One of the more difficult aspects of this research is understanding the weight of the histories contained within. I often feel like I am writing against the "canons" of rhetoric and western knowledge despite being so firmly situated within this framework as a person. Tuck and McKenzie provide one of the reasons for this in the following:

> In Western philosophical traditions, Descartes's *Cogito ergo sum* has sprouted a lexicon that links what humans do to/with ideas only to the mind, located in or near the brain in the human head. Intellect/ualization and concept/ualization are both nouns and activities that are through or perceived to have a home in the mind, which is physically located, somehow, in the brain. Thoughts and perceptions, incidentally also take place in/from the human head; so too with comprehension, cognition, theorizing, understanding, interpreting. This observation (again, the head) is not meant to be dense or obvious, but to draw attention to how the very words we use to describe how humans interact with ideas are over-coded by assumptions about where thinking comes from and goes to. This coding is perhaps a good match with Western common sense, which regards the mind as apart from the body, the self as apart from others, the body as apart from the rest of the living world. (Tuck and McKenzie 53)

In my research, I am breaking this dichotomy and insisting on bringing the mind and body together to shape a connected ontology that links what we do to how we understand and how we move within spaces/places to who we are. This work is demonstrating a way to more deeply understand the self to better see the relationships to the whole, whether this whole be a community, ecosystem, workplace, or environment. To understand how the individual is a component of the whole. By focusing on action, Tuck and McKenzie are showing what this can look like when we stop and think critically about what is and what has been taken as truth: how

is it physically possible for concepts to be located in only one place in the body when the body learns through repetition how to move and anticipate the motions necessary to put a concept into action. An easy example for this would be shooting free throws in basketball: the mind takes in a huge amount of input, but it is only through the coordination of the body and the mind that this task becomes doable. Over time and with enough practice, the mind draws in this input on a subconscious level and the body takes over the primary functions of this conceptualization. The pathway for my scholarship is to find these kinds of places where examples of the theory exist in an emergent way that is still rooted in a Western frame of knowledge. I fully understand that isn't Tuck and McKenzie's goal, their goal is to provide the support needed for Indigenous ways of knowing and research to exist and be, but as a settler colonial person engaging with this scholarship the connections are still there, setting up a settler colonial intervention.

In relation specifically to place and the land by way of the body mind split, Tuck and McKenzie state, "Similarly, we might imagine that ontology of place-based paradigms is something like 'I am, therefore place is,' in contrast the ontology of land-based [paradigms] might be summarized as 'Land is, therefore we are.'" (55-56) Land-based ontologies are not contingent on Indigenous knowledge, though as Tuck and McKenzie show us Indigenous scholarship demonstrates what land based ontologies are and how they can function in research. This dissertation is the written out from of my development of a land based ontology that is not rooted in appropriation, but rather the complex relationship I have with the land (which is inherently settler colonial). Further, it provides a means for others to develop their own land based ontology. Tuck and McKenzie's positioning of the Land as the primary signifier of existence is hard to contest as all of our needed components for existence come from the land.

This is further driven home when Tuck and McKenzie delineate what the land is as follows:

> Land refers not just to the materiality of land, but also its 'spiritual, emotional, and intellectual aspects' (p.37) these scholars chose to signify consideration of these aspects in their capitalization of Land (as do Syres & Zinga, 2013; Korteweg & Oakley, 2014; and Engel, Mauro, & Carroll, 2014). Land can be considered as a teacher and conduit of memory (Brooks, 2008; Wilson, 2008) in that it 'both remembers life and its loss and serves itself as a mnemonic device that triggers the ethics of relationality with the sacred geographies that constitute Indigenous peoples' histories' (Byrd, 2011, p. 118). Relationships to land are familial, intimate, intergenerational, and instructive. (Tuck and McKenzie 57)

And put into contrast with:

> Conceptualization of land as property are enmeshed in the ideologies of settler colonialism, reliant upon constructions of land as extractable capital, the structural denial of Indigenous sovereignty, the fantasy of discovery, and the naturalization of heteropatriarchal nation-state (Arvin, Tuck, & Morriill, 2013). Thus, from the perspective of Indigenous scholars and writers, Western notions of place have been compromised by an over-reliance on the European colonial notion of property (see Barker, 2005; Grande, 2004; Belmessous, 2012 for elaborations on this point). But as Indigenous philosophers and elders remind us, there are more complex and meaningful relationships to land that humans have always enacted. (Tuck and McKenzie 65)

Here, Tuck and McKenzie are encouraging their readers to engage with the abstraction of the land within Western frames of knowledge and to engage with the emergent possibilities of what existed before, during, and on the land during periods of settler colonialism. While my work, understandably so, focuses on land as extractable capital in particular, the threads of structural denial of Indigenous sovereignty, the fantasy of discovery, and naturalization of the heteropatriarchal nation-state are still present here whether I am capable of seeing them or not. The goal here is to know, look for, and figure out different possibilities for these constructions, and for Tuck and McKenzie, drawing from Indigenous philosophers and elders is one way to do this. To further bring this home, "Again, it is the *structures* of settler colonialism that has reduced human relationships to land to relationships to property, making property ownership the primary vehicle to civil rights in most settler colonial nation-states." (Tuck and McKenzie 65) In my experience, this concept is one of the easiest places to begin to see that there are emerging alternatives to a complacent acceptance of traditional settler colonial values. As the housing market crashes around us (December 2022) and personal savings is rapidly dwindling, yet corporate profits are at an all-time high, the route to civil rights needs to be something everyone has access to. In this work there are always a lot of conversations around what this looks like, but here it is clear that it is the structures of settler colonialism that are making these moves, not individual settlers specifically. Much of my critiques of settler colonialism are focused on the structures that afford its existence, and for Tuck and McKenzie this is also true. The interconnectedness of these relationships is often hard to understand, but it is the complacency in these structures that, if anything, deserves blame.

However, and not quite in line with my previous example, deep within the frameworks that Tuck and McKenzie are building here are some hard truths:

> Settler emplacement is incommensurable with decolonization because at its basis is a drive to replace the Native as the rightful claimant of the land. Replacement relies on fantasies of the extinct or becoming-extinct Indian as natural, forgone, and inevitable, indeed, evolutionary (see Tuck & Gazatambide-Fernandez, 2013). Replacement is invested in settler futurity; in our use, futurity is more than the future, it is how human narratives and perceptions of the past, future, and present inform current practices and framings in a way that (over)determines what registers as the (possible) future. (Tuck and McKenzie 69-70)

This is further driven home by this earlier quote in the same section when they state, "It cannot be emphasized enough that settler colonialism wants Indigenous land." (Tuck and McKenzie 67) The nature of settler colonialism is to inhibit the relational networks that afford agency to the land, focusing the intentions purely on ownership and control. In order to enact these goals, the "inevitable" must become a "truth", overwriting the histories that have come from these places and potentially shaping the future of these places so much so that they are no longer recognizable to anyone or anything beyond a settler colonial paradigm. In these instances, it is important to come back to the previous discussion on structures. It has taken me a long time to understand that as an individual, there is only so much I can do one way or the other. Even in my complacency, as I am not quite the status quo and I don't have much if any real power, I only have so much I can contribute to settler colonialism on an individual level. Conversely, as hard as I push against settler colonialism, I am still a settler and the work that is being put into action here will only have a limited audience. So, the focus for me, and others, comes down to how to change the structures in a collective way, understanding that the emergent strategies available to each person provides a piece of the whole. It is my belief that the easiest ways to change the

structures is to develop a critical self-awareness directed towards the whole, to seek those moments of intervention and to dwell in the spaces of resisting these structures. It is also for this reason that my relationship, at least these days, with decolonial theory is more focused on finding specific spaces for intervention.

As part of this work, I have been working to understand how the abstraction of the land interacts and defines place. I have deeply struggled with defining this abstraction in clear way in my coursework, but here is one of the most important aspects of *Research in Place* to me, how Tuck and McKenzie work towards these kinds of definitions:

> However, a typology of concrete and abstract aspects of place also assumes that these considerations can be separated– that objects and physical characteristics are merely physical without human abstraction; and likewise that human thoughts and feelings do not have concrete or material qualities such as manifestations in the body. (Tuck and McKenzie 100)

And providing what the opposite can look like:

> Another theoretical commitment that girds Indigenous methods of crucial place inquiry is the non-abstraction of land, as has been discussed. Goeman (2012), Brooks (2008), Bang et al. (2014), Salmon (2012), and Gould (2011a) all emphasize that their work is concerned with generating real and lived impacts for specific groups of Indigenous peoples on specific expanses of land. Land is not a conceptual flotation device–although it could be because it figures so prominently in Indigenous literatures. Instead, each of the methods sets purposes about repatriation, rearticulation, and reclamation of Indigenous land. This land is locatable, walkable, and material. (Tuck and McKenzie 148)

The shift back to a relational model of the land is what I have been working toward, and Tuck and McKenzie show the spaces in which this model has always already been in motion. My connections to this model by way of my uncle showed me at a very young age that there are alternatives to looking at a forest and seeing the houses that could be built from the trees, that there is a bounty of knowledge that can be gained by slowing down and looking both with your eyes, but also with your full body, Tuck and McKenzie state, "Considering embodied methods more broadly, phenomenology is one methodological frame that entails methods of seeking to elaborate and understand embodied relationships to place" (105). One of the more useful aspects of this text is that I long envisioned this project as a methodological framework, however as the project has evolved, I have come to understand that much, if not all, of its focus is on phenomenology working towards an ontological framework through embodied methods and research. Everything is processed through the body and it is my contention that even folks completely outside of an Indigenous methodological framework can come to know the land through understanding the relationship to embodiment and memory.

Tuck and McKenzie draw from Striffler by stating, "Likewise, place has been shown to have a significant influence in the shaping and recalling of memory (Striffler 2007). Places can function intentionally or implicitly as 'sites of memory,' or as locations 'where both formal and popular memories are produced, negotiated and take root' (Sarmento, 2011, p.1). (Tuck and McKenzie 111) and:

> Also important are the ways in which the senses play a role in how cultures and places are constituted and changed. Linked to this is how the senses are connected to memory…If we understand memories as sedimented in the body, it suggests that memories are bound up in the sensory and 'are an inextricable element of how we know

> in practice.' These considerations extend to how cultural, gendered, racialized, class-based, generational, and other experiences and identities influence the meanings and memories imbued into sensory encounters. (Tuck and McKenzie 108-109)

The inherent connection to the body and senses here show the pathway through Indigenous methods, even if they are not necessarily named as such, to an embodied memory of both the land and our experiences. In many ways, it is awesome to see and read this as it is something I have struggled to articulate for years, but beyond that, it also drives home for me that there are routes to these knowledges that extend and connect to just about anyone's experiences. One of the major things this dissertation is doing is providing multiple routes that are supported by research, scholarship, and experience, for individuals to find where they align with these ideas and where they can make their own interventions to the structures Tuck and McKenzie talk about in their work. Tuck and McKenzie provide definitions, methods, and many points of reflection to delineate the role place plays in modern societies by highlighting a myriad of approaches from various positionalities.

Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* was one of the first texts that I really connected with in my first grad class. Wilson has the ability to break down difficult concepts in a way that is approachable and easy to understand, due in large part to the fact that Wilson is writing for both academic and lay audiences. Wilson frames this text through a series of letters that start off to his adolescent sons and eventually shifts to the reader.

In preparation to write about *Research is Ceremony* I spent a few hours rereading this text and for the first time I found myself drawn more towards the constructions of research, rather than the specific framework Wilson develops within these pages. I have been in a kind of

weird place with scholarship for a few years. At a time when I have watched most of my friends stake out their identities and research trajectories, I have found myself taking a deeper look at who I am and what drives me as a researcher. I have wanted to complicate a lot of things about myself and my approach that match the ways I have discussed throughout this document. I have let a lot of labels be placed upon me that have never really fit who I am and who I am becoming. Wilson writes, "If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right." (200) And for the first time in my life I understand what this means.

I have spent a lot of time being afraid of the complexities in my life and have spent much of this time driven by fear and fear alone. Until I finally get sick and tired of being sick and tired, I do nothing and let the world happen around me. I proclaim what I will do and how I will change, shouting to the aether to hear what these changes and shifts feel like when I say them out loud. What's worse is that the realness of writing things down means, for me, that I have to then be/come the words on the page. My heart has been hurting, hurting too much at times to be able to look at this research, hurting too much from things that I just couldn't let go of. One of the recurring themes of this document is carrying too much emotional baggage and how the more I carry makes the concepts I am talking about in this dissertation so much more difficult to enact. While I know I am not alone in this, it is also the reason why when I read Wilson this time, the things that were important to me changed. Wilson states, "One person cannot possibly know all of the relationships that brought about another's ideas. Making judgment of others' worth or values then is also impossible. Hierarchy in belief systems, social structure and thought are totally foreign to this way of viewing the world" (136). This is where I want to be. This is who I want to be. As stated in my analysis of Brown's work with emergent strategy, part of this emergence for me is to step away from the conflict and contest of ideas that I have been engaged

in during my time in academia. After being driven by fear for so long and holding on to my insecurities and perceived offenses, I realize now that in these moments what I was actually fighting against was being misunderstood and mislabeled. The thing that made this the hardest to let go of was that it was in large part my fault due to me placing a greater importance on the perception of who I was rather than who I am.

As the distance grows from all of these experiences, I realize that there is no way for me to know firsthand the struggles of anyone else. The best I can do is try to empathize and continue working on not taking things personally. Of course, this is complicated, relationships are complicated especially when there seems to be so much riding on them. I have spent most of my life somewhere in between places of security and confidence. My life has been informed by my intersections of cultures through my family and in adulthood, my chosen family. This move towards love as the basis of the approach offered in this dissertation is a linguistically simplistic way to look for the relationships across ideas and experiences. In reality, it is one of the hardest concepts I have ever tried to do in my life. One of the statements that I have always found a connection with in Wilson's work is how relationships are situated. Wilson states "the shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality)" (10). As my prior work focused on articulating an epistemological framework, I am deeply interested in the ways in which how we come to know shapes how we understand the world. While I am not utilizing an Indigenous framework, specifically, what I am presenting is undeniably related due to the intersections of my experiences with my uncle growing up and my academic mentorship at Michigan State. This dissertation is ontologically focused in that I am providing a road map for folks to understand what their realities are and a way to directly ask if this is the reality they want, but I am also

mapping the shift in who I am. I am trying my best to describe the emotions, time, locations, pain, love, and difficulty that comes with internal shifts to change one's reality.

Wilson writes, "Research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers" (Wilson 8). Through the long process of this research I have had to confront this head on. The hills I was willing to die on 6 years ago were an important stepping stone in this larger journey, but I will never go back to them. Instead, now my focus is on allowing my reality to be the relationships that help me grow. This process requires a lot of forgiveness, and it is forgiveness that started with forgiving myself. To accept the things I struggle with, and as Brown reminds me, learning to be okay with being wrong. Wilson shares, "When talking or writing, we usually expect others to make the same jumps in logic, to follow the same patterns of communication and to have similar terms of reference" (Wilson 9). This is one of the major things I constantly struggle with in life as well as research. I have spent most of my life wondering how the connections I was seeing weren't the same ones everyone saw, and it would frustrate me that this was continually the case. In an inverse way, I found the answer in a previous section from Wilson, "Finding this common ground is one of the struggles of cross-cultural communication. Yet it is necessary so that both sides in the communication process can begin to see or understand the same things" (Wilson 9). In a roundabout way, I found closure to my expectations of everyone else and their knowledge. One of the most valuable things this work has done for me is to shift my expectations from being based on knowledge or presentation of knowledge to finding something, even if it is small, that common ground can be formed on.

My approach to this is grounded in the lessons I have learned from Malea Powell and are supported by Wilson. I am a storyteller. In this dissertation I have shared many stories that have shaped this document and who I am. I share stories as a way to connect and build relationships. I

share stories to provide multiple ways into discourse and offer as many places to establish common ground as possible. Wilson writes, “Stories and metaphor are often used in Indigenous societies (not just in Canada and Australia but with other Indigenous peoples around the world) as a teaching tool. Stories allow listeners to draw their own conclusions and to gain life lessons from a more personal perspective” (25) and directly connected to this idea, “By getting away from abstractions and rules, stories allow us to see others’ life experiences through our own eyes” (Wilson 25.) One of the core concepts in this dissertation is rhetorical empathy. Empathy is a very difficult thing to achieve on topics that we may or not agree with or have an association with, but through storytelling and emergent strategies we can get closer to “see(ing) other’s life experiences through our own eyes.” I am sharing a story in my understanding of Wilson on this important reread because after utilizing this work for years, I am beginning to understand that I had missed the point in my previous ventures with Shawn. I sought to draw things that were useful to me, and as a result I presented many of the concepts Shawn shares to decontextualize from the Indigenous paradigm he has built. But he anticipated this move, “Of special significance is the way relational theory examines the power relationships and hierarchical structure of male-dominated, Euromerican ethnocentricity that is prevalent in most social science theory” (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah qtd. in Wilson 23) and “This study is also important for non-Indigenous people, as it will assist in the understanding of Indigenous issues, cultures and values” (Wilson 28) and the biggest kicker is this very early quote, “This relationship needs to be formed in order for an understanding of an Indigenous research paradigm to develop. This paradigm must hold true to its principles of relationality and relational accountability. As I cannot know beforehand who will read this book, I cannot be sure of the relationships that readers might hold with me or the ideas I share” (Wilson 8). While my intentions have never

been to abstract these ideas, it belies the larger structures of academia to stake knowledge as yours' and mine. On this read through, I realized that I had been co-opting an Indigenous paradigm in a particular academic way that shielded me, for the most part, from appropriation rather than to try to understand what I, as an intersectional multicultural white person, should take away from this text. What I believed I was doing was akin to this quote from Wilson, "As my writing and thinking progressed, these voices became less and less distinct. Maybe I was finally beginning to internalize what it was that I was theorizing about" (13). In reality, I didn't understand my relationship to this scholarship in a deep enough way yet.

Wilson shares, "As part of their white privilege, there is no requirement for them to be able to see other ways of being and doing, or even to recognize that they exist" (Wilson 66). Through the reframing of Wilson's work through my own lens, I was enacting my privilege. Because so much of my life has been informed by cultures outside of the dominant one, I had forgotten about the performance of whiteness I had been engaged in ever since I allowed others to label me. Because I could openly talk about my whiteness, once I was aware of whiteness as a concept, I was often given the pass to navigate this terrain in whatever awkward way it took me. In the vacuum of rhetoric and composition, my approach worked. I built relationships that are meaningful with the Indigenous folks in the field and many of these folks are part of my chosen family now. My wife is one of them. My closest mentor, Malea, is one of them. But, for some reason, these relationships didn't translate outside of our shared specific community. Wilson writes, "This is how Indigenous communities work—a key to being included is not only the work that you have done in the past but how well you have connected with others in the community during the course of your work. Thus, the strength of your bonds or relationships

with the community is an equally valued component of your work" (Wilson 120). To fully explain the meaningfulness of this quote, I must share a different story.

When I came to Syracuse during my campus visit, I was able to set up a meeting with a prominent Indigenous scholar in the field of ecology. One of the biggest worries I had in making my choice of grad school was finding someone who had a similar "library" as I had developed, meaning we had read the same books and would have a common language to talk with. I had seen this scholar give a presentation full of rich stories that built a web of relationships that tied land stewardship to scholarship in a masterful way. It was so good that I immediately picked up their book at the conference. I found a small booth and started reading, 4 hours later I looked up and it was dark outside, so I walked home and finished the book that night. For weeks this was the only text I thought about. I had already mostly finished my thesis, and to be honest, the book didn't quite fit what I was talking about, but the momentum of this book started to build within me.

When I was applying for PhD programs, I selected two programs where I had direct academic relatives and Syracuse. Between the winter conference where I saw the presentation and CCCC's Tampa, I found that the scholar whose work had been on loop in my mind since winter taught at ESF[13], which was somehow affiliated with SU, I knew that if I got the chance I would try to meet them and share how amazing I found their work and connected I thought it could be with what I was trying to move my work towards. Shortly thereafter I received a phone call letting me know I had been accepted based on my application to SU and more or less made up my mind that this is where I would be going for my last stage of graduate school.

[13] SUNY ESF is part of the SUNY School systems and is geographically located right next to Syracuse University

When I got to SU I started to get sick, like very sick. Every movement hurt and I was dragging so much on the inside I was worried that my acceptance would be revoked because of how poorly I felt I was doing. I tried to put on a good face and stayed on top of cold meds and made the best of it. During the visit, I was able to meet the aforementioned Indigenous scholar and holy cow did that meeting not go well. I tried to fit everything I had ever been taught into one conversation. My relationships didn't translate and the community I had become a member of through hours of conversation and shared experiences had no meaning to them at all. Sure, they knew some of the scholars I referenced, but not what my relationships were to them.

I pulled a cigarette out my pocket and broke off the filter and offered them some tobacco, mortified, discouraged, and embarrassed. I chalked most of this up to nerves and being so sick and just focused on getting through the trip. Their work meant no less to me, but I was very unsure about the whole interaction and the embarrassment I felt lingered with me through that summer as I was driving the moving truck East to my new home Syracuse, NY.

My transition into my new academic home was rough. I didn't understand the environment and if I am honest, I missed the connections I was able to establish at Michigan State. I kept waiting for the opportunities to build similar relationships, to put into practice those things I had learned from my academic family that had transitioned into my chosen family. And man, if every turn did these things not translate. It was super difficult to find belonging. Admittedly, now after years of running through all of these experiences through my head a literal million times and 6 months of letting them go and moving on, I probably wasn't as open as I thought I was, and I am sure my brand of being came off in ways I would have never imagined.

During the darkest days of this transitional process, I reached out to the Professor I had met with during my campus visit again and my worst case scenario was confirmed, after meeting

with me again they politely told me that they didn't see any connections to my work and the work they were doing and suggested I talk to the chair of the Indigenous studies department at SU. I was crushed. Everything else hadn't gone the way I had planned it, and this was just a continuation of the same. I met with the chair of Indigenous studies and that meeting was at the time, quite offensive. The work I had done and the community I had previously built had no meaning or importance here. After being asked a series of what felt like intrusive questions that also felt like a trap, I was told to read some decolonial theory and think about my relationships, then maybe do some presentations.

My feelings were hurt. I felt I had been clear that my work is not Indigenous studies but was related to it and that I had carefully crafted a non-appropriative relationship with the scholars and theories I engaged with in my thesis and through my field. I felt misunderstood, like I was asking for sacred knowledge, when what I was asking for was conversations to further and build the relationships I had built in my home with the people who claimed me as their relative. I will be honest; this series of conversations were a significant part of the reason that I left Syracuse. There were a fair number of other things going on as well, but I had put so much weight on these conversations that they felt like the last ditch effort to find an active community at SU and this was the first time I felt like there was no future for me if I stayed in that physical location.

It has taken me 5 ½ years to understand (and rereading Tuck & Yang's "Decolonization is not a Metaphor") to start to understand what happened here. At each step I was looking for signals that it was safe to share what I had been taught by my community, but I had lost my ability to see these signals, instead I was looking for what Wilson explains here, "They are expected to question, argue, challenge, critically critique and use these adjectives in their

dialogue about the work of others. The assumption is that if one can find fault with others, then one's own work will look better. There must be a winner and a loser" (85). My experiences at SU weren't what I was expecting, and I had lost what made me who I was, and in this process, I had lost the meaning in my previous work and the value of the relationships I had built through the Indigenous Caucus. I missed that the "intrusive" questions were awkwardly worded questions to share my web of relationships and to demonstrate that I had in fact read an extensive amount of decolonial theory. That I had presented at the conferences and I had written my own tangential scholarship. At the end of the day, these folks were taking the necessary steps to protect their communities from an unknown person (me) in order to prevent further colonization of the space and the ideas therein. These moves, while they hurt my feelings, must have been made for a reason.

One of the more awkward things that has come out of these experiences and taking "Decolonization is not a Metaphor" to heart is that my work is shifting away from invoking decolonial theory as a positionality, but rather to focus on understanding what the limitations are from a settler's perspective in being able to understand the lived experience of colonization. This is at the core of why some of my language seems to hedge engaging directly with a decolonial perspective. These moves are to carefully navigate and put into relation my experiences while acknowledging things like the land is important, capitalism is killing all of us, storytelling is one of the most important aspects of building meaningful relationships with theories and the world around us, and this list could literally go on for more pages than this dissertation.

In a way that I was not intending, I took the lessons from these interactions and grafted them to my heart. When looked at through a framework of love and relationality, these

experiences, despite the pain I felt when they happened, will lead me to better things and a truer relationship with those who I can share this love with.

I have shared this story to get into the right headspace to work with Wilson in a different way than I have before. Here I am taking up the writing conventions Wilson is using to better understand a relational orientation to what an Indigenous research paradigm can do, while maintaining a focus that does not extract the needed pieces to make my ideas work. There are limitations to my understanding of this text and Wilson knows that *Research is Ceremony* is an academic text meaning that the ability to control the narrative and how his ideas are used can potentially get lost in the process (i.e. how I have utilized his words and the ways I have seen others utilize his words). I think that this is a really important step to the process I am offering in this dissertation: to revisit the spaces that have felt comfortable and to constantly put them in relation to shifts and changes in perspective based on experiences. The following is a more straightforward analysis of Wilson through an emergent lens that will situate the cultural context of an Indigenous research paradigm and highlight the places where emergence can and should be used to better understand ways of research that put relationships at the fore.

One of the most interesting aspects of emergence to me is that it provides layers to thought that allow for experimentation, but when put through the lens that Brown offers, there are checks and balances with what to do with the findings of said experimentation. On the one hand, through an emergent framework, the ability to think about and sit with just about any thought and relationship becomes possible. But, given the personal work supported and invoked by Brown, there is also an obligation to think through the implications of this kind of experimentation and to only bring to the fore things that are grounded in love and mutual respect

for the context of the ideas and folks directly impacted by the ideas. The idea is to do what you need to bring your whole self to the community.

What I am doing here to achieve this is pointing out where I see connections or feel similarly to what Wilson is saying followed by a brief conversation of what the limitations are from my perspective. This is a move to afford the cultural context to remain, but to also demonstrate ways to engage in this work that does not claim or extract specific ideas.

Wilson writes, "Indigenous epistemology is all about ideas developing through the formation of relationships. An idea cannot be taken out of this relational context and still maintain its shape" (12). For this project, I am constellating my relationships to provide the context for the ideas I am sharing here. Everything I have come to know as true has come through the relationships I have built. This is one of the most important aspects of Wilson's work to me, while I am not writing from an Indigenous perspective, I find the idea to be true in my life and the ways my mentors have shown me to develop my stories to share this knowledge allows for a deeper connection to aspects of an Indigenous framework. By showing how the relationships track back to those who taught me, I am engaging in a practice that is similar to what Wilson is describing, while maintaining a contextually respectful relationship to the knowledge that has been shared with me.

By looking at each of the texts used in this project as a place to build relationships, I am practicing an emergent strategy where I seek a level of understanding in relation to my experiences, while practicing reciprocity to the ideas. I often find it difficult to explain the minutia of these relationships without developing stories that go along with them, but this also provides its own share of limitations. In my earlier attempts at writing this dissertation I continually got bogged down on all of the things I needed to define in order to make sure others

would understand what I was writing about. The turn for me was to share a story that established the relationships I do have rather than to explain how I don't really feel like identifying or fully fitting into the dominant structure of academia. Wilson shares, "So I was faced with the problem of trying to define or describe the ideas when doing so would take them out of their relational context" (12). By invoking my own story, I was able to constellate the relationships I have to the field, while realizing the meaning to the relationships I have to the space of my PhD program. I focused on the relational context before trying to engage in the work of making academic relationships with the definitions I need to provide.

Of particular importance to Wilson's work is the way he defines the theoretical aspects of research. In the clearest terms I have found, Wilson defines ontology as follows, "Once a set of beliefs is established regarding just what is 'real,' research then follows these beliefs in an attempt to discover more about this agreed upon reality. Ontology is thus asking, 'What is real?'" (49). Within this research, I am defining my ontological approach to relationality and I am providing the steps and events that have shaped/shifted this understanding. Further, Wilson writes, "…is that knowledge is seen as being individual in nature. This is vastly different from the Indigenous paradigm, where knowledge is seen as belonging to the cosmos of which we are a part and where researchers are only the interpreters of this knowledge" (Wilson 56). This distinction becomes very important because it provides weight and meaning to varying ontologies. While contrasting an Indigenous paradigm to "dominate" paradigms, Wilson also demonstrates that there is space to think through and adapt the pieces that don't match a given approach. I have written about the tensions I feel between what I appear to be versus what is real to me at length in this document, and it is through this kind of conversation that Wilson is engaging in that leads me to understanding that this is the space to dwell in the emergence of this

tensions and to push against the structures that don't fit my worldview while simultaneously attempting to understand attempting to understand the dominant worldview that seeks to categorize and define everything. These taxonomies of existence primarily only work for those who don't ask questions and through understanding the functionality of them, the limits of taxonomical usefulness can provide inroads to locations of emergence. These intersections are the places where I am asking others to question the status quo by providing what this process has looked like for me.

Wilson pushes this even further within the context of Indigenous ontologies by pointing out the relationship with constructivism: "In an Indigenous ontology there may be multiple realities, as in the constructivist research paradigm. The difference is that, rather than the truth being something that is 'out there' or external, reality is in the relationship that one has with the truth" (Wilson 107). One of the reasons why this is important is that Wilson is drawing connections to a "dominant" research paradigm in a way that supports the rationale for developing a contextually appropriate approach for Indigenous scholars. Further, this move shows others how to question/engage with their own culturally contextual paradigms by pointing to the places where there are similarities and distinctions. What this dissertation is asking its readers is to engage with their own relationships and ways of being and to determine whether or not their realities are external or internal. There is no right answer here and in my life my answers to this type of questioning have changed and shifted. When I was figuring out who I was, the majority of life was external, and through time and experience, this shifted to a closer meaning to what Wilson is providing here. It was only after I had figured out how to put the various experiences I have into context with each other and to see the ways they were related (essentially practicing emergence before I knew that what it was called).

One of the moves I tried to make while developing my navigational epistemology is, "It is important to recognize that the epistemology includes entire systems of knowledge and relationships" (Wilson 109). In my life I have to start off with as big of a picture as possible and then gradually focus on parts to narrow things down. When Wilson talks about the epistemology, he means an Indigenous epistemology, but I also think that there is then room to pause and to think about how it is possible for my non-Indigenous epistemology to function in similar ways. Is it due to life experience? Is it due to the way I process knowledge? Is it due to the relationships I have made and the things I have learned through those interactions? For me it is the combination of all of these things, but it took a long time to figure out what questions I need to ask to understand how it functions. This dissertation is designed to help folks figure out the questions they need to ask to do the same thing.

In Lisa Brooks' *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast,* Brooks delves deep into historical documents to describe and shape a contrasting story of settler maps in the, now, United States. Brooks is a scholar who I have relied a lot throughout my understanding of the land and the constructions of space; specifically, Brooks works to define what Native Space is and how it is in relation to settler colonial spaces. Given the nature of Brooks work, she is not focused on defining both of these spaces, like Goeman, she is working to define Native Space to provide an always already counter narrative to combat the relationships between writing and oral traditions of Indigenous folks in the U.S. Northeast.

While I will be going more in depth to the specifics in Chapter 5, I am specifically including Brooks here to establish some fundamental importance to the larger framework of this dissertation. Brooks is heavily situated within Indigenous rhetoric and her conversations of settler interactions with Native folks are primarily focused in a Native perspective. Brooks is an

Abenaki scholar whose work delves deep into primary source documents of early contact. Brooks' states, "Traditionally, Algonquian land transactions were essentially diplomatic agreements concerning land use. Negotiation involved delineating territorial boundaries or common hunting areas with the goal of balanced accommodation of the needs of both groups" (Brooks 35) and frames the common pot's importance as, "Europeans were in the common pot, whether they knew it or not, and they brought with them ideas, behaviors, and materials that could potentially disrupt or even destroy it" (Brooks 7). These quotes show a contrasting view of what the land represented and what the relationship was to it.

Through framing these transactions as diplomatic relationships, Brooks is framing the Indigenous approach to the land as a collective, much in the same way Brown establishes the current need to find what binds us and affords the moves necessary to continued existence, and the sovereignty needed to engage in these kinds of allocations remains at the fore. Here it is a little tricky, because in today's context, Brooks' connection to the negotiations' goals being "accommodations to the needs of both group", could very easily be understood in relation to the Noble Savage trope, but it is through historical context that breaks this down and demonstrates two drastically different approaches to the land in relation to space. What Brooks is building here is a larger framework of a common pot that is truly that, common, as in everyone draws from it. In contemporary society, this approach is more defining something akin to socialism, rather than stereotyping. This is strategically put into contrast to the European settlers whose approaches to the land sought individualistic ownership, which is in direct contrast to the Algonquian approaches. In my previous work, I did not take up the last pieces of this concept that, the "ideas, behaviors, and materials that could potentially disrupt or even destroy it", is the interventional

space that we see authors like Brown, Tuck and McKenzie, Goeman, and many others dwelling in.

In this dissertation, I am focusing on the potentiality of this idea as if this has not yet come to pass. In many ways, aspects of this have already happened, but at the core of this research is understanding the larger cycles of the land to exist beyond human interaction. The destruction of the common pot could very easily be argued as done, but like Brooks, I am seeking ways to repair and bring awareness to my communities while we are still alive and have the ability to change how we move forward together. While Brooks' text is primarily working with historical documents as a means of reclamation, her definitions are still contextually relevant toward an approach of understanding grounded in mutual respect and love.

One of the things I have often struggled with: is that within a Noble Savage framework, it is assumed that destruction of the land did not occur under Indigenous stewardship, but this is categorically false, and Brooks provides a glimpse into these historical happenings by her analysis of the Great Beaver origin story where the lessons learned by the (then historic) context of pre-contact Indigenous communities often stemming from historical examples of this stewardship beginning or fully going astray (15). I come back to these ideas often because they are where survivance is grounded; learning from the past to inform ways to exist moving forward that are sustainable. Brooks states, "Inherent in the concept of the common pot is the idea that whatever was given from the larger network of inhabitants had to be shared within the human community" (5). Much in the way that Brooks frames European settlers as being part of the pot whether they knew it or not, the networking here is to bind all human beings to stakes that determine how and what can be extracted from the land, whether it be through mining or the growing of crops. One common theme that weaves the majority of the scholars I am drawing

from is the focus on what is at stake from continued rampant capitalism where money, and the means to gain money, are privileged over human and natural life. This is one of the primary reasons this dissertation focuses so heavily on ways to find commonalities across communities, I am not writing to the 1% or even the top 5%, I am writing to the majority of people that do not directly benefit from capitalistic structures that devalue their lives and wellbeing.

I am writing to expand on and understand what relational accountability to the land looks like. In my experience, there has to be a commonality amongst groups of folks to establish connections, and through Brooks' expansive conversations of the common pot, I see what it is that can bind us together. Often, and as Brooks demonstrates that this is not a new thing, folks get caught up in the why of why things are different, even if the goals are similar. With each of the authors I bring into this document, I highlight this, because these folks are brought together in conversation with each other for a particular reason: each author looks for threads of connection that establish the boundaries of cross contextual understanding, but also provide many things that remain after all of the differences have been laid bare.

Brooks demonstrates, in my opinion better than most, that there is something that all of us share and that is the common pot, "The common pot is that which feeds and nourishes… The pot is made from the flesh of birch trees or the clay of the land… It can carry or hold…The pot is Sky Woman's body, the network of relations that must nourish and reproduce itself" (Brooks 4). Here, Brooks is demonstrating the various aspects that go into the pot. Humans are acknowledged through the food aspect, the land is represented by the clay and birch, the mystic/un-understandable aspects are included with Sky Woman, and the relationships are demonstrated through the networks that nourish and reproduce. In my thesis I analyze these connections as follows, "The pot is the land and its people, it is the vessel that nourishes and here

I argue that it is also the means through which meaning is made across the ever changing dynamics between relationships" (20) and further "It is the land masses that can be mapped and known, but further, the pot allows for changes in the landscape and the ways through which relations are made or unmade with the land. The pot serves as a reference point which allows mapping to happen by situating how and why relationships develop" (20). Each of these quotes builds on the momentum of the pot as a central location to meet and learn and now to engage together through love and the very human need to survive.

Brooks' use of the pot as more than a metaphor is what substantiates the lessons that should be learned from early contact interactions between Indigenous and settler colonial folks. The literal and tactile nature of each of these aspects afford space to the less tangible and I am arguing that there are aspects here that everyone can have a connection to, whether it is through the literal, physical, spiritual, or metaphysical. It is only through this approach that these connections can become the foreground for any cultural negotiation: there must be something for everyone to ground themselves with to the land to change the ways we engage with each other and the earth around us.

Mishuana Goeman's *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nation* sets up a lot of the ways I will be looking at constructions of land and space in chapter 5 and in this section, I will be mostly focusing on the introduction where there is some very useful definition that contextualize a lot of the terminology I use throughout this dissertation. Through an emergent framework, I will be asking questions like: is it possible to understand space, land, America, and mapping through a non-colonial lens from a colonial perspective? What do these definitions problematize in dominant discourse regarding the land?

Goeman writes, “The Americas as a social, economic, political, and inherently spatial construction has a history and a relationship to people who have lived here long before Europeans arrived. It also has a history of colonization, imperialism, and nation-building” (Goeman 2). As this dissertation becomes more focused on location based inquiry, the understanding of the construction of the Americas becomes more important. Here we see the state of this place as containing pre-contact knowledge and the history post-contact. As the majority of my conclusions live in the space of understanding and analyzing the past in order to shape the future, the historical implications of colonization are necessarily a heavy focus. “Colonization resulted in a sorting of space based on ideological premises of hierarchies and binaries, and Indigenous women did not fare well in these systems of inequity” (Goeman 2). Goeman’s focus is on the stories of Native women navigating these colonial spaces but is also on understanding how the women she writes with shape the land in spite of the hierarchies and binaries. As chapter 5 focuses on the Water Protectors at Standing Rock, there is a connection to the particular ways that Indigenous women are at the heart of this movement. Additionally, this move is to highlight the Indigenous women who have supported and helped me grow this research. I will be bringing in these relationships and the works of my academic network to support the claims in this chapter and try my best to achieve as similar goal as Goeman when she writes, “A main point of this book is to examine Native narratives that mediate and refute colonial organizing of land, bodies, and social and political landscapes” (Goeman 3). While I still struggle with my settler colonial position in some ways, one thing that is consistently clear is that the colonial structure of the United States does not work. Further, it is a guise that presents itself as the “American Dream” which has not been a viable dream for the majority of folks for a long time.

As much of my previous work has focused on making maps and understanding story as a mapping device, I find a connection to Goeman's work through the representation of the land. Goeman frames (re)mapping as follows: "(Re)mapping, as a powerful discursive discourse with material groundings, rose as the principal method in which I would address the unsettling of imperial and colonial geographies." (Goeman 3) and "(re)mapping is not just about regaining that which was lost and returning to an original and pure point in history, but instead understanding the processes that have defined our current spatialities in order to sustain vibrant Native futures" (Goeman 3). I am interested particularly in how the discourse (re)mapping opens up as this directly relates to Wilson's approach of establishing a culturally contextual paradigm and Brown's emergent strategies. Similarly, the ways in which Goeman defines and interacts with the land are examples of what Tuck and McKenzie describe in their research on place. What makes Goeman's work particularly vital to this dissertation is her approach to (re)mapping and the role she is able to shape for it in her text. "My aim here, however, should not be mistaken as utopian recovery of land through mapping pure ideas of indigeneity (which I find troublesome) on top of colonial maps." (Goeman 3) and further, "(Re)mapping is about acknowledging the power of Native epistemologies in defining our moves toward spatial decolonization, a specific form of spatial justice I address throughout" (Goeman 4). My goals in this dissertation are to establish the internal work necessary to engage with spatial justice from my subject position and to provide something of a road map for others to engage with this as well. The carefulness of situating (re)mapping that Goeman is making here as not on top of but as part of the larger picture of spatial mapping in relation to colonial mapping practices is part and parcel to the larger conversation of spatial decolonization. As Tuck and Yang discuss, there is a lot of contention in the rise of the use of decolonization, and it is examples like Goeman's work that

demonstrate the cultural context of land based decolonization. Goeman consistently makes the move to bring her concepts into the present. As many of the previous quotes discuss, Goeman is considering the scope of what has happened through colonization both historically and contemporarily by asking questions and intentionally positioning (re)mapping.

Goeman writes, "What are the relationships set forth during colonialism that continue to mark us today? What happens when non-normative geographies are examined? I use the parentheses in (re)mapping deliberately to avoid the pitfalls of recovery or a seeming return of the past to the present" (Goeman 4). These are similar questions to what I am asking and like Goeman, I am contextualizing these questions from a non-normative space, however it is important for me to add, that this is my perspective and there are a wide range of factors that could contest my approach as normative by simplifying these things to the surface level subject position I appear to be. What Goeman is doing is answering these questions through the analysis of stories by Native women and putting into context the long history of this type of storytelling as it has happened for generations, with each building on the previous. This move prevents, or at the very least, problematizes notions like the disappearing Indian myth or the Noble Savage. How this is similar and vital to what I am offering in this dissertation is through the move to bring these things to contemporary importance and to directly engage with the colonial move that afforded the establishment of settler colonial determinations of the land. How it is different, should be obvious to some extent, is in the ways that Goeman establishes her connections to these stories and the lands that she has traveled from and Indigenous woman's perspective. While I am interested in engaging with these questions on an emergent tentative level, I will always have the ability to forgo these questions, Goeman does not.

One of the more interesting things to me is the way that Goeman defines space: “first, space can be defined ‘as the product of interrelations’; second, ‘as the spheres of possibility’; and third, ‘as always under construction’ or a ‘simultaneity of stories-so-far’” (Goeman 5-6). What I see here is an expansion on what space means that affords adaptability and change. Additionally, in an emergent move, I have often wondered what it would look like to take up this view of space myself. The move to make connections across lived experiences and to position love as a method of connection requires an understanding of interrelations. The shifts in dominant discourse I am proposing, likewise, require spheres of possibility to adapt and learn from each other. And, the future looking always under construction feels like what would be the necessary move to connect the stories-so-far. This definition is not set up as a “Native” definition, but the emergence is needed, from my perspective, to step outside of settler colonial spaces, even if it is as a thought exercise to build and establish empathy. They look and are aware of additional stories and relationships integral to shifting how the dominant culture understands the land. “Alternative spatialities that I examine in this book imagine that many histories and ways of seeing and mapping the world can occur at the same time, and most importantly that our spatialities were and continue to be in process” (Goeman 6). The importance of this is that through Goeman’s articulation of the meanings and connections in her work, there is a history established that is running parallel to the dominant one, meaning there are always more perspectives out there and to continue on this earth, we must listen and make space for them. Goeman writes, “Too often in this hyperspatialization, we are left with little room for imagining connections to other people, alternative histories, places, or even futures” (Goeman 10). When I read this, I see that there is a need for this situation to be addressed from all perspectives, that it

is not any one group or cultures' responsibility to make these things happen; it is the responsibility of everyone to make this happen.

One of the perspectives I am most interested in from Goeman's work is, "Embodied geographies thus become pivotal to address in decolonization projects, and it is here that Native feminisms can play a major role in our thinking about the connections between land, individuals, and constructions of nations" (Goeman 12). As this project has taken shape the focus on embodied geographies has increased. The stories I am sharing, the experiences of the Flint water crisis, and movements at Standing Rock are grounded in embodied geographies. Additionally, this project is related to decolonization and is greatly informed by it, and the folks who have taught me about decolonization demonstrate a Native feminism in their methods. The goal here, for me, is to engage folks who may not know or be familiar with this perspective and get them thinking about these connections too. If nothing else, Goeman provides insight to something I think everyone could benefit from dwelling on, "A fruitful acknowledgment of the pain and chaos of colonization provides the fertile ground needed for decolonization" (Goeman 13). While taking Tuck and Yang to its furthest and most literal extent, settler colonial decolonization most likely isn't possible, through an emergent perspective there is room to acknowledge how the structures of settler colonialism are painful and chaotic to everyone. This is where things started for me. Because my experiences don't fit into a specific box, and I would argue that working poor folks are not necessarily in the dominant culture no matter their race or ethnicity, there is something to be gained in understanding how the structures of settler colonial expectation damage the land and lives of everyone (one example that has been coming up a lot lately is micro plastics in blood). These considerations go beyond appropriating decolonization,

they are the considerations that are necessary to change these systems and to value the land and each other.

There are a lot of hard truths in this process. There is a need to establish an ongoing awareness of the lived experience and stories of other's lives. There is a need to understand the history of colonialism in this country. There is a need to understand how those in power have used "science" and "reason" to rationalize the destruction of earth and its people. Goeman points toward some of the roles that mapping has played in this process: "The development of the 'scientific' modern map—one of geometric, abstract grids—is a development that coincides directly with Europe's war on Indigenous people" (Goeman 17) and "While maps were essential to earlier projects of exploration as well as the documentation of explorers and literate traders before the nineteenth century, it was in the 1800s that maps were understood by many to simultaneously represent the 'real' as they symbolized the destiny of settler states" (Goeman 18). The "scientific" process of mapping abstracted the land and the people who lived there as a means to highlight what existed in the land while ignoring what was on the land and further this abstraction afforded the space for metaphor to take hold and be proclaimed as "destiny". One aspect of the abstraction I refer to often can also be found shortly after the previous quotes, "Maps exert political control by manipulating the representation of space into a language of normativity" (Goeman 18). This language of normativity is resource focused and not relationally focused, which is one of the big moves I have and will continue to frame as what has lumped working poor white folks post industrial revolution in with the dominant culture and taken away a lot of the dynamics of white culture. Additionally, Goeman goes on to relate this to the frameworks of colonization, "The development of modern nation-states depended on sending out official mapmaking expeditions as a state tool to find information that would enable the assertion

of political force over territories and all contained within" (Goeman 18) and "Maps were instrumental in the navigation of the slave trade in the Black Atlantic that provided labor instrumental to conquest, maps erased Native land claims and sacred sites, and maps situate the borderlands that mark the immigrant as a foreign body to be policed and disciplined" (Goeman 22). The focus on control here is what really connects these ideas for me. The state sanctioned control determined who was "free" and I just can't get over the fact that these determinations were made by folks who would have been the wealthiest of the time. This fact taken in conjunction with the perception of the empty lands as crafted by the state controlled map makers presented an opportunity to some at the cost of the folks already existing in this space, the folks brought through the slave trade, and of the land.

Goeman too understands this conundrum, "We also have a tendency to abstract space—that is to decorporealitize, commodify, or bureaucratize—when the legal ramifications of land or the political landscape are addressed; too often we forget that reserve/ations, resource exploitation, federal Indian law, and urbanization are relatively new phenomena" (Goeman 28) and further, "This particular erasure of a way of life is deeply tied to economic exploitation in other global spaces" (Goeman 31). One of the things I have struggled with understanding is how this approach was established by European settlers before they came to the Americas. While it is undeniably true, there isn't much available beyond the conversation of war and monarchy in Europe. Why did European settlers enact the same violence they had experienced in the new lands they immigrated to when the reason they left in the first place was this treatment? In some ways I can put together answers that make sense, but it's something I continue to grapple with. The results of these practices are apparent though and Goeman expands on them here, "Imposing European concepts of territory was a strategy of control and a method of creating empty space"

(33). By creating empty space through Eurocentric frameworks, these settlers also crafted the story of possibility. “Maps in this case also provide the narrative backbone of conquest. In this narrative of conquest, maps have affirmed “the truth” of territories. The “closure” of blank spaces or mapping of territories is a strategy to limit Native legal rights, ownership of land, and tribal imaginations” (Goeman 35). Through this process the abstractions of mapping through a resource focused orientation afforded state sponsored genocide. Additionally, it determined the status quo for Americans and their interactions with the land. During this period and through the process of industrialization, capitalism became the non-feudalism way to enact similar processes through the promise of escapism, but in truth these routes were only available to other European or European descended folks (if at all).

Goeman provides a historical analysis of mapping that delineates the roles of abstraction, essentialism, and conquest from an Indigenous perspective. Additionally, by providing alternate methods of mapping through the later chapters in *Mark My Words* she demonstrates additional ways that this land can be known.

In the next chapter, I am applying the framework of analysis and establishing an ontological lens that brings in the previous texts in both direct and indirect ways. These texts will provide the theoretical grounding for the rest of this dissertation.

Chapter 4

Under a Killing Moon: Reflections on Flint

As I was preparing to leave my home state of Michigan to move to Syracuse, there were murmurs of the crumbling infrastructure of the state and many of its former industrial powerhouses. The institution of the emergency managers was a hot topic and really seemed to divide the people I knew on whether or not they were needed, were they constitutional, and what this process would look like for the elected officials charged with the stewardship of these communities. The role of Emergency Manager is murky in the state of Michigan and to whom their obligation falls is even more opaque. This role, functionally, sought to cut costs, and in practice without regarding human life or the communities they were tasked to manage. Flint's history of socio-economic disparity was not something that is really talked about beyond the few surrounding cities, and the general approach of the state is to hang its laurels on the past industrial infrastructures established by the automotive industry. Flint is also one of the few major cities in Michigan where the population is majority non-white[14].

One of the things I have struggled the most in my life is to understand the differences between class and racial struggles because of how closely intertwined they are. Is the situation in Flint ongoing because of the lack of care for brown bodies? The research says yes. Is the situation in Flint ongoing due to the continually worsening economic opportunities in the city? The research also says yes.

[14] Both Highsmith and Pauli discuss this at length

The main reason why any distinctions like this are important at all is because how the narrative is told depends on the audience. When it is convenient, the public faces of this mess highlight the storied history of Flint as a major center for industrial goods, hanging the importance on what Flint was, and not what has happened since. Inside of Michigan, the Flint crisis was a class issue, outside to the world, the Flint crisis was about racial divides. The biggest problem with these two sides of this story is that it divides the audience's attention from the fact it is both at the same time. Racialized disparity has long been swept under the rug and has been normalized to the point where it often reads as if the blame is on the folks of color for not being white. Class disparity functions in many of the same ways, but despite being employed and working, socio-economic class is one of the most difficult social structures to change, move from one class to the other (social mobility), or the social access to be able to identify and acknowledge the movement within class structures happen.

Without a consistent narrative, the story of the Flint water crisis seemed to ebb and flow through the media, both on a state level and on the national scene. It is June 28th of 2022, and the people of Flint still do not have consistent clean water to every home in the city. As a rhetorician, I have been thinking a lot about how this situation would be different with a consistent narrative, or for the folks most impacted to have the same level and scope of platform as the politicians involved. While the Flint water crisis is another crisis of my lifetime, this type of systemic elimination of populations is as part of America's history as the second amendment is. This all leaves me wondering who is actually to blame, does that blame help the situation on any level, and where the accountability lies with the governmental structures that allowed this to happen.

The politicians involved are continually dodging the charges associated with these crimes, as of 6/30/2022 all charges have been dismissed, though the evidence stands, and the

dismissal is on a technicality. The process of justices for Flint seems to be coming in at too little and too late. As the pipe replacement projects continue, the evidence of these crimes is erased from the infrastructure of the city, leaving only its impacted residents to carry the memory of this atrocity. Due to the nature of the Flint water crisis, those impacted will have, or have already had, shortened life spans, so the question remains of who will remember the acts of the Governor of Michigan and the Emergency Manager of Flint when those directly affected pass away.

Much, if not all, of the media attention has shifted from Flint and while there was a very brief time where this story was consistent front page news, the 2016 election results more or less doomed Flint (and Standing Rock). The attention shifted focus from the situation to the people involved, but only the people with "power". The everyday citizen was ignored in favor of a tv personality whose narcissism clouded any real issues with pandering to whites that would vote for them. Flint being 65% black essentially means these are not the lives that were valued in the eyes of the media and the Flint water crisis no longer played a role in national politics.

While Flint is a very important case study in politics, it is also a very interesting situation to look at rhetorically. Water is undeniably a needed resource for human life; however, the response from the media and the majority of politicians involved did more work to determine and describe who a person is than they did to secure clean resources for all residents of Flint. Relating water back to human life should be an argument that should work, however when the focus is taken away from water and is pointed at whose life is worthy of protecting, water becomes a secondary aspect of the conversation.

And this is something I struggle to understand. How is a building block of life separated from life itself in these conversations? Why isn't there outrage for both the dehumanizing of the

residents of Flint and the disregard to the water itself? How is a needed resource political and how does it not behoove all involved to make sure that the available water is clean and ready to drink? What is the moral imperative of the EPA and how does that relate to state level issues? How do the various narratives that surround the water crisis shape perceptions of the state, city, and its residents?

In order to find some tangible place to ground my research, I turned to two authors who have covered Flint pretty extensively. Andrew R. Highsmith is a historian whose manuscript *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the Fate of the American Metropolis* covers the history of Flint from its founding through 2013, which aligns well with Benjamin Pauli's manuscript *Flint Fights Back: Environmental Justice and Democracy in the Flint Water Crisis* which covers the author's move to Flint pre-crisis through 2019 when the book was published. I am drawing heavily from these two authors in order to situate the history of Flint, before I make the connections to how to understand the situating of Flint within my model.

One of the bigger connections that needs much further research then I have time to do in this document is that in instances of failing democracy, the potentialities explode and there is a relatively unique space for emergence where the rhetorical imagination doesn't have to reach quite so far to consider paradigms outside of the norm. Both Flint and Standing Rock represent an undermining of democracy. In Flint, this can be clearly situated by the emergency manager system, which is one of the big reasons for the focus on understanding the history of the EM system and making direct connections that Pauli and authors Jeanne Woods and Sarah Lambert do in their article "The Collapse of Democracy: The Flint Water Crisis from a Human Rights Perspective". While this is a topic that emerged from the research, and I really think there is more here, I will only briefly cover, in relation to what could potentially be covered, the

relationship between failing democracy and land/resource/human rights as it would be a dissertation's worth of material in and of itself.

Flint has always been in my constellation of important historic Michigan cities whose boom and bust were tied to the industries that made Michigan the furniture and car capitals of the world. As I discuss at length later in this chapter, I have spent very little time in Flint, and by the time I was an adult, Flint was known and understood to be past its booms and holding on with dying hope that General Motors would bring another shining day. When designing this chapter initially, I had hopes to tie Flint with the Enbridge Line 3 in Mackinac and the Kalamazoo River oil spill as a way to bind the lower peninsula by covering one instance of natural disaster in the South of the peninsula, the middle of the peninsula, and the Northern tip of the peninsula, however when I started to do this research I found an overwhelming amount of pathos in the stories of Flint and relatively little information on the two other land rights battles over the waters of Michigan. I am writing about Flint so that I can better understand the relationships in this space. I am also writing about Flint because it is an important instance of the ways that memory functions in the actions of today. The Flint River held the memories of the chemical runoff that required specific neutralizations to be life-giving to the people of Flint and the people of Flint remembered the promises from the state of Michigan to bring jobs back to the city and to take care of its people. In both instances there were fundamental breakdowns in communication that resulted in mistreatment.

In order to gather a historically informed perspective on this matter, I will now turn to Andrew Highsmith and the prologue and epilogue of *Demolition Means Progress* which provides the contemporary history that lead up to the events of the water crisis from a perspective of industry and governmental policy. Highsmith situates the racial tensions of Flint

as one of the major factors in early city development. While the industry was booming, Highsmith writes of the Golden Carnival of 1954, “There, Curtice, a longtime Flint resident, announced a three-million-dollar donation from GM to fund the city’s new cultural center” (2) and contrastingly, “On that same day, however, the paper ran Jim Crow advertisements from local citizens seeking ‘Colored’ housekeepers and white homebuyers” (3). The Golden Carnival was an event intended to highlight and bring Flint in to the national scene as a happening growing town, but as Highsmith shows that the tensions of the city that existed in 1954 would carry through to the 2000’s in ways that would directly impact the approach state governments would take in addressing the needs of the people. Further, Highsmith outlines the extent of this racial disparity and tension by highlighting instance such as, “Furthermore, when Harlow Curtice and his colleagues made their trek from the Van Slyke plant to the parade in downtown Flint, they traveled along Saginaw Street, the Vehicle City’s most persistent racial fault line” (3) and “On the east side of the street sat Floral Park, one of only a few areas in the city where black people could obtain housing” (4). Flint is described as a city divided from its first industrial boom through the events of the water crisis. This will later be brought into complexity with Pauli’s work demonstrating that the perspective of racial separations within the city melting away to great extent due to the shared peril of the water crisis, but it is important to know and understand that governing bodies of Flint have, at various time, made active choices that lead to the socio-economic stratification that continues through today.

Flint seems to always be in a competition with itself, with the city presenting the infrastructure as forward moving and financially important/viable while actively bailing the water out of a sinking ship behind the scenes. Highsmith writes, “Significantly, although the organizers of the Golden Carnival described it as a celebration of Flint’s place in the automobile

industry, the state-of-the-art factory that birthed GM's fifty-millionth car was located not in the Vehicle City but in the nearby suburb of Flint Township" (4) and further, "Because Flint's leaders consistently failed in their attempts to establish a tax- and resource-sharing metropolitan government, the suburban migrations of the postwar era ultimately caused economic devastation in the increasingly poor and black central city" (4). As demonstrated here, the smoke and mirrors of the auto industry's boom always eluded Flint itself, with the majority of the taxes and infrastructure funds going towards the surrounding suburbs, which at this point had been increasingly middle class white folks. Highsmith states, "Flint was also a city teetering on the brink of economic disaster. During the decade preceding the Golden Carnival, tens of thousands of white taxpayers had moved away from the city in search of newer and better housing, schools, and jobs in the segregated suburbs of Genesee County" (4). While this is not a situation unique to Flint during this time period, it demonstrates the legal financial minefield that comes with tying a city's infrastructure and wellbeing to a corporation whose only loyalty is to itself.

Highsmith shares:

> In the end, F. A. Bower's predictions of stability and prosperity for the Vehicle City turned out to be false. During the economic crises of the 1970s, American businesses saw their sales decline precipitously. With its lineup consisting almost entirely of large, energy-inefficient cars and trucks, GM suffered devastating losses during the oil shocks of 1973–74 and 1979. American employers, GM included, responded to the slowdowns by launching an austerity campaign that resulted in millions of job losses. Between 1973 and 1987, the company's directors eliminated twenty-six thousand local jobs, pushing Flint's unemployment rate into the double digits.10 The economic downturns of the

> 1970s and 1980s marked the end of the postwar boom and the onset of a new era of mass deindustrialization. (4)

While Flint had been consistently close to the edge of bankruptcy since its industrialization, the moves made by GM at this time pushed the city of Flint closer and closer to the brink. While Flint wasn't the only city impacted, "In response to the economic slowdowns and the ongoing loss of market share, GM implemented an austerity program that devastated Detroit, Pontiac, and many of its other plant cities" (Highsmith 242). Flint was one of the most impacted as GM was the only automaker in the city. This situation in Flint eventually led to, "Between 1971 and 1991, GM cut its workforce in the United States by 50 percent. In previous decades corporate officials had shielded the Flint area from such painful job losses, even during major economic slowdowns. By the 1970s, however, GM's commitment to the city had waned" (Highsmith 242). As this commitment waned, Flint did not have a source of employment available to replace GM and the city began hemorrhaging citizens.

Highsmith writes, "Whereas the executives of the postwar period had seen Flint as a business-friendly company town, their counterparts in the 1970s and 1980s viewed the city as an inhospitable and unprofitable place ... and increasingly anti corporate political climate. Flint thus bore the brunt of GM's late twentieth-century restructuring campaign" (243), and further, "The dismantling of GM's local manufacturing operations also led to a devastating human exodus from Flint. Between 1974 and 1982, the Vehicle City's population declined by a staggering 20 percent while mortgage defaults, business closures, and property abandonment surged to all-time highs" (243). One of the things that really stands out to me here is that there was time to make changes on the city and state level that could have prevented the outcomes of the water crisis, as the ongoing practices of GM meant that as the city lost residents there should have been a clear

response from the city management. “Within the city joblessness reached a peak in 1975, when Flint’s unemployment rate ranged between 15 and 20 percent. Among young African Americans, however, the unemployment rate during that year approached 50 percent” (Highsmith 246). At no point did the city managers of Flint move for industrial jobs outside of the auto-industry, and while there were individuals who attempted these moves (and they were supported by the city officials, at least in word) it was not enough to shift the Vehicle City’s dependence on GM.

With the peak of unemployment in 1975, Flint’s city officials turned to tax abatement programs to lure GM jobs back to the city. This however wouldn’t quite work out as planned, “Michigan’s controversial abatement law required the recipients of tax breaks to invest in their local economies by erecting new buildings, rehabilitating old ones, or purchasing new equipment. Yet, in a surprising omission, the law did not stipulate that these employers had to create new jobs” (Highsmith 247). While GM took advantage of the abatement programs, they did not bring any number of meaningful jobs. Further, Highsmith writes, “Despite numerous signs that the abatements were not producing the desired results, Mayor Rutherford and others at city hall remained committed to a supply-side approach to municipal economics, arguing that the tax cuts at the very least would preserve existing jobs” (248), and “Without explicitly saying so, Rutherford and his allies wished to reassure company leaders that Flint was still a company town” (248). For me, this begs me to ask if the outcome of Flint was due to a belief in corporate America, a lack of other clear options to bring in resources and industry not linked to GM, or some other reason that I just can’t figure out. But, at the very least, these situations demonstrate that the state of Michigan and the previous Flint officials demonstrated a pandering to GM that created an abusive relationship.

GM's abuse continued in 1982 with a lawsuit regarding taxes, "Just in the city of Flint, where the appeal cited grossly inflated assessments dating back to 1982, GM sought to have its property valuations reduced from $303 million to $170 million. At stake was over $30 million in contested tax payments and, many feared, the last remnants of Flint's tattered reputation as a company town" (Highsmith 250). While this move was met with resistance from the city of flint, "Mayor James Sharp, Flint's first popularly elected black chief executive, similarly vowed to fight GM, stating, 'We are not going to balance GM's budget on the backs of our school children'" (Highsmith 250). The stakes were high, and the cost was large, "During the first year of the dispute, city leaders spent $1.5 million just to cover legal fees and property appraisal expenses. As the costs mounted and the city's economic crisis deepened, municipal officials began negotiating to resolve the controversy" (Highsmith 251). In a move that could have potentially saved Flint from bankruptcy, the officials of flint found themselves embroiled in a legal battle that took additional funds away from the city.

Flint saw that they couldn't win in court as GM would just out last them in legal fees, as a result, Flint was no on the hook for the tax refunds for GM. Highsmith writes, "The settlement called for the city to refund $34 million and provide the corporation with a 30 percent reduction in property tax assessments. For their part, company officials agreed to forgive all interest on the city's debts and coordinate a long-term payment plan" (251). The lasting impacts of this on the City would be devastating. While GM continued to struggle, the city of Flint was dying on the vine, "The combined effects of factory closures and layoffs reduced the automaker's Genesee County workforce from nearly eighty thousand in 1978 to just forty-eight thousand in 1987." (Highsmith 251). With half of the workforce cut by the primary employer of the region, the ability to bring in money to Flint became a consistent uphill battle.

By the 1990s, the degradation of the city of Flint became impossible to ignore. “The 1990 federal census revealed a city in deep economic crisis. That year, the Vehicle City’s unemployment rate of 18.3 percent was one of the highest registered in the United States” (Highsmith 252). And in an additional move to further separate the citizens of Flint, “Equally important, the transportation projects—which resulted in the closure of no fewer than eighty-five east-west roads connecting the black enclaves of the North End with the predominantly white east side—sharply inhibited travel between neighborhoods and ossified the city’s already stark patterns of administrative segregation” (Highsmith 253). Given the consistent history of citywide policy to continue segregating the population of Flint, it becomes obvious to me why so much of the water crisis was seen as a racial issue by everyone outside of Flint and for many in Flint.

In 1992, one of the first directly connectable, in terms of impact and environmental concern, event happened. The Genesee Power Plant was a waste incinerator and power generating company located near primarily Black neighborhoods. The incinerator was responsible for generating power by burning materials, oftentimes from abandoned homes and factories. The construction of the power plant was contested, and petitions were formed, but the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality was unwilling to block the power plant due to the jobs it would, in theory, create (Highsmith 254).

The impact of this move was devastating to the geographically close residence and their health. Highsmith writes, “For the citizens of the North End who had suffered through decades of popular and administrative Jim Crow, endured foundry pollution and the city’s disinvestment campaign, and then lost their homes to urban renewal only to be slowly poisoned by the burning of some of those same toxic structures, the irony and indignity of the incinerator’s existence must have been impossible to escape” (Highsmith 254). This is one of the first instances where the

vast majority of the population of Flint did not approve this construction, so much so that they actively tried to fight this construction, and the state government refused to listen and did what was "economically right" for the city. The moves to fight the power plant construction also brought strain between the state government and city government.

Through the remainder of the 1990s, Flint would teeter on the edge of bankruptcy. Each of the civic engagement plans to lure new business and people to Flint failed in major ways with Flint consistently being labeled the worst place to live in state/country (Highsmith 265). Even as GM revamped its factories and opened new positions, the way the funding played out and the people who were hired meant that it was primarily the suburbs that benefited. This continued on until the 2008 recession. Highsmith writes, "Between December 2007 and the fall of 2008, a nationwide spike in subprime mortgage delinquencies and home foreclosures triggered a precipitous drop in both real estate values and the broader securities market, which in turn spawned a sharp decline in stock prices" (Highsmith 271), which is put into relation to, "GM executives shocked millions of Americans by filing for bankruptcy. Although federal officials ultimately approved nearly thirty billion dollars in loans to rescue the moribund auto industry, GM's collapse and the so-called Great Recession of 2007–9 wreaked havoc in Flint and other cities" (Highsmith 271). While every GM plant suffered losses, with this bankruptcy filing, the overall employee count from the city of Flint was reduced to 6,434. The residents of Flint began defaulting on their home loans and the number of vacant or in receivership homes in Flint to 14% of the landmass in the city (Highsmith 271-273).

While during this time and the buildup to the real estate crash, Flint had been under the guidance of emergency managers, the early emergency managers were often put in place for one specific task and once that task had been completed, all of the controls of that task were given

back to the local governments. When Governor Rick Snyder was elected and instituted an emergency manager, the approach was different in so far that Snyder declared a financial emergency for the city of Flint. Highsmith writes, "In the wake of Snyder's proclamation, Flint's residents and officials suffered perhaps the ultimate indignity of losing the right to self-govern" (Highsmith 279). It is under these terms that the water crisis was beginning to take hold. With this brief snapshot into the historical contexts of Flint, Highsmith provides a needed background into the city politics and relationships. Highsmith demonstrates the ebb and flow of an eventually parasitic relationship between GM and the city of Flint. Highsmith also provides the constellation of relationships between these two entities, which can also provide a map to follow in other geographic locations with similar relationships. Highsmith connects Flint to cities like Philadelphia, New Orleans, and Oakland as cities where similar relationships and connections could be found (284). For my research, Highsmith also made the connections to shift in emergency manager approaches, from specific task oriented to encompassing, as one of the most important shifts in the statewide dynamic of Flint and connects this to potential future issues.

Similarly, Benjamin Pauli's *Flint Fights Back* starts off by reflecting on the social movements of Flint starting with the Sit Down Riots (which prompted GM to recognize the UAW) through the actions to fight the Genesee Power Station and 1998 efforts. Pauli states, "A similar complaint filed by the same group in 1998 against a permit for a steel recycling mill on the same side of town (the so-called Select Steel plant) is widely credited with exposing the thinness of the Environmental Protection Agency's commitment to environmental justice" (XI). Pauli's focus is to establish a history of activism within Flint and show the pre-water crisis relationship between the city of Flint and the various organizations within the state and federal

governments. *Flint Fights Back* provides consistent information that follows this line through 2019, contrasting what organizers are experiencing with what the responses are from various organizations. My main focus with *Flint Fights Back* is to demonstrate, as best as I can, the various aspects of activism and relational discourse around this activism at various stages of recognition by the state.

I am also utilizing Pauli's work because they are a self-identified white academic who is committed to activism and worked closely with the water activist of Flint. Pauli's identity becomes more and more important as the text goes on because it demonstrates something that is alluded to but doesn't quite fit the timelines of Highsmith's *Demolition Means Progress*. By the time of the Flint water crisis, Flint's population had become socio-economically and racially mixed, with the majority of the racially divided neighborhoods from the 1950's-1990's housing a wide variety of folks. Pauli works to demonstrate that while the water crisis may be fundamentally about race and money outside of Flint, the only thing that really mattered to the citizens of Flint was clean and safe drinking water. Flint has a storied history of racialized tensions that in many ways repositioned these struggles as socio-economic struggles long after Jim Crow was actively enforced within the city limits. I find this to be very important because the Flint water crisis demonstrates ways that environmental collapse sees no borders or race and I think that it adds a dynamic to the situation that complicates everything to some degree. The heterogeneous mixture of citizen's classes and backgrounds is not what national media saw and frankly, it wasn't what the majority of people I know from Michigan saw. The reason I bring this up is that it goes to demonstrate that environmental causes can bring folks of different backgrounds together to force change and visibility, and the obvious, there is always more to these situations than is readily available in the media.

Pauli moved to Flint with his family at the start of what would become the water crisis. Pauli writes, “For all its hard knocks, then, Flint was not the kind of city where people rolled over or gave up. I’d heard that there had been some issues with the city’s drinking water and was warned to expect fluctuations in the water’s taste as the utility fine-tuned its treatment methods. But I was given no reason to believe that the water was a safety hazard” (XI). Pauli had moved to Flint after the switch to the Flint River Water Treatment Plant, and Pauli shares that, “The resident voices pleading that the water was not safe were, from my perspective at the time, faint, drowned out by the reassurances of neighbors and government authorities who said the water was fine and presumably knew what they were talking about” (XI).

Here Pauli is setting the stage for how dissent was approached during the ramp up of the water crisis, the government authorities and neighbors reassuring that the water was safe. This is the approach that government authorities would take until it was too late.

When reflecting on his role at the beginning of the crisis, Pauli states, “As someone with a history of activism and an interest in political dissent and social movements, I was ashamed at having written off the voices in the wilderness that had helped to expose the water crisis for what it was” (XII). It was this quote for me that demonstrated that *Flint Fights Back* could work for this chapter, because here we see someone grappling with their own reality and acknowledging their faults in relation to their actions. It also demonstrates that Pauli is attempting to be as objective as possible.

From here, Pauli begins to give the background on the city of Flint’s water source. In 2013 Flint city officials voted to move away from the Detroit water system by creating their own pipeline (which was to start construction in 2016) to deliver water straight to the city of Flint.

The DWSD (the Detroit water system) filed termination of service for 2014 in response to the vote from Flint officials. This move forced the Flint city officials to find a temporary water source in the meantime, and they turned to the long closed but historically working water treatment plant on the Flint River. The Flint River treatment plant had provided Flint drinking water until the city grew too large with this facility, but the Flint officials reasoned that with the massive decrease in Flint's population the Flint River treatment plant could work.

Pauli writes, "When it was announced that water diverted from the Flint River and treated at the city's own treatment plant would provide the necessary stop-gap, many residents were incredulous, sure that it must be a 'joke.' Not only had the river served as a dumping ground for decades' worth of industrial pollutants, it was popularly known as a repository for shopping carts, old cars, and the occasional corpse" (1). This makeshift choice of the Flint River treatment plant would be the start of the water crisis. Shortly after the move to the Flint water treatment plant, Pauli shares, "In August and September 2014, they discovered total coliform bacteria in water on the city's west side, indicating a risk of E. coli contamination and hinting at dangerous weak spots in the city's water infrastructure" (4). Which would be followed by, "In summer 2015, activists revealed that the city had a serious problem with lead in its water, a consequence of the MDEQ's [Michigan Department Environmental Quality] failure to mandate the corrosion control needed to prevent the river water from damaging lead-bearing plumbing" (4). By the summer of 2015, the damage had been done and the rest of the water crisis was a matter of getting everyone else on board with the citizens of Flint and the claims they were making about the water quality.

As I stated previously, a theme that comes through often in any literature regarding the water crisis, "Many of the key decisions made about Flint's water during the period in question

were made not by utility workers or regulators, not by local politicians or contractors, but by Flint's state-appointed emergency managers (EMs)" (Pauli 5). While there are many faults to be found with the water crisis, all of the key choices made were by the emergency managers. Further, as if to demonstrate the supreme power of the EM's, EM Jerry Ambrose ignored the city's symbolic vote to return to the DWSD (Pauli 5).

Pauli writes, "At first glance, the Flint water crisis has all the hallmarks of a classic environmental justice scenario: A population vulnerable for reasons of race and class. Contamination through human activity of a natural resource essential to life. Residents with little or no background in activism catalyzed into action by their personal experiences with the contamination" (6). He then connects this to the failings of democracy, which is a topic I will spend a brief amount of time on and bring in an additional source, and how it is the failings of democracy that bonded the activists of Flint together. "What first stood out to me about the struggle for environmental justice in Flint, however, was what made it distinctive: everyone, it seemed, was talking not just about water, but about democracy."
(Pauli 6) and "Activists saw the denial of democracy—as personified in Flint's EMs—as the most fundamental cause of the crisis and a major reason for its extent and severity" (Pauli 6). I am bringing this focus on failing democracy because it is in these moments that I believe the chances of settler colonial intervention can happen in earnest due to the fact that there is an acknowledgement of a failed governing system and in these failures, there is the space to truly explore options beyond the current economic and political systems. To highlight the connections here I turn to Jeanne Woods and Sarah Lambert.

In "The Collapse of Democracy " by Jeanne Woods and Sarah Lambert an argument is put forth that the emergency manager system was one of the first steps of disenfranchisement for

the citizens of flint. The emergency manager system is a system where the Governor of Michigan appoints a representative to run and control a struggling city or county's infrastructure, un-beholden to that region's charters, constitutions, or other governmental system of elected officials. Specifically, the emergency manager overrides said elected officials and the power of those elected is effectively stripped.

Woods and Lambert write, "In 1990, the Michigan state legislature enacted Public Act (PA") 72. This Act provided for appointment of an Emergency Financial Manager ("EFM") following a unilateral declaration of a financial emergency by the governor. Under this law, an EFM had control over financial matters, but local elected officials remained in control of administrative and policy matters" (180). This first step afforded space for the elected officials to carry out their tasks and duties, but in 2011 Michigan shifted from EFM's to Emergency Managers, whose governmental power spanned far past financial matters. Shortly after this shift, Flint was placed under the control of an emergency manager, also in 2011.

Woods and Lambert come from the Law field, and the majority of this article is focusing on a constitutional level that examines the rights of the individual in relation to the larger world governmental bodies. Citing various charters, Woods and Lambert present an argument that describes and elaborates on the disenfranchisement of the citizens of Flint and draws direct connections to the unconstitutionality of the emergency manager programs.

The emergency manager programs overrode the determinations of the people by placing a single individual as the sole decision maker in the governmental processes of a given municipality. One of the major distinctions in Flint experienced both a financial emergency manager and municipal emergency manager. Woods and Lambert specify that it is the municipal emergency manager that bypasses democracy for political gains and practices (181).

The various rehashing of the emergency manager system in this document feels necessary because each angle that this role is analyzed from points to a new understanding of how this program is antithetical to the values America and its states hold dear. For Woods and Lambert, any political choice that takes away from the elected official's ability to follow through and execute the will of the people has the foundation to become anti-democratic, but here specifically in Flint, democracy has been functionally destroyed. The result of this destruction is the disenfranchisement of Flint's population, the majority of whom are non-white (African American/Black folks are about 66% of the population) (Pauli 15-18).

The thing I want to dig into are the parallels of the disenfranchisement of people in relationship to the disenfranchisement of the land. Effectively these two things are the same in that both of these disenfranchisements somehow allow both people and the land to be understood as only objects by those in power. This change is important to this research because one of the most difficult aspects of arguing for a different understanding of the lands is that the land does not have a direct voice that speaks in a language that is universally translatable, but by drawing this connection and understanding that in a capitalistic system both the land and these populations are seen as the same, it is possible to hear and read the stories of the people naming and bringing voice to their disenfranchisement and understand that there is more there and to consider if the land would be saying the same things. Advocates for the land often face the capitalistic hedonism that is strip mining and fracking, but changes and repercussions typically only happen once a human population has been harmed. Here, it must be said that for every instance that is made public, there are likely many more that have not been brought to the public eye yet, but this connection seems real, nonetheless.

We are reliant on the land, but through the laws of this country, corporations have the same rights as humans while lacking the moral imperative to stewards these resources for safe and continued use. Now the difficult thing for me to figure out are the various layers and intersections these factors have. General Motors successfully changed their water sources from the Flint River because they could independently afford to do so, presenting a scenario where the only ways that this situation could have been fixed was separate from the city's government itself and at great personal cost. This was/is not an option for the vast majority of Flint's population.

I turn to Woods and Lambert here due to the prevalence of discourses on democracy in relation to Flint and to broaden the scope of what this means and how it relates to the people and the land. Additionally, the biggest take away from Pauli's work in *Flint Fights Back* are the methods and ways that the citizens of Flint responded to the failing of democracy. Pauli lays out what was at stake for the activists of Flint:

> For Flint activists, 'water justice' encompassed everything from securing safe, affordable water, to replacing damaged infrastructure, to declaring water a human right, to community revitalization. The broader idea of "environmental justice," too, was very much in the air. Whether or not activists employed the term explicitly from the start, they came to see their struggle as part of a longer tradition of everyday people battling pollution and official obstruction, and the connections they forged within the environmental justice community were some of the most significant to come out of the crisis. (14)

He further contextualizes the relationships as follows: “their conviction that the injustice of the water crisis was the product of a prior crisis of ‘democracy,” and “As they saw it, establishing that the water crisis was caused by a denial of democracy required dispelling the ‘false narrative’ promulgated by state agencies and the Snyder administration, which downplayed state culpability and hinted that Flint was to blame for its own problems” (Pauli 14-15). By pointing towards the specific people and situations that lead to the water crisis, the activists of Flint re-centered the discourse around the impacts of the water crisis. They began to seek their own options in resistance to the state government and the Snyder administration. All of these options involved returning the ability to self-govern to the people. Pauli states this relationship with democracy as being embedded in “local control” which was to shift the power structure back to the people, saying, “The principle of local control implied not only that people had a right to political autonomy but that they were best off when they looked after themselves. In Flint activist Claire McClinton’s words, ‘If we control our water, it’s not gonna get poisoned” (20) One of the biggest issues here was that the residents of Flint were given opportunities to provide input and feedback, but at each turn, it was clear that these communications, while sought by the EM, were a placating move for the residents. After this process became dreadfully apparent, the activists began pushing for renewed control of their governmental body and resource systems.

With the relationship deteriorating between the resident/activists and the EM, the residents became more and more leery of accepting half measures like water filters. “They feared that embracing the filters meant dampening calls for infrastructure replacement, distracting from structural issues with the water system, modifying everyday behavior in unwanted ways, and exposing residents to bacterial contamination that the filters could not eliminate or even

exacerbated" (Pauli 23). While the consistent agreement is that anything to improve the situation was a net positive, it often missed the point of fixing the system that caused the breakdown in the first place. Pauli shares, "Usually it is when infrastructures break down that they suddenly become visible, their inner workings exposed to people who once paid them little mind" (22). An extremely destructive series of events meant that for the activists of Flint, half measures would not be acceptable. Pauli Shares a communication from Dr. Hanna-Attisha that precisely summarizes the events in Flint, "… Flint had not just been poisoned, but poisoned by policy—offers an instructive articulation of the view of the water crisis I will elaborate in the first part of this book: what made the crisis distinctive, what made it especially egregious, was not just how badly residents were harmed, but how they were harmed" (32). This phrase, poisoned by policy, would become the phrase that captures the essence of the activists' grievance.

Flint represents an interesting case study in relation to the framework I have provided. The following is a twofold analysis of how the water crisis connects to the roots, waterways, and mountains framework, looking at the set up and connections established in *Flint Fights Back* and how I deploy this model on a personal (meaning my perspective) basis.

The water crisis is deeply rooted in the communities of Flint, each pocket of community representing different rhizomatic nodes that constellate to shape a larger root network of communication and connection. As seen in *Flint Fights back*, at any given time there were at least 5 different community organizations working towards providing safe drinking water to the larger Flint community. These "grassroots" networks are the reason for national attention (see further discussion in the portion of this analysis that connects Flint to the mountains in this model) and state stage (see further discussion in the waterways portion).

Flint Fights Back shows readers that while not every single household was directly poisoned, the sentiment of the communities at large was such that no one escaped the impact of this situation. Flint, having experienced large cycles of boom and bust financially, maintained a population of mixed races, genders, and socioeconomic classes despite many contemporary years of economic downtimes. The emergency manager system removed much of the direct action capabilities of residents of Flint, and in a move to resist a purely capitalist approach to city management, grassroots organizers became the voice of the citizens of the city. Further, these organizers were often the main sources of communication between the city government, which consistently sought to downplay the damage done by the changing water sources, and the general population.

As often discussed, these organizers were often folks with experience in labor and community organizing, but the thing that stands out the most is that they were often chosen by democratic processes, that flew in the face of the emergency manager systems given the autocratic placement of those officials, or long time "good" people with an established connection to the community. Understandably so, the stakes couldn't have been higher for these organizers and this also resulted in the people of Flint fighting for the survival of their homes, their communities, and their city: Flint. This counter narrative of the people contained the ethos and pathos needed to connect the smaller groups to larger groups of organizers, while keeping the focus on the literal people of the city. As with any larger social movement, of course there were bad actors, but these folks were not given a platform for long if their actions did not reflect what was understood as the goals of the movement: safe, consistent, water to every home within the city limits, effectively connecting seemingly disparate organizations into a rhizomic network

that contained the stories of every type of citizen of Flint and presenting a mostly unified front on this point.

These organizers also played a pivotal role in changing the dialogue between citizens and officials on local, state, and national levels. As the situation in Flint became apparently negative for the community, the word of mouth accounts of rashes, hair loss, and worsened health overall, forced a shift in how the existing grassroots organizations approached the governmental bodies who had their hands directly or indirectly in this mess.

The organizers of Flint quickly realized that their tight knit approach wouldn't be enough to help every person in their midst, and they began to strategize ways to expand the influence of the experiences in Flint beyond their immediate networks. This move is where the Flint water crisis began tapping into the waterways of communication available to them.

In my proposed model, waterways serve as a meso level approaches to knowledge, action, argumentation, etc. and with each lawsuit against the state of Michigan, the organizers of Flint began to shift the scope of the crisis, both in the intensity of harm but also the breadth of impact, expanding the communications outside of their neighborhoods, to bring in scientists statewide and further to get to the bottom of what was happening to their community. As with many similar situation, the key thing here was gaining and maintaining the momentum of the citizens of Flint, and while not every organization was in complete agreement with what the end outcomes would be, there was a unified front that the bare minimum should be clean and safe water for the city of flint and that the specific reason why this was even in question was the de-democratizing of municipality of Flint through the emergency manager system where, through

time and demonstration, these managers valued the resource use and economics more than the human lives within in the city limits.

At each stage of the crisis, the consistent upshot from the governmental officials was consistently on the resources: the shift to the Flint River would save money, the shift would provide natural resources autonomy of Flint (eventually), and further back that the selling and granting of tax shelters would bring jobs back to Flint. Had any of these terms came to pass and actually benefit the communities that the officials claimed they would, maybe there would have been more trust between the citizens of Flint, but as it stood, the everyday person in Flint saw little to no benefit as the companies granted tax shelters were often just outside of the city limits and often times provided no additional jobs directly to the people of flint, the Flint River processing plant was outdated with little to no plan to update it, and the resources autonomy was a wolf in human clothing as the initial steps of the plan required the Flint River processing plant to be in working order in the first place for the plan to be viable.

As the lived experiences of the citizens of Flint were not enough to sway the emergency managers or local officials (whose power was, at most, in the position of figure head), the people of Flint began expanding their purview of influence, and as they entered the waterways of state government; they were shown that economics came first without undeniable proof that the massive spike in health concerns came from the switch to the Flint River. The moves of the grassroots organizers from Flint connected Flint's cause to other organizations across the state that focused on the rights of citizens and resources management. In these exchanges the statewide network of organizations for human rights expanded, those with experience with the EPA provided what roadmaps they had used, those with experience with fighting natural

resource corporations shared their legal approaches, and those with triage experience mobilized to gather the stories and experiences of the residents of Flint.

By expanding beyond the city limits, the organizers of Flint entered in the currents of Michigan state politics and political activists to establish momentum that would demonstrate how this currently meso-focused situation would continue getting worse without some direct intervention and changes. In a move that subverted the de-democratization of Flint, the people of Flint and the organizers who represented them made the failing infrastructure a statewide concern that connected communities of activists statewide.

The last step in my proposed model, mountains, represents what most folks know (common knowledge) or can find via a quick google search. For instance, when searching "Flint, MI" today, the first page of results shows a 50/50 split between the City's official web presence/news from the last week or so and media covering the ongoing Flint water crisis. After months, and in many cases years, of pushing for recognition of the poisoning happening due to the water source shift, the momentum carried through to national attention for flint. In *Flint Fights Back*, it is shown how the actions of these grassroots organizations are what broke the story, made the statewide attention shift to national attention, and eventually lead to the declaration of emergency.

For many, the declaration of emergency was one of the main goals of organizing as it seemed the only way to garner enough attention to Flint to force the financial resources to be provided to the cause of fixing the water system to the City. The national attention did bring a focus to lead in water nationwide and was the impetus for fast-tracking the improvements needed to fix the decay infrastructure that lead to lead in the homes of Flint residents, but it also began

the national conversation of who deserves assistance first and judgment calls on whether or not Flint was worthy of such assistance. Further, it also brought into focus the emergency manager system utilized by the state of Michigan, which due to the murkiness around this system lead to the questions of who was responsible for the water crisis, with fault often falling on Flint itself, thus abstracting the human lives behind the political veil. These arguments may have held some real weight, had the process of emergency managers not undermined every elected official in Flint for more than a decade.

Most importantly, while the national attention was focused on how this could have happened, the activists of Flint continued to push for accountability and first and foremost, a solution that would bring clean water to the community. These moves afforded the Flint activist a national platform to make connections and stake their claim as the forgotten folks, left behind due to continually capitalistic focused governmental policies that undermined voting, the oft cited means of recourse to damaging political/economic decisions. The organizers of Flint provided a literal mountain of evidence that supported their claims that they had been lied to at nearly every turn, that the move to Flint River plant was the cause of the crisis, that their sovereignty as citizens was non-existent, and that the emergency manager system actively undermined democracy.

In each part of this process, the organizers of Flint had to be in a state of emergence, crafting their own settler-colonial interventions to a broken democracy and in response to a statewide government that consistently downplayed its role in the water crisis in favor of capitalistic gains. The move to organize and not be silenced was an intervention to the status quo. The resistance and refusal of being dismissed demonstrated a persistent intervention to the stripping of geo-political power every citizen of the United States is granted. Now, this is a

complex situation that has had innumerable impacts on the folks of Flint, but I am arguing here that through a constant state of emergence, in relation to the stance taken by the state of Michigan, the only recourse given to the people of Flint was to create a system within a system that afforded the citizenry a voice and an actionable plan to defend their very humanhood, which through this whole ordeal had been put into question. This is an anti-colonial move that intervenes at the very core of citizenry.

Additionally, one of the more lucrative features of the model I am proposing is that while I have used this model to analyze media and world events, it can also be used to analyze one's own thoughts and experiences in order to see what kinds of structures connect the relationships that exist in one's life. For this purpose, Flint provides an interesting situation for me.

Most of my scholarship has focused on the land of Michigan and the experiences I have had navigating the land and lessons taught by my uncle and academic mentors. This focus of the land is a necessary component as I often find myself somewhere in between existing theories of rhetoric, somewhere between Western and Non-Western approach with a consistent anti-capitalist undertone heavily influenced by Indigenous theory and decolonial theory. In this document I have tried my best to couch my relationships to these theories as rooted in experience and Flint is a location that in all honesty, I don't have much experience with. I have been to Flint a handful of times, mainly the airport, and the closest towns that I have many lived experiences in are Holly, MI and Frankenmuth, MI, both within a 15 minute drive of Flint. Further, my roots exist in much the same way as many Michiganders, tied to the industry that has come to and left Flint. To live in Michigan is to be connected to Ford and GM, at least tangentially, and in my first factory job in 2006 I spent a summer cleaning auto parts in a steel mill that would eventually make their way to Flint. My roots here are more general and only extend so far as a proud

Michigander who writes about the Michigan landscape as a means to make connections across ideas and experiences.

So as the news broke regarding the water crisis, I mourned for my home state 800 miles away. I felt hopeless and uneducated. The connections to the emergency manager programs and resource management were unknown to me and buried deep in the initial news stories was this gross sense of blame that pervaded every story. “If the city of Flint had” … “The past choices of Flint have come back to” … but what wasn’t talked about was who was truly to blame in this situation. My Michigan news sources made Flint seem like a flash in the pan and my personal network of people were just slightly too far removed to have boots on the ground. The closest the initial wave came to me was a few shared stories of cousins and friends of the family who worked at the GM plant near Flint that shared the new difficulties they were running into due to corrosion and plumbing (a now known sign that the Flint River water treatment plant had something wrong and that the pH and pollutant levels of the water were off).

Another three months passed before I read about Flint again and this time people were getting sick. I once more reached out to my network of people, but even those folks who I knew worked in Flint had refused to live within the city and commuted from up to an hour away. At this point there was very little knowledge of what was going on in the media and as I didn’t have anyone within the city limits, much of the initial wave of warning signs were framed as isolated events and I more or less pushed it out of my mind as I had just started my first year of my PhD program and the urgency just didn’t seem there.

In 2016, much of this changed as national attention began to form. At this time, my roots were to Michigan as a whole, and I ached for my home state as I read national coverage. There

was little I could do to change this situation and it often seemed as if all the damage had been done already. This hopelessness seeped into everything for me, at least to some degree, as this was the worst purely man-made disaster in Michigan during my lifetime. It was extremely difficult to get up to date information.

Now, one of the biggest things for me here is that while I had minimal roots to Flint, my roots to Michigan were strong. Michigan is where I shaped the majority of who I am and the home that, at various times in my life, I fought for. In Michigan there are a few major environmental situations that have/will present major ecological issues, but at the time of this writing, the Flint water crisis has been the most deadly, impactful, and widely covered instance of a direct blunder leading to mass casualties. In the initial forming of this document, my focus was going to be on the Enbridge Line 3 pipeline that connects the lower peninsula to the upper, but after I began digging, I had to shift this focus due to the impact of the stories from Flint. The accounts of children losing their hair and legionnaires spreading demanded attention. My hesitancies with writing about Flint have always been consistent: My only connection here is to my home state, the fact most of my scholarship is directly tied to environmental preservation but I have not covered an ongoing environmental crisis, water and the land must play a connected role in my research but so many of the most important aspects of Flint focused on the people and I didn't know if I could do both.

On the one hand, I suppose as a scholar it could matter fairly little that I don't have a direct tie to this specific location, and yeah I guess the fact that the water crisis is ongoing means that I have no lack of material to write on and at the end of the day the reason why any of this matters is because of the connection to the people who inhabit these lands, etc. But, in many ways, the lack of connection, the ongoing nature, and human focused discourse means that my

scope will be limited and will have to focus on the roots I establish with the existing scholarship and knowledge of the industrial history of Michigan. The reason why it is important to connect these concepts is that it is not enough to assume my intentions are good. The purpose of this model is to have a guide when establishing ethical connections to research and to have a three tiered process to check and balance against. In order for me to engage in a settler-colonial intervention, I would need to be there and have a deeper personal connection to this land. However, this model affords the space to look at how others have engaged with their context and to see how they have made meaning from these experiences and what settler colonial interventions have occurred in this space.

Here it is necessary to strive for rhetorical empathy where I have to take an intentional turn to place myself, as best as possible, into the range of emotions and series of motivations based on the feelings/emotions invoked through testimonial and research. I have found this to be a necessary move, personally, that affords me a little time and space to start sorting things out. There are limitations of course, I am allowing a temporary bubble of emergence to envelope my thoughts and ideas which means new information can have a hard time coming in and impacting the emergence. It also means that I am relying on my internalized code of ethics and morals to guide this emergence, and while I have spent years working through my internalized isms[15], there is no real way to know if the emergent strategies of rhetorical empathy are in fact taking up the frameworks of emotion that the folks of Flint are feeling, or any other specific situation, the goal here is to find a reasonable approximation to base a connection/relationship on that does (at the least) no additional harm. Example questions that I ask myself are:

[15] Here I directly mean thing like racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, etc.

- Does this situation directly impact me?
- What is the potential for re-inscribing violence through my line of questioning and have I gathered enough information to engage in my questioning in good faith?
- Does this situation directly align with any of my personal positions that I can directly connect to? Is it appropriate at this time to make these connections?
- Can I engage in this connection in a non-appropriative way?
- What can my voice add to the situation? (amplification of the voices already speaking, additional questions/conversations/discourses, resources)
- Should I be the person sharing at all?
- Why should there be awareness about a given situation and how can I share this information in a way that is respectful to all parties?
- Should I be the person sharing at all, one last time just to be sure?

For me, this line of questioning (or any line similar) allows me to go through my thoughts and establish the connections that become my roots, waterways, and mountains. With Flint, there is a direct connection to my home state, which means that if it could happen in Flint, it could happen anywhere in Michigan, with the emergency managed cities being the most likely places first. As an academic employed by a state university, the potentiality of re-engaging in violence exists and is real, but through utilizing the information available and focusing on the failing of democracy, the easiest conclusion here is that the citizens are not at fault here. As a scholar whose research

has consistently focused on non-invasive approaches to land preservation and ecology, there are a lot of connections that I directly support and believe in. This framework is built to consider the land as an equal parts partner in survival and to provide alternative options for human action that afford space for the land to heal and grow alongside people, the biggest hurdle in Flint is getting help for either land and/or people, that is consistent and fixes the situation. These are the roots in which I am engaging this project.

Additionally, the waterways are demonstrated in how this information is shared. In this chapter, I am drawing primarily on the testimonials found in *Flint Fights Back* and various other literature that focuses on the lived experience of the water crisis. I argue here that as long as the sharing of this information is grounded in the experience of the lived lives of the citizens of Flint and is focused on the systemic failings of the political systems at play in Flint, it is hard to appropriate this situation as it covers all races, creeds, socio-economic classes, and neighborhoods of Flint. The gain here is further knowledge and that is the goal of disseminating this information. It is to amplify the experience of the citizens of Flint and to make connections to the existing body of scholarship regarding the land and land based practices. As somewhere between an insider and outsider of this situation, I am positioned in a place to make these connections and start/add to the ongoing land rhetorics discourse in relation to political structures. After reading and engaging with the literature around Flint and the water crisis, a consistent theme has been consciousness raising and due to this I believe that the ideas I have to share are at worst neutral and a drop in the bucket amongst the others screaming into the void; at best, a specific way of engaging ecological terrorism that ties the land and the people together that affords the space for change and future connections.

The mountains here, for me, then comes in the form of public discourse (such as this dissertation) that shares/amplifies the voices of the people of Flint, makes connections to how the political systems at play see the land and the people, and brings the conversations of land rhetorics into relation to the happenings of the Flint water crisis. Sharing the direct words of the people, when possible, in relation to the research that has been done, in conversation with existing scholarship on the land. Making these connections to all water rights efforts and making as many relationships between why this happened and what caused it to happen as clear as possible. The fact that Flint still doesn't have clean water and that new information is primarily regional makes me fear that these kinds of situations will keep happening and continue the struggle for consistent clean water.

Chapter 5

Reckless Abandon: Standing Rock and the Futurity of Water

The startup after a rest is usually where I make or break the rest of my journey. I have ruined 80 mile bike rides because I stopped at the halfway point rather than waiting until I couldn't go any further. But this time I had burned a little extra effort out just to make it to the "halfway" resting point, and my mind was beginning to turn back to why I was here. I had begun this trip to test myself. I had driven from Syracuse, NY to the Standing Rock Reservation in Cannonball, ND to see the lands I had dreamed about for months two years previous.

I had been sitting in social histories of rhetoric with Dr. Schell thinking about how the events in North Dakota were unfolding. Water Protectors, decried by the media as a nuisance to progress, were laying their lives on the line. Not out of some need to maintain the past, this move was/is an extension of the colonial practice of erasure, but in fact utilizing and supporting means of electric power that does not come at the potential cost of an entire river ecosystem. My friends, co-conspirators, relations, and allies joining in the cause shared images of community and shared struggle, of solar panels and medical care, of police brutality and survivance. Deep into course work, I began sending funds to groups of folks I knew and donating many years' worth of winter gear too big or too small for me. I began saving any and all media coverage that came through my various news feeds and one of the most shocking moments for me was when the Standing Rock movement and the Water Protectors began to be distilled to rabble rousers and enemies of the state of North Dakota.

Continually, I was surprised at the willful apathy in regard to how human life works and at the consistent stupidity regarding how rivers work. Many news outlets focused on the section

of the Missouri River that flows through the stacked reservations of the Standing Rock and Rosebud Sioux, and while that is all well and good, water doesn't care where it is flowing. Water has shaped the landscape of this world through movement, and here for some reason audiences of mainstream news were asked to suspend their beliefs in the flowing properties of water and to just consider the disruption caused by the Water Protectors… What about the Oil? What about the progress? What about the eminent domain?

Yes, indeed, what about these concepts of capitalistic control? Does it matter that Indigenous women are the most likely to be sexually assaulted and that the oil boom has brought greater violence against the Native women that live here? Does it matter that DAPL is in direct conflict with numerous treaties that, had they been honored, established self-determination, therefore rendering the notion of progress non-applicable outside of the Standing Rock Reservation's definition of progress and autonomy? More importantly, the emotional burden of land stewardship is being stereotypically back-handedly given to the Native people of this space, yet this burden is met with disparaging reproach.

The connection that should have made this an obviously easy decision are the compounding factors that the people of Bismarck, ND had already vetoed all plans that placed the pipeline through the city limits, and in a move seemingly supported by the state government, Energy Transfer Partners shifted the pipeline 60 miles south so it would not impact the city of Bismarck, but the way oil spills and pipeline bursts would impact the entirety of the Missouri River water table which means that 60 miles south or 60 miles north of the city has the same environmental impact on Bismarck as it does at Standing Rock. The Missouri flows south meaning at the Standing Rock Reservation or the city of Bismarck, ND are both on the North ends of the river. If a pipeline bursts in Cannon Ball, within a matter of a few days the oil spill

will move the rest of the way south. But this is the very thing that the Water Protectors are protecting, a clean flow of water through the entire length of the Missouri River. This is not just an Indigenous people's issue, this is a concession to capitalism that actively puts lives at risk. This is an issue that impacts everyone. On the side of a mountain, I flash through these thoughts and look around, wondering what other situations are where the memory of what the land used to be and what it is now are so disproportionately far apart. I think about what I saw when I walked the front lines of the Water Protector's struggle and I see little to no memory in the land. And this is where things get complicated. In the long scale of time, the land has both long term and short term memory.

While the lands entering into Standing Rock are now covered in lush prairie grass, seemingly having forgotten the camps of police with their riot vehicles and the Water Protectors with their allies in protecting our water, this is an instance of seemingly short term memory. But when thinking about the land, scales of time become relative. The land stores memory for centuries, and through relationships with the self and the land, some of this memory can sift through to human recognition.

Standing at the top of this hill, I can see the police barricades from the media photographs, blocking this bridge, the only paved and straight forward way to enter Standing Rock. While the landscape is undeniably beautiful in its summer splendor, it is impossible for me to forget the images of water cannons and tear gas used to "contain" and "control" non-violent protestors; non-violent protestors that were (are) actively fighting to every person's right to clean water. The dramatic, starkly contrasting characteristics of the stripped away prairie and snow fall provides an opaque lens to see the vibrant green flowing hills. I am here to see how the land remembers the movement of Standing Rock, I am here to see how the land remembers

capitalism, I am here to cry the frustrated tears of being correct but watching one of the worst outcomes (Energy Transfer Partners installing the pipeline) play out on a national scale.

My own timelines become slippery as I sit perched on top of this hill. I start losing track of how long I have been sitting there and focus on the sound of the wind. I know that I am not alone on the banks of the Missouri, that the spirit, the energy of the Water Protectors and their ancestors lives in this land.

This chapter has been the toughest chapter to write for me. I remember working in the writing center with PhD students and always wondering what these folks would do if their research didn't turn out the way they had expected it to, and I tried to think about what I would do if I ran into the same issues myself. None of that planning really worked out though, and that has made this chapter rather difficult to figure out. I will start off by sharing what I expected to find, what I did find when I went there, and a synthesis of these findings in relation to the framework I am providing in this dissertation.

One of my major academic endeavors has been to define the terms I see connected across the various cultures I engage in. My Uncle Jim taught me to be aware of the land as I move through and with it, so when I was in my first graduate seminar on Native American and Indigenous theories of rhetoric, I was really draw to the way that the land was discussed and written about. I saw connections to the way I was brought to understand the world around me, though it would take a while longer to understand why.

My Uncle Jim raised me to move with the water and the earth by showing me the ways to exist in the woods that would leave the least impact. We would spend hours traveling the trails, learning what was safe to eat and how to follow game (despite never hunting). Each fallen tree

was a relative, each brook a friend. We would spend weeks at a time in the woods, with me learning how to move with the landscape and Jim's health slowly fading. He always told me that he was teaching me this stuff so I could figure out how moving in the woods was the same as moving through my every day, but that instead of trees and pathways I would be dealing dudes and school hallways and he wanted to me to see how they could be the same. It was in these trips that I started shaping the metaphors I am bringing in to this document, but also the space I started to see theories in action.

As I worked through this course, I started to see a lot of the ways I had been taught to live my life matched the lessons I learned from my Uncle, but I also started to see places where the language started to break down. One of the connections I saw and I am exploring here is that the land being described as a relative in Indigenous theories of rhetoric implies the land has characteristics and that these characteristics are able to change us as much as we are able to change it. Mishauna Goeman writes in her article "From Place to Territories and Back Again: Centering Storied Land in the Discussion of Indigenous Nation-Building", "While many keywords in Indigenous Studies could be linked to other minority cultures and statuses, land is what is uniquely pivotal to tribal identity and survivance. In fact, maintaining relationships to the land is at the heart of indigenous peoples struggles" (23), and "The importance of naming the land from a tribal collective memory is one of the most important political and social tools to tie people together in a shared story. Land in this moment is living and layered memory" (25). The role that land plays in Indigenous worldviews is an equal parts partner in existence and the relationships with the land are at the center of North American Decolonial struggles.

In much of my early work, I didn't really have to explain or push on this relative status that much, but as I began addition new lexicons to my vocabulary, I did find that when I made

connections to my research and land as a rhetorical agent, I would have to explain this connection in rather unsatisfactory ways. It wasn't until I started the travel for this project that I started to see ways to make this connection easier to talk about. What I am saying when I make the connection to land as a rhetorical agent is a re-envisioning of how Western frames of rhetoric see the land. I have been trying to find a way to translate and make connections between a taught worldview (taught to me by my uncle and early academic mentors) of the land as a relative and activist rhetorics that call for a re-evaluation of our use and distribution of natural resources. I am arguing that the land is always already a rhetorical agent and the evidence of this can be seen in traditions that do not stem from Greece/Europe.

While I will dig further into this in my model assessment, I am bringing this up here because I genuinely thought I would find tactile support for this as I looked on the landscape where the Water Protectors and Energy Transfer Partners battled a year and half later. In the media images of Standing Rock, the land looked destroyed with heavy equipment turning the land over so just dirt was seen or hundreds of tents on the field positioned to block the equipment. My intention was to compare the images I saw in media with the images of what was left over a year and half later.

What I found was nothing. The prairie grass had covered the land in a solid blanket of green from the Western eyeline to the River. There was no perceivable remnant of the Water Protectors or Energy Transfer Partners. In fact, there was no evidence that these lands had been the site of protest at all.

I honestly don't necessarily know why I was expecting to see more damage to the land, but I truly was. So, I found myself racing to find something useful here. What does it mean that

the land shows no lasting impact of pipeline installation and protest? Does that mean there was no damage if it can't be seen today? What does this do to my connection of land as relative= land as rhetorical agent? What constitutes relationships and what does this say about the relationship between the people of Standing Rock and the lands that surround their home?

At this point, I had barely driven into the reservation lands and decided to keep moving on to see if I could find where the pipeline would be visible. I passed over the Cannonball River and turned left down a road that lead to the river and a small neighborhood, and I could barely see pipeline buried behind 5 chain link fences and prairie grass. There were small signs that said no trespassing that alternated with small signs that said no photography every 20 yards or so.

While the reservation lands were open with very few fences, this was the only section that I could see barricades around. There were no people within a half mile of the fence line, and while this road would have been the easiest access point to the neighborhood in the distance, it was clear that this road wasn't traveled on much, and I actively saw 5 cars avoid this road all together. As I tried to find a better vantage point to photograph the landscape, 3 work trucks came barreling down the access road. They paused at my car, at which point I started heading back to my car, for five or so minutes and moved down to the entrance gate for the pipeline. By the time I made it back to my car there was a highway patrol car slowly coming down the road, a few hundred feet behind my car. As I was unlocking my driver's door to get back in, the highway patrol car parked behind me and gave me a long look. At this point I started to feel a little worried as the timing seemed a little odd on a Saturday afternoon and I just got in the car and got moving on my way.

When I got into Colorado Springs that night, I started thinking back through this experience and really focused in on my expectations and what I actually found. The fact that there was no clear evidence of the protest connected to the memories I had of being in Syracuse while the protest was actively happening, which then connected to this trip and how I was pushing on through from Standing Rock down to Colorado Springs to hike Pike's Peak as a way to engage with trauma and establish new memories in a geographic location of trauma. This then connected to a conversation that I had in my Native Rhetorics course regarding generational trauma and colonization and genetic memory. The thread that consistently came through for me was memory. The ways that I remembered things, the ways that stories are told to share memories, and what I perceived the memories of the land to be. It wasn't until I was about a quarter of the way up Pike's Peak that I began to really think about what this means for the land. Does the land remember? If it does, what do those memories look like? If it doesn't, how is it possible to form a relationship with it? Are relationships contingent on things like memory or at least the ability to have memories? How long/many times does it take to establish a memory? How long am I able to remember for?

I didn't have the luxury of finding answers to these questions while I was hiking, but I did manage to get myself into an interesting series of connected thoughts in relation to time and memory. All of my thoughts up to this point had been on making a distinct claim about the land and memory, but what I found was that it was impossible for me to really understand the land from the scope of human timelines. The land remembers. The river valleys and mountains show this memory. The oil pipeline that was the impetus for this trip demonstrates this memory in the form of oil. The natural cycles of life and death demonstrate this memory as decomposition returns the atoms to where they came. Food contains the memories of the nutrients that combined

to make them. What I realized later is that the physics law of conservation (matter is neither created or destroyed) has much of the thoughts I was thinking covered, but what it does require is an expansion of what memory means.

So much of Western rhetorical thought is funneled through the human experience in regard to where knowledge comes from and what/who can possess knowledge. But as the object orientated ontology folks have been arguing, in conjunction with folks coming from post-colonial studies in Asia and Indigenous folks in the Americas, there are frames of experience that happen that are beyond human cognition and that the lives of things can help answer some of these questions. To me, if the land is a relative/actor then its agency has to match the scale of the actor.

When I look at the settler colonial paradigm of the U.S. I see a structure akin to a shipping harbor, with each shipping container holding specific information and relationship, everything is stacked but discreet. As Goeman shares in *Mark My Words*, Indigenous worldviews seek to make sense of the interactions and systems at play that afford relationships to happen. (48) This is further supported by Wilson (125) and Tuck & Yang (5) in their analysis of how the research terms are intentional within Indigenous scholarship. I can't help but think that there is something further here. That it makes sense to me that the worldview that is systems focused would see the land as a relative whereas the taxonomical focus of settler colonial worldviews partitions off potential relationships. What I am trying to add this this conversation is the question of whether or not these relationships exist in worldviews that don't have lenses to see the relationships with. Meaning, do relationships exist if we are not consciously aware of them? With the framework provided in this dissertation, these are the types of connections I am

using emergence to explore. I am also making the connection here, again, to breakdowns of democracy as a location to ask these kinds of questions.

The reason why Standing Rock became so visible is due to the widely published fact that the original plans for the pipeline were to go through Bismarck, but after the citizens of Bismarck vetoed this plan, the state of North Dakota utilized eminent domain to shift the pipeline plans 60 miles to the south. As the Water Protectors' efforts became common knowledge, this crux of legalities opens the possibilities for newly imagined possibilities for folks who are interested in getting involved in scenarios that are seemingly similar. The model I am providing walks readers through the ways that I utilize this framework as an example for how folks can do so themselves. Additionally, this framework is designed for settler colonial folks to navigate their own morals and ethics and locate the places where they can intervene in their own settler colonialism to find alternative possibilities and places of rhetorical empathy.

Standing Rock, for me, is mostly about the land. Since there was such a delay between the Water Protectors' camp and my ability to get to see these lands, the focus of this chapter had to be about the land. This has presented a slightly difficult issue in that I am not overly focusing in on the movement itself at Standing Rock, rather I am looking at the thing that was deemed worth fighting for. Standing Rock is important because it demonstrates what rhetorical empathy can look like. The Water Protectors were not fighting just for themselves, they were fighting for the entirety of the Missouri River Watershed. The Water Protectors knew they were fighting for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. They were aware of the contradictions of progress and that to let this pipeline be installed without a fight would further derogate tribal sovereignty. There are a few issues here, primarily being that the Standing Rock Reservation had little to no say in the pipeline plans (thus deteriorating their sovereignty) and the potential for ecological

disaster that could extend from North Dakota down to St. Louis, MO. These issues are both connected to the larger issue/question of whose burden ecological stewardship becomes when capitalism removes responsibility from the destroyers, but that is a conversation that extends way past the context of this project.

Standing Rock is also interesting because of the ways it connected people together on the land. The Water Protectors came from all walks of life with various tribal and settler colonial communities represented in the field of people fighting Energy Transfer Partners. With such a wide array of cultures coming together on the Cannonball River there was a show of unity for the land and for the life the land brings. It isn't too hard to see how the roots metaphor can work here. The rhizomes of the prairie grasses connecting to cover the scars left in the ground from the construction equipment can represent each of these communities of Water Protectors. Further, these roots can connect to the ongoing healing process of the land, where one generation of prairie grass removal and compaction is not enough to change the landscape and that it takes more time than the 6 months the Water Protector camps were in place to change how these roots grow.

I think it is here that the roots also begin to represent time. Time on a root level would be the human perception of time, the changes that happen in one human lifetime and can be storied/shared within one generation. The histories of the lands at Standing Rock are now woven with the stories and experiences of the Water Protector and it is through the daily interaction with the land, then, that affords the space for the Water Protectors to speak for the land. It is due to their relationship with the land that the Water Protectors move to demonstrate one of the aspects of this relationship that I believe prevents more Settler Colonial scholars from being able to make these moves as well. The Water Protectors are translating the words of the land for others

to be able to understand the land's words. As Goeman outlines, Indigenous relationships with the land are both personal and intergenerational are co-constituted through experience and story (24). Further, Tuck and McKenzie share, "Indigenous philosophies of place represent significant epistemological and ontological departures from those that have emerged in Western frames. Yet, in Indigenous worldviews, relationships to the land are not overly romantic– it might be more accurate to say they are familiar and if sacred, sacred because they are familiar" (Tuck and McKenzie 51). What this shows to me is that by understanding this relationship with the land, settler colonial folks can start to find their own version of what this relationship can look like. It is important here to note, I am heavily drawing on metaphors to serve as a mnemonic device for myself and to make meaning out of abstract concepts. When I write that the blades of prairie grass represent the vast range of folks who found a connection on the land at Standing Rock, I mean this is mostly figurative way, but if I take the words of Goeman and Tuck & McKenzie literally here it would mean that the blades of prairie grass are literally made up of pieces of the folks gathered there. The complexity here is that both frames are correct. My use of roots as a literally device allows me to make connections and to let these connections live within the metaphor; the use of roots in Indigenous studies can be metaphor, but it can also mean a literal interpretation of how things relate.

These connections also make me wonder about the nature of communication. How does one change the way a culture sees communication? Would approaches to ecological preservation be more effective if the earth could speak for itself? Is the earth speaking but settler colonial frameworks of knowledge prevent understanding what the words are? The Water Protectors used their roots to connect across various cultural barriers through communication and persistent resistance, but they also showed what these relationships could look like by demonstrating their

own relationships in these spaces. The land, then became the medium of exchange between the Water Protectors and Energy Transfer Partners, but the goals of the two groups remained separate.

The waterways of Standing Rock were the inter-community communications that shared and connected Water Protectors with each other and the outside world. They were the literal waterways of the Missouri River connecting the Great Plains with the Ozarks and eventually the Gulf of Mexico. They are the land continuing its cycle of renewal and healing its surface wounds with grass.

Unlike Flint, my social media was consistently sharing information about the Water Protectors and Standing Rock as the movement happened. With the first announcement of the move 60 mile south to reservation land, the connected Auntie network of Indigenous women were sharing awareness and making connections. The closer a given person was to Standing Rock, the more detailed the information, at least at first. I had social media friends in the Dakotas organizing meetups and the Indigenous scholars I knew were planning food and clothing drives for the folks in the field. As the weather turned cold, these drives would focus more and more on winter gear. I saw folks donating and mailing solar panels to groups they knew were going to Standing Rock. For a roughly 6-8 month period, I saw a small section of every social media platform activate and start making connections. These were pockets of folks here and there that I had primarily met through the Native American Caucus at CCCCs and NAISA [Native American Indigenous Studies Association] that were connecting the academic/community based networks as fast as information was made available.

Additionally, the cycle of renewal by the land here represents a waterway type metaphor to me in that the land's response to destruction was to regrow the grasses and hide that destruction away under a consistently recognizable visual reminder of its permanence. As I will discuss a little further in the mountain section, the push and protest here was in response to the potential for long lasting ecological disaster that would stretch the entirety of the Missouri River. The pipeline installation itself was a relatively minor nuisance that sowed the seeds of oblivion. While I was genuinely surprised when I saw no bare lands and no obvious destruction from heavy machinery, looking back, it makes sense that the visual damage done by digging trenches and installing the pipeline were seemingly temporary. There were no houses near the installation. There were no specific places of direct human interaction along the visible route of the pipeline, so in the geological sense of scale, there was fairly little to renew once the rhizomes reestablished their bonds below the surface of the ground. Here, I think it is important to return to the notion of the land as a relative in order to speak to memory. Much in the same way that humans adapt and change their behaviors to achieve specific designs, the land adapts to destruction as well, but there is a tipping point where it is no longer able to do so.

The Water Protectors' camp and machinery are destruction that the land has long adapted to and reclaimed, in so far that human encampments could be considered part of the cost of the relationship and normalized. The overall temporariness of human experience means that there have been historically periods of time of renewal that allows to land to heal itself. Long lasting locations of population show evidence of existence far longer than a camp that was utilized for a season or two. But here, I would argue that the memory of land is to itself, not the constructs that man places on it. Land does not seek to renew itself to be a human interface, rather the land renews itself to its natural state to interface with all of the systems and organisms on the planet.

This is one of the major reasons why colonial world views struggle to understand Indigenous worldviews. Colonial worldviews are focused on expansion and control from a human focused loci, non-colonial worldviews are often focused on communal loci, and further the Indigenous worldviews that have been shared and that inform this project expand what all is considered to be community by expanding this out to the land and organisms beyond just humans.

The metaphorical mountains at Standing Rock are the two opposing representations of the Water Protectors in the media, the ecological outcomes when (not if) the pipeline fails, and the impact of the Standing Rock movement in relation to how the land is perceived.

The national media coverage on Standing Rock ranged greatly between support for the Water Protectors and portraying the Water Protectors as anti-improvement and technologically backwards. Indian Country Today, one of the larger news outlets focusing on Indigenous news in the U.S., shared the pan-indigeneity gathering in support of the Water Protectors. The activist academics I knew were making connections to the efforts of the Water Protectors being the bellwether for manmade oil disasters. The majority of mainstream media was slow to pick up on the movement, but each of the big news networks ran at least one story portraying the Water Protectors in negative light, drawing primarily from statements from Energy Transfer Partners and the Army Corp of Engineers. Whatever the stance on this issue, Standing Rock and the Water Protectors were making the moves on the national spotlight. For a few months, the potential destruction of oil pipelines was at the forefront of conversation. The information available on just how many pipelines there were in North America became more common knowledge. The slowly dying fossil fuel energy sector saw one more layer of lies and climate damage get peeled back. There was hope that Standing Rock would prompt an across the board movement against oil pipelines in North America until the presidential election.

It seemed that as soon as Standing Rock began to gain momentum on the national scene, everything was shut down by and expedited order from Trump.[16] The Water Protectors left the reservation. The sovereignty of the Standing Rock Reservation was denied. The pipeline was installed and the only places I read or heard about the movement anymore was through the Indigenous social media presence that had brought my awareness in the first place.

Now the elephant in the room has always been what will happen when the pipeline fails. Part of the conversations happening regarding the resistance to the pipeline had centered around the fact that every oil pipeline has failed to some degree at some point and that we only have ways to lessen the impact of pipeline failure and oil spills rather than reverse the damage. So, the question here is not if the pipeline will fail, it is what will happen and to what degree it will fail. A full failure would result in the collapse of the Missouri River ecosystem with no clear timeline of repairs. The range from there goes down to minor failures that are contained and not really a bigger problem than that. The issue here is that money proved to be more important than the potential for disaster. Additionally, the sheer volume of people relying on the river for life demonstrates a clear misunderstanding of the risks involved with oil transportation. The fact that the Standing Rock Reservation was the only party seemingly upset at the choice of the pipeline placement beyond their own immediate concerns shows me that the folks who the Water Protectors were protecting couldn't fully understand what was at stake here.

The last few decades have seen the Exxon Valdes and the BP oil spill in the Gulf, but the connections to that damage and destruction seemed to be missed by everyone but the Water Protectors. The impacts of fossil fuels overall seem to be ill adjusted for non-capitalist ways of

[16] https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/president-trump-says-dakota-access-pipeline-serves

being, even today as the southwest U.S. becomes unlivable do to climate change. The problem here is that due the scale of the land, the changes and adaptation of the land are happening in so many microscopic ways that by the time there is enough accumulation for these changes to be seen it is too late. Drawing from my previous example of long lasting civilizations causing even longer lasting visual memories of destruction, this can be extended out to oil spills or strip mining. The scale of devastation with these kinds of events are the few instances where the scales are approaching each other. Human wrought devastation on a large scale produces the level of impact that the land can't ignore. Human industrialization, as a whole, is approaching dinosaur ending meteorite level destruction but in slow motion. As the land takes years to catch up to this repeated damage, it starts to demonstrate the desire for equilibrium by retaining the greenhouse gasses and changing the weather patterns.

Standing Rock was an experience of contrasts for me. It was disorientating to have an expectation of what I would find, only to have to dwell with the findings for a week before I started to make sense of them. It also has provided me with some of the more interesting thought experiments throughout this project. I have never claimed my work was decolonial and I certainly have been as careful as possible when relating my work to Indigenous theories but making the moves I am here is difficult to figure out. I am still figuring out how to constellate my relationships to all of these events and it is hard to focus in on these events in the past when there are so many current events vying for that attention. This project has shifted a lot of things for me. I have had to find ways to contextualize my relationships and thoughts through emergence and the conditionality of always being in a state of paracolonialism. Much of this work was a result of reading Tuck & Yang and taking that scholarship seriously by questioning my motives, thoughts, and intentions. It is the reason why so much of the work here is

contextual. It's the reason why I use myself and thoughts as the example, not because I am doing it right, but rather it is the only experience I can actually talk about. My roots to this project today are different than they were when I started the research and I will take effort to indicate which is which along the way.

In many ways my connection to Standing Rock is mostly tangential. My close relationship with my Uncle taught me ways of being in this world that defied settler colonial norms. Growing up working poor in an interracial family also shifted my understandings of how to approach relationships and engage with capitalism, meaning I was skeptical of both but willing to engage. Honestly, had I not met Dr. Powell, I wouldn't have any roots to connect to Standing Rock beyond the distrust of the oil industry that I grew up with. It is the shift to recognizing the lessons I was taught by my Uncle in the scholarship of that first grad class with Dr. Powell that I started to spread my rhizomes and connect with the field of rhetoric and composition. It was also this relationship that connected to me the Indigenous scholars in the field and I became aware of the various channels of communication within the Indigenous community. These relationships branched out to theory and books that work their ways through decolonization and anti-capitalism and through reading these texts and recognizing a further internal need for options outside of capitalism I began looking at the land and forming connections across the various cultures I live in. But it was the emergence of my questions that connected me to this community.

While I was afraid of learning the right way to ask questions, I still asked them. I ran through the conversations as best I could and would eventually establish the list of questions shared in the previous chapter. I talked about this process too, which seemed to be the move that opened up a lot of conversations along the way. These intentional shared growing moments

established relationships with a wide network of Indigenous scholars who helped me to learn that my fate was tied to theirs. That the change I was working towards was related and often times the same. It was also through this process and the encouragement to delve deeper into these connections that I saw how the land was my relative and learned how to tell the story of coming to know this relationship. These moves and conversations with individuals helped me to see how I was constellated with friendship, co-conspiratorship, and scholarship.

Now, how does this have to do with Standing Rock? These friendships mean we shared our experiences and lives together. The concerns of my community are also my concerns. Now there is the important navigations of what to do with those concerns, so I read, I listened, and talked with my friends and community members. I was in course work and it became clear early on that while I understood that I had useful skills that could be helpful, my intentions of going may or may not be coming from the right place. Because of that uncertainty, I found the other ways to support and connect with this movement by donating winter gear and funds for food and resources. I also talked at length with my friends and mentors and we talked through a way to write about Standing Rock that would focus on the land and make connections between western and Indigenous frames of knowledge. So, when I got to Standing Rock and found lush fields of grass, I started to branch out all of the mental relationships I could which brought me here. The land is what was being fought for. The reason for the movement was the ability to live on. To respect the land that lets us live on. That is something I believe in. It is something that I will fight for.

The waterways for me have been navigating my relationships in light of Tuck & Yang and my interactions with Indigenous studies at Syracuse University. The way that my relationships were built through the natural mentoring structure of our field lead to me feeling

overly confident in my relationships to Indigenous theories. I assumed these relationships would move with me as I moved through this world. That because I knew I was coming from a good place on these things, I would be able to quickly demonstrate this and get back to building relationships and scholarship. The missteps that I shared during the conversation with Wilson's *Research Is Ceremony* really caused me to pause and to really think about if this was the right topic to be writing about in the first place. It took a lot of conversations to feel comfortable moving forward and it is one of the reasons why this dissertation is looking at how to do this kind of research and how to position one's self to write about their experiences without generalizing ideas.

This also got me thinking about how Tuck & Yang situate metaphors in relation to decolonization. As a way to create clarity between my mnemonic metaphors and the spaces specifically interacting with decolonial theory. I termed these interactions as settler colonial interventions to imply an intervention into settler coloniality where emergence can be used to imagine different outcomes/ways of being to provide a line of thought that contextualizes the limitations of settler colonial decoloniality.

After I went on this trip, I knew that I had to deal with these feelings before I wrote about them. I felt like a stranger as I made my observations and took my pictures. It is one of the few times in my life I felt white, like distinctly white, as I got back in my car and drove away with just a dirty look from the state trooper. Combine this with my expectation versus reality, I had to question my good intentions. I had to reconnect with my relationships. I also had to find a way to encapsulate this discomfort to come back to and to remember as I moved forward in this project. Feeling like a stranger on those hills showed me the limitations of assuming my relationships and

provided a compass whose directions were filled in by scholarship, the land, the experiences, and the relationships.

The mountains for me are twofold, the real consequences the Water Protectors were protecting us from are terrifying and the desire to shift the role of land in the western paradigm from resource orientated to something akin to a relation.

The threat of manmade disasters consistently amplifies each year. Climate change is connected to the fight of the Water Protectors. While the Water Protectors could point to one specific instance where disaster could happen, their message was not just about oil spills or water rights. The Water Protectors stood in solidarity with Flint, with the folks in the Gulf, with the folks who can light their water on fire due to fracking run off, but this solidarity is in an effort to make change. In the last year the impacts of climate change have been very real very quick and the connection to the Water Protectors message of conservation and respecting the land becomes clearer every day. The Water Protectors weren't just fight a pipeline, they were also fighting the entirety of the oil industry, proclaiming relationships with the land and stewardship for future generations were more important than an industry that is destroying the world.

The thing that really drove this home for me was seeing the ways the river connected the Water Protector's camp down to New Orleans. It felt like Energy Transfer Partners was hyper focused on the local issues and they willfully missed the point that this fight was for everyone on the River and its watershed. This is one of those situations where I don't really know what it would have taken to inform everyone whose health and safety was actively being defended by the Water Protectors of the real consequences of pipeline disaster, but I have to believe that had more people known, the pipeline may not have been completed. I want to believe that through

education, these kinds of fights become everyone's fight and not just the Water Protectors'. The emotion burden of ecological stewardship should be shared across all of humankind.

This is one of the big reasons why I am writing about Standing Rock, I believe there has to be a shift in the settler colonial paradigm that recognizes the land as more than resources. In this dissertation I am offering a few different routes to this through the connections I see to the concept in Indigenous theory of the land being a relative. There are other routes through and the take away here is the shift in paradigm. I personally don't care if folks agree with my connection and find their own in non-appropriative ways. I have provided the route that I saw that made the most sense because I believe this is one of the only ways to provide a future for this planet. Relatively small groups of folks around the globe working in relation (as understood as relationality by Wilson) with the land are great, but they aren't enough to prevent disaster if the rest of the world continues on the way it is currently going. By shifting the role of the land in capitalist and settler colonial cultures to a role of equal importance as the self could provide the motivation we need as a species to stop further harm and find ways to reverse the harm that has already been done to the land. At the end of the day, this has always been the goal, convince enough people to do the right thing by the land so the land can continue to do the right things by us, and this is the route that I think it will take to get there.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Please Take me Home

In this dissertation I have provided an approach for settler colonial scholars to engage with emergence to establish the process for determining their own versions of settler colonial interventions within their own knowledge and research. I have done this by example through the weaving of a narrative that walks readers through this internalize process, for myself, while providing the series of events and questions to connect with the reader to encourage their own development of these skills. Further, I provide a method of questioning and building of geographic metaphors that work for me to ground my research on multiple levels, establishing root metaphors as micro approaches rhetoric (interpersonal), waterways as meso-approaches (local community communication), and mountains as macro approaches (global/national/field level communication) to rhetoric. Next, I constellated the primary scholarly resources, in detail, that have informed this approach by putting into conversation connections between decolonial, indigenous, and western scholars to shape an approach that would work with Human centered events (Flint) and Land centered events (Standing Rock). I then provide historical and contemporary context to engage with Flint which leads to the discussion of the ways in which my model can be utilized when doing human focused research. I follow this discussion with a similar walk through and application to the land through an analysis of the lands of Standing Rock. Now, I will walk through a few things to take away and some parting thoughts.

This is my second project focusing on establishing a research approach. Over the last 7 years, a lot of things have happened for me that inform this approach and where I will take it moving forward. These kinds of projects can be extremely difficult. For me, I had to establish the

route that would let me get past the baggage I was holding onto and to move with gravity. And I would be lying if I said this didn't take a lot of time. One of the issues I have found is that over time, the things that I am writing about here became so internalized that it took nearly the entirety of that 7 years to figure out what my biggest points were. For instance, I knew that carrying too much weight would become a secondary metaphor for my story here, but I wasn't aware of everything that held weight and that I felt personally connected to every minor step in the process until I was on that given step. That alone had me feeling like I had to defend everything here tenfold and that if I couldn't, I shouldn't be doing the research. But here is where it gets complicated: no one actually has to defend who they are, it just takes an amazing level of self-awareness to be ok that. There are a lot of fears that come and go with this scholarship because I could pretty easily see these words being twisted and used for nefarious practices, for instance, I am proposing that emergence affords the internal space to ask any question and to do the work on the inside before sharing, but this assumes a lot of things about my audience. Do I know that the folks reading this document will do the personal work to utilize this framework ethically? No, I can't. But what I can do is to frame what an ethical approach looks like and I can provide examples and questions to ask along the way. Once it is built, I can really only control how I use the approach.

I am providing a way to answer the question of how to do complicated, identity political, subject position dependent research in the field of Rhet/Comp. I am finding ways to answer my own questions that develop along the way too, because I know I am not the only one asking them. I have taken my experiences and thought about what the most meaningful connections along the way and what ways have been can I honor those connections and relationships. I am providing examples where I had to heal myself in order to be a good member of my communities

and that work is hard. These kinds of projects require the use of self, though, because there are ideas that can work for everyone here, but the route to them requires a personal touch and guidance.

One of the ideas that I returned to throughout this project is hope. Hope has been harder for me to maintain in the last few years than at any other point in my life. When I started this project, it was just before Trump was elected and it really felt like most of the world was trying to figure out how to navigate identity politics and further the work started the civil rights movement. As time has passed, a lot of this feeling has changed for me and I find myself at a weird crossroads. This will be the last project that I use myself for the example on for a long time. This project has taught me that I still have a lot of work to do on my anger and being ok with who I am before I am ready to use my experiences as examples again. This project has been as much about getting these things done as it is about growing and becoming okay with where I am at, and while I have hope that these things are cyclical, I don't have the space or time to work on these things in a public space when my peers in Florida are worried about going to jail over teaching acceptance. For me, the hope is that each person will figure out how to heal themselves to be a better member of society, while figuring out what healthy boundaries are in sharing myself. I stand by the need for personal examples in this work, but I do have to figure out a new orientation to this approach to keep doing this work myself.

I need a break from writing about myself, but in no way does that mean these processes stop. This is always ongoing internal project and I think that is the main reason why I believe that it is necessary to share what this all looks like. One of my biggest lessons from Brown's work with emergence is that it takes a little bit from everyone to shape a meaningful whole and that part of my growth here has been to provide examples of what these processes have looked

like, so folks know they aren't alone and that there are routes to learning how to come to terms with difficult things inside. I have learned to encourage these processes for others and for the first time, I learned how to use my actual voice and beliefs after hiding behind perceptions and the performance of graduate school. This dissertation is the first document I have written that comes only from my heart and that ties a lot of emotion to these words, but they had to come eventually, and it has been an honor to share the experience with you all.

A lot of things have changed for me over the writing of this document. I lost my best friend to bladder cancer in 2019. He was the person who taught me how to approach ideas that seemed impossible at first look. Through a shared love of playing music, he taught me how to become persistent and to work for the things I want to see. He also taught me to accept that practice is the only way to get better at anything. He was there with me as I struggled to be ok with myself and to heal enough to begin writing this dissertation and a part of this work is showing how to carry these lessons with us and let them inform our everyday.

I have also gotten married and become a home owner. These two things are the best things that have happened in my life. For me, education was always the way to shift my socio-economic class and after I had finished my PhD, I would have time to find love and a home. But life is tricky and didn't care about the order that I thought these events should happen in. luckily for me, these two things have provided the biggest shift in my world view. Many of the things that I thought were important to me really just aren't that big of a deal any more. The pressure to change the field and to shift the way that everyone thinks about capitalism and colonization is gone. Now the goal is to simply get folks thinking about what different approaches look like and to help at least one person figure these things out for themselves. The scope of stability has been one of the biggest factors in reminding me of hope and to keep going through out this project. To

have a home to dig my roots into with a person that loves me for who I am has healed me more than anything else could have. It's what brought me back to this project on the few crises of faith I have had along the way. I had to stop being so self-deprecating and see what was worth marrying in myself. To figure out what was worth building a future with me. Sharing my stories has always been a doubled edge sword of exposing who I am to the world and hoping it is accepted, but this time around I am sharing my stories knowing they are worth being accepted because I am worth being accepted. I have tied my sense of self to the research and scholarship that I do, and this is the first offering where I actually know who that person is.

The last big change that I will share here before I get to the more expected pieces of this conclusion is that my Uncle Jim passed away this year from emphysema. Jim is the reason why I am here. 25 years ago, Jim taught me how to trust in myself. The woods I was lost in became the confusion of growing up, but Jim also gave the room to make mistakes and to learn for myself. He taught me how to be in this world by teaching me to walk quietly when I need to and to run wide open when it was time to run. He taught me that to get unlost, I just had to find the water and follow it home. He also taught me to tell people I love them often because he never said enough. He taught me patience because he didn't have any. He taught me give as if I had too much and most importantly that life is for having fun. I haven't had much fun in my life and this process has been hard, but I will honor this lesson and finishing this dissertation is the first big step in that direction. With Jim is where all of this began and, in many ways, where this project ends for me as I move forward.

While I have directly acknowledged that this is the last foreseeable project that I will outline my research approaches, it will not be the last I think of these ideas. My plan is to craft a creative-nonfiction travel narrative, specifically focusing on the process of revisiting prior

locations of trauma and building new memories in those spaces where I write through events in my life and home in on the process of healing from trauma that is geographically based. This will go deeper and cover journeys not discussed in my dissertation as well as the journeys shared here.

Additionally, I really believe there is something to be discovered by researching instances of failed democracy as locations for theoretical frameworks other than the norm. In the United States, as seen from my examples, when democracy fails there is an opening to consider options outside of capitalism and/or representative democracy. While this is a small piece of what I am covering in my dissertation that lets me get to the human and land focused topics I want to, this was an unexpected connection to me as I started this research and once I started to see the connection, I began finding it in so many more places that there has to be something here. Now, I am not sure that this will end up looking similar to my research as it stands right now, but after the travel narrative, this will be the next idea I will start on that is related to this project.

I also think that there is more research to be done on scope and time here. The findings and connections to Standing Rock were shocking at the time. As shared earlier, I truly expected the land to show more traces of the water protectors, but when all I saw was the prairie grass covering the hills and burying the visible aspects of pipeline, I knew I had to stop and think. While I was walking back up the hill to my car, I realized that to understand the land the scope of time required far eclipses that of a single human life time and I started to make my connections then. One approach to this would be to contrast communities with ongoing oral traditions and communities with written traditions to see how far back their communal histories go as a way to understand what limitations there are on human perspective. Another approach would be to locate a storied geographical landscape and see how those stories change over time, especially as

the timelines intersect with things like cartography. For me, the connection between the land as a rhetorical agent and the land as a relative makes a lot of sense, but I could also see this a location for future research as well.

I think it is really important to work towards ideas like rhetorical empathy and metaphors that help folks make sense to their world. It is empowering. It provides places for emergence. It also provides one of the most important things that I have found in my life, a way to talk about the things that feel unexplainable. I am pushing on the ways we can mobilize self-improvement by joining the choruses asking what self-improvement looks like if the goal is to be a better member of the whole of community. This is always the goal: to feel good about yourself so you are able to give yourself in healthy ways to the community. This dissertation provides ways for readers to figure out what this looks like for themselves.

Now I will end with one last brief story:

My Aunt Judy slowly gathered her belongings and the cookie jar that held Jim's ashes. In the last few years I hadn't been as physically present as I would have liked, but due to Jim being sick with respiratory illnesses and COVID, there really had been much time for visits either. Instead, Jim had taken to calling me at random times at night in last few years, leaving messages of wild stories of woods hiking and animal interactions. Things, he said, that reminded him of our times up north. My inbox had been silent for a few months now and this was the first time I had come home since Jim's passing.

When my grandmother passed, I felt a hole in my heart. My grief and pain radiated through everything. I didn't get the proper goodbye with her and it changed how I went about the rest of my life. On our last trip up north, Jim had a medical emergency and had to leave in the

middle of the night to get back to Grand Rapids as it was the closest hospital that had the facilities he needed. Barreling down the highway we came to terms with his death and made our peace. We both were sure that this was the end. I held his hand as he tried to swallow enough air to slow his heartbeat and kept on driving.

We made it to the hospital in time. He would live for another 5 years. From that day, Jim said “I love you” more. Not just to me, but to everyone. Shortly after that trip, Jim apologized to me for the first time.

I had watched my grandfather become bitter with each month that passed that he was alive while my grandmother wasn’t. Jim, on the other hand, was harsh and bitter from the beginning, but something shifted on that 3 hour drive home. I saw the kind of man I wanted to be come from the fear of death. Jim began to soften and share the kind things. His pride for things became known as he told anyone and everyone who would sit down long enough to listen the things he was proud of them for. But the saddest part was that there were so few of us left to hear it. Jim had driven most of his friends and family away as his health worsened. He was the type of person who would find an insecurity and ride it down until you felt an inch tall, if and when he wanted to. Of my aunt’s side of the family, I was the only person of my generation who was still around.

My love and relationship with Jim began in earnest on the trip I got lost in the woods. Jim always trusted to me to figure things out for myself and was the only person in my family that I felt accepted me for who I was at all points in my life. Despite the usual ebbs and flows of growing up, he had always made the effort to be there, like the time he showed up at my first apartment, shortly after I moved in, on his bike unannounced and full of laughter. Despite his

flaws and harshness, his message was always right. Whether it was the constant reminder of life was for having fun or ways to navigate everyday life. I am sure if he could have found a way to soften his approach before life threatening illness, he would have had a room full of mourners.

But as it stood, it was just me, my aunt, and my cousin Tanner & Co. (Tanner was Jim's nephew. His wife, Kelly, and their two kids were also there), meeting to spread Jim's ashes on the worst air quality day in recorded Grand Rapids history. We got together to remember the man who had brought us together but also to renew our bonds to each other. There was nothing but laughter as we shared our stories with Jim, standing on the banks of the river in one of Jim's fishing spots. The most frequently shared thing that day was joy that Jim found a way to make peace with those of us who were still around. We shared our hugs and our goodbyes and Aunt Judy and I made our way back home. As we said good night, Aunt Judy turned to me a said, "Always trust who you are, if you start to get lost, you gotta find the water to find where you are. From there, it's up to you if you want to head home or keep going."

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Vita

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