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## A letter to the survivors of-the-old-time

*This letter was written in the context of the PhD-project "Listening to Land: De-neocolonizing the imaginary." It is a piece of speculative fiction and casts a critical eye on human relations with nature through re-visiting historic and contemporary land commons, in particular the social relationship of communities and soil which has almost been destroyed through the unhealthy habits of modernity, coloniality and capitalism. The letter allows us to imagine a different time and place and evokes space for uncertainty because that's where we are.*

Originally written in the context of my PhD-project "Listening to Land: De-neocolonizing the imaginary," this text was invited and edited by the Georgia collective, you can find the full version of the letter on their website.<sup>1</sup> In my PhD-project I cast a critical eye on humankind's relationship with nature through re-visiting a variety of land commons, a relationship between human communities and land that has almost been destroyed through the habits of modernity, coloniality and capitalism. In my practice-based PhD, I engage with the subject through research and theory, as well as through practice, an animation film that I hope will play a part in the process of decolonizing our imagination and re-relating to nature.<sup>2</sup> I use speculative fiction and play with the rules and structure of the English language.

In a future scenario, when you might be reading this letter, many of the rules might have changed, along with so much else. Some words in the text might be unfamiliar to you, but I am using them as if they were. You will find much of this in the endnotes and yet, in order to allow the text to do its work, I strongly encourage you to read it more than once. It would be best to first listen to the text, have someone read it out loud, like a letter that is written for many recipients, or read it to yourself and listen to the words carefully with your inner ear. Only in a later reading, pay attention to the footnotes and endnotes. Allow yourself to imagine a different time and place, and make some room for uncertainty, because that's where we are.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.georgiageorgia.org/a-letter-to-the-survivors-of-the-old-time>.

<sup>2</sup> Proponents of the theory of degrowth claim that in order for people to change their minds about the way they live, they need to "decolonize their imaginary" (Latouche, 2015, pp. 117-120). For proponents of the degrowth theory this battle begins with questioning and altering the way we see ourselves in this world, only then will we be able to alter the desire for what we could have. As the Zapatistas have taught us, first, we need to learn to imagine a better world is possible.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred W. Crosby cited in Réséndez, Andrés (2016): *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, p.14.

<sup>4</sup> Bartolomé de Las Casas cited in *ibid*, 14. Elsewhere, de Las Casas notes, "he will finish in a very short time consuming all the people of this island [Haiti]." Cited in Forbes, Jack D. (1979): *Columbus and Other Cannibals: The Wétiko Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism and Terrorism*, New York, Seven Stories Press, p.31.

<sup>5</sup> *Wétiko is a cree term that describes a cannibalistic spirit driven by greed, excess and selfish consumption that are at the heart of capitalism and central to the ideology of modernity/coloniality* (the term also exists in Algonquin, in Ojibwa as *windingo*, and in Powhatan as *wintiko*). According to author Jack Forbes, it is "the greatest epidemic sickness known to man" that he contributed to the destructive behavior of Christopher Columbus and his colonial descendants (Forbes, 1979, xvi).

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, 24–25. *Wétiko* is a Cree term that describes a form of "(cannibal) psychosis ... the greatest epidemic sickness known to man," *ibid.*, xvi. The author refers to some examples, "the wealthy exploiter 'eats' the flesh of the oppressed workers, the wealthy matron 'eats' the lives of her servants, the imperialist 'eats' the flesh of the conquered ... Anglo American imperialism is a form of cannibalism designed to 'eat' Indians and also to consume the Native people's land and resources," *ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>7</sup> Silko, Leslie Marmon (1991): *Almanac of the Dead*, New York, Simon & Schuster, pp.742–46.

in the year 1492 of-the-old-time, settlers arrived on the shores of what they called the-new-world, and with them they brought disease. one such disease brought immediate death, like dropping lighted matches into tinder.<sup>3</sup> it acted fast and decimated, death everywhere. but there was another disease that began to spread with a different effect, a bringer of death with another temperament, and only with the great-stirring did it come to an end. one chronicler of the settlers' first encounters identified the disease of greed as the purpose for the killing of anyone and everyone who [showed] the slightest sign of resistance.<sup>4</sup> *wétiko*<sup>5</sup> was a disease of an unrestrained kind: out of control hunger for anything and everything that would enlarge one's wealth, that would increase one's power, a form of cannibalism. the consuming of another's life for one's own private profit. no ceremony, no mystical communication, only self-serving consumption.<sup>6</sup> the appointed hero identified with the discovery of the land was, after all, a sailor and trader, the warmest of bodies in which the disease would thrive. the conditions the sailor had negotiated with his financiers granted him a quarter of all profits of any trade that emerged from the conquered colony. having sailed to a place that none of their fellow sailors had ever sailed, a land that no occupier had occupied, the disease grew immensely within them, until it became them. they claimed to bring science, religion, progress, and in return they believed they could take everything, nonhuman and human. what they brought were lies, disease, and death.

for years the occupied rose up to defend a way of being. countless attempts, only rarely recorded in the annals of history writing, but told and retold to fill hearts with courage in the face of the plague.<sup>7</sup> but their occupiers, filled with wanton certainty and following a self-fulfilling prophecy drenched in the blood of any who opposed it, were relentless and overpowered them.<sup>8</sup> each *intifada*<sup>9</sup> left remnants for another to follow as the disease's hosts spread across the land.

steeped in enlightenment philosophy, the settlers possessed by *wétiko* camped on a demarcated border, waiting for the sound of the military horn with steely-eyed determination to turn a profit, ready to lash their horses into furious speed in order to be the first to place their flag on the stolen land—a day of perfect peace.<sup>10</sup> as the sun stood in the middle of her course

in the year 1889 of-the-old-time, they made a run onto the land of others because the demand exceeded the supply.<sup>11</sup> what the possessed considered uncultivated land they transformed into opened territory by each one of them claiming land for themselves, the devil's rope<sup>12</sup> crisscrossing once shared land to demarcate the theft.<sup>13</sup> in this colony, land as commodity had become the basis of the economy.<sup>14</sup> the freshly inked laws required one to work the land for five years in order to become its owner. it would become private property according to the law. the destruction of communal lands for the sake of the aggrandizement of the individual, an expansion of their wealth.<sup>15</sup> the settlers' new religion claimed that the defect of the [communal] system ... [was] that there is no enterprise to make your home any better than that of your neighbors. there is no selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization.<sup>16</sup>

the attainment of private property came at a price. land of others made one's own, made possible by broken treaty after broken treaty. the others took the trail of tears after years of defending a way of life, out of desperation, in an attempt to avoid the churning war machine. the heroes of wétiko, cow-boys,<sup>17</sup> chased them down and made a hobby of shooting them down in an attempt to put an end to them.[21] the children of the captured were placed in schools for their re-education, un-learning a way of being in the world. for those possessed by wétiko there was only one way.

at the end of that week in that year of 1889 of-the-old-time, on their holy day, the community of wétiko gathered in an ad hoc religious ceremony in gratitude for the stolen gift.

wétiko was everywhere, and mother-nature wept.

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starting in the year 1914 of-the-old-time the disease again reached new heights. those possessed by the diseases went to war with each other due to the unquenchable hunger within them. in those nights of annihilation death was everywhere.<sup>18</sup> they put to use technology they had developed to eradicate each other in a battle with the single aim of being victorious. the victor would gain the right to take their disease yet further, to consume any unattained land they could, while the defeated would cede all colonies to the winners. one such land the possessed all craved was called the sick man of the continent, each of them wanted to make it theirs, to make it private, to exploit it.<sup>19</sup> this was a wé-

<sup>8</sup> Churchill, Ward (2002): Struggle for the Land: Native North American Resistance to Genocide, Ecocide, and Colonization, San Francisco, City Lights.

<sup>9</sup> *Intifada* is usually used as a reference to the 1987-1993 and 2000-2005 Palestinian uprisings against the occupation. The way I use *intifada* here is in reference to the Arabic term itself that has no English equivalent, but could be described as the collective act of rising up and shaking off, as a dog might shake off water, or as one might shake off sleep, or a people an oppressive power.

<sup>10</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne (2014): An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States, Boston, Beacon Press, 133-61; Tumbleweeds, directed by William S. Hart (1925; self-produced), film; Bohanon, Cecil E./ Coelho, Philip R. P. (1998): "The Costs of Free Land: The Oklahoma Land Rushes," Journal of Real Estate Finance and Economics, 16: 2.

<sup>11</sup> Hightower, Michael J. (2018): 1889: The Boomer Movement, the Land Run, And Early Oklahoma City, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma University Press; Howard, William Willard (1889), "The Rush to Oklahoma," Harper's Weekly, 33, P. 391-94.

<sup>12</sup> An early reference to barbed wire, first designed to fence in animals and prevent them from fleeing, then to designate boundaries of land held as private property, and finally to demarcate the boundaries of nation states. The devil's rope was a vital tool in the white man's "war to win the west."

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. By 1890, the government of the so-called USA considered the frontier "closed," putting an end to further large-scale land theft.

<sup>14</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne, 2014, p.141.

<sup>15</sup> Trujillo, Simón Ventura (2017): "So That the Thieves Will Not Inherit the Earth': Writing and the Fugitive Translation of Indigenous Land Reclamation," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 1, p. 59; Bisharat, George (1994): "Land, Law, and Legitimacy in Israel and the Occupied Territories," *American University Law Review* 43, pp.467–561.

<sup>16</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne, 2014, pp.140–57.

<sup>17</sup> These are commonly known for herding animals, and yet many were at one and the same time killers hired to annihilate the indigenous populations of North America and their way of life. One way they did this was by killing 10s of millions of buffalo in order to create a dependency on settlers and their economy, while these took the land of the indigenous population. By 1880 only hundreds of buffalo remained. This settler culture succeeded in depicting the killers as heroes.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin, Walter (2021): "To the Planetarium," 1928, in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, London and New York, Verso, p.104.

<sup>19</sup> "The sick man of Europe" was a common reference to the Ottoman Empire amongst the battling European powers in the First World War. For years, the Empire's power had been waning and control over its territories was a clear trophy of the war's victor.

<sup>20</sup> Bunton, Martin (2007): *Colonial Land Policies in Palestine 1917–1936*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 6.

tiko war par excellence, a war defined by the disease in which mother-nature was the spoils, there to be taken advantage of in order to be turned into profit.

the about-to-be-occupied prepared to protect themselves from the coming invaders. they gathered up simple weapons and powerful resilience to disrupt wétiko and its hosts spreading into their land, to make the very roads they walked unsafe.<sup>20</sup> they cut telephone lines, obstructed the railroad arms shipments, and attacked their military outposts in an attempt to fend off the occupier's cosmology of wétiko. they sought to maintain a way of life.<sup>21</sup>

many of the about-to-be-occupied communities lived on the musha',<sup>22</sup> land that was common, joint, whose fruits were shared by the whole community, where the community carried out periodic redistribution of land so the partitioning was never permanent.<sup>23</sup> verbal negotiation defined land boundaries. there was no law, no written record, only the relationships between humans and between them and nature.<sup>24</sup> as collective property the land could be more flexibly worked, its gifts distributed more equally in order to face external threats of war, taxation by overlords, of raids and storms.<sup>25</sup> land accessible to all meant the land tied humans together. mother-nature was the source for relationships. then the invaders possessed by wétiko arrived. the land's inhabitants had never faced a storm like this one, a raid of this size.

utopia was the name of a prominent book of wétiko culture, its author intoxicated by the disease wrote

"if they find that the inhabitants have more soil than they can well cultivate, they fix a colony, taking the inhabitants into their society, if they are willing to live with them; and where they do that of their own accord, they quickly enter into their method of life, and conform to their rules, and this proves a happiness to both nations ... but if the natives refuse to conform themselves to their laws, they drive them out of those bounds which they mark out for themselves, and use force if they resist."<sup>26</sup>

this was the kind of story the occupiers told to justify the flourishing of their disease. the disease's hosts wanted to destroy the musha', with its way of life around the land and harmony bet-

ween beings and mother-nature. it hindered their mission, the enlargement of territory, the accumulation of wealth. so they set out a plan for the *démemberment* of the *musha'*, its disassembly, and in so doing stripping humans and mother-nature apart.<sup>27</sup> to disrupt these relationships took time. the first step was the mapping<sup>28</sup> of the land, to scar it, in order to make it private, to introduce the concepts of the individual and ownership, with the ends of extraction for profit.<sup>29</sup>

but the occupied did not remain silent. in order to stop the destruction of their relationship to mother-nature, the occupied assassinated three land surveyors, hosts of *wétiko*. what happens to people and what happens to the land is the same thing.<sup>30</sup> this *démemberment* had to be stopped. a few years later, another *intifada* began, slowing the process of *wétikoization*, placing doubts in the minds of the diseased. but the occupiers bucked like a raging horse, responding to the rebellion by hunting down and killing the *intifada's* protagonists, locking up some, and exiling others.<sup>31</sup> much like the winning of the great *wétiko* wars, the occupiers had a determination, no-matter-the-cost they would implement their program of *démemberment*. for the disease that possessed them considered the unprofitable exploitation of nature unholy—scientific control was their method to attain maximum profit, fevered dreams of progress and technoscience. the mastery of nature ... the purpose of all technology.<sup>32</sup> the diseased professed a generic plot, the destruction of the relationship between humans and mother-nature, the extinction of the *musha'*, to save nature from the decay it experienced under collective ownership.<sup>33</sup> all in accordance with a *wétiko* commandment they held dear

"be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."<sup>34</sup>

their utopia led to the sixth mass extinction, a planet in ecological ruins.<sup>35</sup>

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minutes into the first day of the first month of the year 1994 of-the-old-time, another kind of *intifada*. they had acted on the prophecy, one day a story will arrive in your town ... the story may arrive with a stranger ... or the story may be brought by an old friend .... but after you hear the story, you and the others prepare

<sup>21</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood argues that privatization of collectively owned land is the hallmark of an "imperialism driven by the logic of capitalism" in Wood, Ellen Meiksins (2003): *Empire of Capital*, London and New York, Verso, p. 73; Neep, Daniel (2012): *Occupying Syria Under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, pp.117–18.

<sup>22</sup> *Musha'* is the Arabic term for land commons. Unlike private property, in the case of *musha'*, the land belongs to a community, a community that can grow and shrink, and land allotments were usually redistributed to all members every 2-5 years. In Britain it took the rulers 300 years to destroy the commons, and outlaw those surviving from them. After the First World War it took the colonizing British and French less than 50 years to do so in their newly occupied lands (Esther Kingston-Mann, 2006, p.120).

<sup>23</sup> Whitaker, James Long (1996): "The Union of Demeter with Zeus: Agriculture and Politics in Modern Syria," PhD diss., University of Durham; Schaebler, Birgit (2001): "Practicing *Musha'*: Common Lands and the Common Good in Southern Syria under the Ottomans and the French (1812–1942)," in *New Perspectives on Property and Land in the Middle East*, ed. Roger Owen, Cambridge, MA, Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs 34, p. 248; Quiquix, Linda (2013): "When the Carob Tree Was the Border: On Autonomy and Palestinian Practices of Figuring it Out," *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, p.8.

<sup>24</sup> Alkhalili, Noura (2017): "Enclosures from Below: The *Mushaa'* in Contemporary Palestine," *Antipode*, 49, no. 5, p.5.

<sup>25</sup> Rappas, Alexis (2020): "Three Murders and a Mandate: On Property and French Sovereignty in Interwar Syria," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 5, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> More, Thomas *Utopia* (2016): London and New York: Verso, Book II, p.143.

<sup>27</sup> Rappas, Alexis, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Mapping has a deeply colonial history. Invading explorers often arrived with claims of good intentions, to bring civilization, science and so-called progress. The mapping of territory could be a peaceful endeavor, but brutal violence followed because mapping made the control of land possible, the containment of all living life on it and its brutal transformation into private property.

<sup>29</sup> "Islamic law 'does not recognize juristic persons'. Rather its members owned the land in undivided shares as co-proprietors." In the words of Henry de Bracton "totum tenet et nihil tenet, i.e. each joint tenant holds everything and yet holds nothing." in Whitaker, (1996): 134. It took Britain four centuries to root out this principle, see El-Eini, Roza I.M. (2006): *Mandated Landscape: British Imperial Rule in Palestine*, New York, Routledge, p. 291.

<sup>30</sup> Hogan, Linda (1995): *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*, New York, W.W. Norton, p. 89; "The metonymy is that people are a part of the soil, the soil is a part of the people. Cabral stating that the people are our mountains means that the people themselves are the terrain of the struggle." in Cesar, Felipa (2018): "Meteorisations - Reading Amílcar Cabral's Agronomy of Liberation," *Third Text* 32, no. 2-3, p.260.

<sup>31</sup> Alkhalili, 2017, p.9.

by the new moon to rise up against the slave masters.<sup>36</sup> this intifada took time. ten years of preparation, quiet, slow building of a foundation, planting the seeds, letting the roots become firm and sink deep.<sup>37</sup> the re-introduction of the practice of collectivity in all aspects of life needed exercise, a metabolistic way of life, muscles that needed strengthening.<sup>38</sup> in reality it took more time than that, psychic mechanisms at play. for five hundred years the communities had been resisting outside and inside invaders, resisting the five-hundred-year epoch of death-eye dog.<sup>39</sup>

this was an intifada that attacked the destroyers, an intifada that began to weed out wétiko in communities. force was necessary. it had to start with an attack. the army of national liberation laid siege to nearby cities on the day the neo-occupiers traded away people's heritage, the day the free trade agreement went into effect that meant the privatization of the ejido, the communal lands. that agreement said in so many words

"i see the great gate  
of the city flung open  
i see people walking in ...  
either you come in  
through the city gate  
or take the rope  
and hang yourself"<sup>40</sup>

the intifada turned upside down that agreement signed in blood and sought to wipe out the cosmology of wétiko, making communal once again the privatized lands.<sup>41</sup> on the day of the accord of the neo-occupiers, the farmer-soldiers did the only thing they knew would save themselves, their way of being, their relationship to mother-nature, their enjoyment of the land.<sup>42</sup> for them there was no distinction between themselves and the earth. if she was destroyed beyond the current destruction to appease wétiko and its hosts' corporations, they wouldn't be able to live the vital relationship. mother-nature was not a resource to be taken. their cosmology confronted the occupier's ideology of extraction of gain-no-matter-the-cost, wétiko as the driving force of history. without a territory there was no way to create a different order, to overturn the one that existed. by taking back the land, they didn't take control

of the means of production, they generated the means of reproduction.<sup>43</sup>

after the attack the invaders possessed by wétiko arched their backs. they fought back with tanks, planes, and helicopters, again and again, baring their fangs, salivating at the mouth.<sup>44</sup> they set up traps for the occupied, tried to find any way to take away the power of their community, to put an end to their collective ways. they lied and cheated and tried to claw back the land and the authority that had been taken back from them. they won some battles, but the new communities were too strong. this time wétiko's hosts would not be victorious.

with time the protagonists of the intifada began to refine their ways of resistance, combining the old traditions with new ones. resistance meant not only opposing the continuous onslaught from militarized forces, but building an infrastructure, based on a reciprocal relationship with the earth.<sup>45</sup> they formulated a new way of governance, good governance, under the spirit of rule-by-obeying,<sup>46</sup> imposing oversight on its temporary leaders rather than changing masters every so many years.<sup>47</sup> this was the unmaking of sovereignty. for they were not against the principle of government but against the state, with the logic of its ingrained disease.<sup>48</sup> in what followed the year 1994 of the-old-time, the communities found a solution to the problems that had arisen following the intifada of the year 1917 of the-old-time, where a new authority emerged to take over the position of the old.<sup>49</sup> here, there was no authority, leadership was temporary. one served, starting at the bottom, obeying the community. serving others allowed one to integrate deeper into the community.<sup>50</sup> wétiko retracted. the ghosts celebrated, psychic mechanisms started taking root. but the new communities saw a storm coming.

"did you hear that?

that is the sound of your world crumbling"<sup>51</sup>

they wrote, and spent time preparing for it.

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in the year 2011 of-the-old-time, another intifada. again, psychic mechanisms at work and at play, this time in so many places at once. on the land where the most resistance had been given and also where the most blood had been shed the ghosts stirred. the occupiers had been replaced by new faces, just as bru-

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p.7; Ray, Gene (2014): "Writing the Ecocide-Genocide Knot: Indigenous Knowledge and Critical Theory in the Endgame," documenta 14, [https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/895\\_writing\\_the\\_ecocide\\_genocide\\_knot\\_indigenous\\_knowledge\\_and\\_critical\\_theory\\_in\\_the\\_endgame](https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/895_writing_the_ecocide_genocide_knot_indigenous_knowledge_and_critical_theory_in_the_endgame) accessed May 8, 2022; Benjamin, (2021), pp.103–4.

<sup>33</sup> Stoler, Anne (2002): "Colonial archives and the arts of governance," Archival Science 2. In Cox, Susan (Spring 1985): "No Tragedy on the Commons," Environmental Ethics 7, Susan Cox argues against Garrett Hardin's commonly cited argument of "The Tragedy of the Commons" that the commons ruined nature.

<sup>34</sup> Quiquívix, (2013), p.10; The Bible, Genesis 1:28 (King James Version).

<sup>35</sup> Kolbert, Elizabeth (2014): *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, New York, Macmillan; Ray, (2014).

<sup>36</sup> Silko, (1991), p.578. "[T]ribal storytellings resist disappearance in colonial scripts," in Trujillo, Simón Ventura (2020): *Land Uprising: Native Story Power and the Insurgent Horizons of Latinx Indigeneity*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press, p.35.

<sup>37</sup> In his book *Decolonising the Mind*, the Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o wrote about the need to reverse the colonization of the mind, a process by which the colonized become convinced of the colonial project as a righteous one, and take it on as their own. He writes, "[b]ut the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb...better than the cannon it made the conquest permanent. The cannon forces the body and the school fascinates the soul." Wa Thiong'o, 1981, p.3.

<sup>38</sup> Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) (June 6, 2005): "Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona," <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/sdsl-en/>; EZLN (2014): *Autonomous Resistance: First Grade Textbook* for the course "Freedom according to the Zapatistas, Chiapas, MX: self-published. <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/EZLN-2013-AutonomousResistance.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> An epoch in which "human beings, especially alien invaders, would become obsessed with hungers and impulses commonly seen in wild dogs" in Silko, (1991), p.252; EZLN, *Autonomous Resistance*, p.67; De Oliveira, Vanessa Machado (2021): *Hos-picing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and its Implications for Social Activism*, Berkeley, North Atlantic Books, p.215.

<sup>40</sup> Adapted from Song of Ocol by Okot p'Bitek, cited in wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ (Autumn 1997): "Enactments of Power and the Politics of Performance Space," *The Drama Review* 41, no. 3., p.25.

<sup>41</sup> EZLN, (2005).

<sup>42</sup> EZLN, 2014; "[L]and was the cause of all life.... The land is not an ideology but it has all that a people need to be strong and happy," writes Reies Lopez Tijerino in *My Struggle for the Land* cited in Trujillo, 2017, p.81.

<sup>43</sup> Kaufman, Mara (2010): "We Are from Before, Yes, but We Are New: Autonomy, Territory, and the Production of New Subjects of Self-government in Zapatismo," PhD diss., Duke University, p.153.

<sup>44</sup> EZLN, 2014, p.49.

tal, even if local.<sup>52</sup> these had been infected with wétiko and acted no different than their former occupiers, their predecessors. so the occupied sought to rise up and shake off. they wanted their communities in their own hands, to lay claim to a way of life outside of the grip of an overlord, like so many that had come before them. the occupied took up arms and in some places even chased off the neo-occupiers and their militias, there they formed local committees to run the day-to-day affairs of life, like those that had been attempted before.<sup>53</sup> they cleansed the school<sup>54</sup> curricula, operated bakeries and clinics, engineered new sources of energy, and dug new wells when the neo-occupiers bombed the old ones.<sup>55</sup> civilian community representatives coordinated with the fighters patrolling the outskirts, protecting against the soldiers of wétiko rabid for revenge. the neo-occupied smuggled seeds through military checkpoints, and taught the youth to plant crops in the besieged cities, a spontaneous temporary mu-sha'.<sup>56</sup>

the neo-occupier's reaction was of unimaginable brutality. rabid, they wanted to leave no one alive, to starve a disloyal populace, to punish them by creating a society in perpetual ruins. and the intifada's protagonists were not able to keep the space. the attacks came from all sides. siege till starvation, bombing from the skies, tanks on the ground, kidnapping, torture and killing of anyone who stood in opposition, as they had learned from the occupiers before them. here they snuffed out the spirit of rebellion. but again, ghosts remained only awaiting to be woken.

\*

the great-stirring.

\* \* \*

while we have come to learn that it was the great-stirring that led to the new dawn, our way of life today is shaped by the psychic mechanisms of intifada, of standing up, of community-making, the successful but also the short-lived, the attempted and failed. the reunion between us and mother-nature already started before that moment.<sup>57</sup> you started it, you the survivors. you put in place the seeds for the new community. you sang the songs of the bushes. you taught us to listen.<sup>58</sup>

after the big-storm, your struggles, your actions, your sacrifices appeared as apparitions to us. today, a cosmology of the individual is the past. today we know of private and public properties only by what we read in your books.<sup>59</sup> when you meet us,

know that we no longer practice earth-as-commodity, land-for-profit. today, we live another time. we live in kinship with earth, where land is a member of the community like all animals.<sup>60</sup> wé-tiko is a disease of the past, as we have learned from one of your poets.

i can lose my hands, and still live. i can lose my legs and still live. i can lose my eyes and still live. i can lose my hair, eyebrows, nose, arms, and many other things and still live. but if i lose the air i die. if i lose the sun i die. if i lose the earth i die. if i lose the water i die. if i lose the plants and animals i die. all of these things are more a part of me, more essential to my every breath, than is my so-called body. what is my real body?

that which the tree exhales, i inhale. that which i exhale, the trees inhale. together we form a circle. when i breathe i am breathing the breath of billions of now-departed trees and plants. when trees and plants breathe they are breathing the breath of billions of now-departed humans, animals, and other peoples.<sup>61</sup>

## CV

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<sup>45</sup> EZLN, 2014, p.67. Breny Mendoza points out that Indigenous cosmology cannot be applied as is to current political conditions. Some questions need to be asked and remain unanswered: "Is it possible to think outside of modernity, relying on archetypes of indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies? ... Can the civilizational projects that mostly male indigenous scholars (in Abya Yala) put forward withstand a decolonial and/or indigenous feminist critique?" in Mendoza, Breny (2018): "Can the Subaltern Save us?" *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society* 1, no. 1, pp.120–21.

<sup>46</sup> The Zapatistas live by the ethic of *Mandar Obedeciendo*, "rule-by-obeying" that organizes the Zapatista body by responding to ancestral practices of the communities' Mayan descendants with 7 principles: to serve others, not serve oneself; to represent, not supplant; to construct, not destroy; to obey, not command; to propose, not impose; to convince, not defeat; to work from below, not to seek to rise.

<sup>47</sup> EZLN, 2006; Kaufman, 2010, p.150.

<sup>48</sup> Reyes, Alvaro/ Kaufman, Mara (Spring 2011): "Sovereignty, Indigeneity, Territory: Zapatista Autonomy and the New Practices of Decolonization," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 2, p.506.

<sup>49</sup> Many of the accounts of alternatives forms of revolutionary ways of living in opposition to the Bolsheviks were not recorded.

As usual, the victor did most of the writing, most of the narrativizing. I follow the lead of Saidiya Hartman in "straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration ... to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling." in Hartman, Saidiya (June 2008): "Venus in Two Acts," *small axe* 26, p.11.

<sup>50</sup> Navarro F., Santiago (July 20, 2014): "Across Latin America, a Struggle for Communal Land and Indigenous Autonomy," *Truthout*, <https://truthout.org/articles/across-latin-america-a-struggle-for-communal-land-and-indigenous-autonomy/>.

<sup>51</sup> EZLN, "'¿Escucharon?' Enlace Zapatista," cited in Reyes, Alvaro (2015): "Zapatismo: other geographies circa 'the end of the world,'" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33, p.409.

<sup>52</sup> See Fanon, Frantz (1963): *Wretched of the Earth*, New York, Grove Press. In a 1966 speech in Havana, Amílcar Cabral said: "We note, however, that one form of struggle which we consider to be fundamental has not been explicitly mentioned in this programme ... We refer here to the struggle against our own weaknesses." Cesar reads "one of these weaknesses" as "the use of a national model based on a colonial paradigm, the fragility of which became evident in the descent into neocolonialism after independence," cited in Cesar, 2018, p.272.

<sup>53</sup>Aziz, Omar (2011): "A discussion paper on local councils in Syria," <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/omar-aziz-a-discussion-paper-on-local-councils-in-syria><https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/omar-aziz-a-discussion-paper-on-local-councils-in-syria>. This text deeply influenced the process of making the revolutionary Syrian councils.

<sup>54</sup>In Syria it was a small group of children who on 6th March 2011 sparked the flame of revolution by spray painting "we want freedom, we want dignity" on the walls of their school in the Damascus neighborhood of *Daraa*. Their arrest by the authoritarian regime of Bashar al-Assad sparked the Syrian Revolution. By the end of the following year, opposition forces to the Assad regime liberated areas all across Syria. There, schools like the one in *Daraa*, became "revolutionary schools" where opposition forces succeeded in dispelling government authority. There, school teachers revised government textbooks by removing government propaganda and adding revolutionary content.

<sup>55</sup> Munif, Yasser (2020): *The Syrian Revolution: Between the Politics of Life and the Geopolitics of Death*, London, Pluto Press; Al-Shami, Leila (May 12, 2016): "Challenging the Nation State in Syria", <https://leilashami.wordpress.com/2016/05/12/challenging-the-nation-state-in-syria/>; Gopal, Anand (August 2012): "Welcome to Free Syria - Meeting the rebel government of an embattled country," *Harper's*, <https://harpers.org/archive/2012/08/welcome-to-free-syria/>; Gopal, Anand (December 3, 2018): "Syria's Last Bastion of Freedom," *New Yorker*, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/12/10/syrias-last-bastion-of-freedom>.

<sup>56</sup> Ciezadlo, Annia (2014): "The war on bread: how the Syrian regime is using starvation as a weapon," New Statesman, <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/2014/02/war-bread-how-syrian-regime-using-starvation-weapon>; Ciezadlo, Annia (May 18, 2015): "Garden grows amid the daily dangers of a siege in Syria," Al Jazeera, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/5/18/a-garden-grows-amid-a-siege-in-syria.html><http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/5/18/a-garden-grows-amid-a-siege-in-syria.html>.

<sup>57</sup> "We propose that a decolonial future requires a different mode of (co-)existence that will only be made possible with and through the end of the world as we know it, which is a world that has been built and is maintained by different forms of violence and unsustainability." The Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective (August 24 2020): "Preparing for the end of the world as we know it," accessed May 8, 2022, <https://decolonialfutures.net/portfolio/preparing-for-the-end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it/>.

<sup>58</sup> Kimmerer, Robin Wall (2013): *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, Minneapolis, Milkweed Editions, pp.43&48. In a similar spirit, Marion Bethel wrote these lines in her poem "And the Trees Still Stand," cited in Alexander, Jacqui (2005): *Pedagogies of Crossing*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, p.36. "And the Trees Still Stand/ We are here/ because you beat back the bush/ because you raked rocks and stones/ because you pitched scalding tar/ to make that road/ You uprooted *lignum vitae* trees/ to turn that uncharted road/ into a journey with landmarks/ And because you replanted/ those trees of life/ we are here".

<sup>59</sup>“One cannot be understood as an individual—and to think and characterize them as such is a fiction elaborated from outside,” says Alejandro Moreno, cited in Zibechi, Raúl (2012): *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movement*, Edinburgh, London, Oakland AK Press, p.54; Navarro F., July 20, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Simón Trujillo refers to Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s use of the term “colonized time,” which he explains, “occluded non-modern Indigenous cultural, political, and spiritual practices that outlast epistemic capture and endure today in temporal and spatial configurations remain illegible to the empty, homogenous time of capitalist-nation-state sovereignty...the lens of wétiko thus introduces the analytic power of Indigenous temporalities in the fabric of modern history.” Trujillo, Simón Ventura (October 2020): “The Indigenous Materialism of Jack D. Forbes: Notes Toward a Speculative Historiography for a Future without Europe,” *Theory & Event* 23, no. 4, p.1114. As a relationship “inherent to indigenous communities,” Justine Smith argues that “‘place’ is understood in terms of radical relationality [that] transforms land from mere spatiality into a cultural performative... It is dynamic by nature, constitutive of the identity of a particular indigenous people.” in Trujillo, 2017, p.81.

<sup>61</sup> Forbes, 1979, pp.181–82.