**PART II**

Luz María de la Torre Amaguana (Otavalo, Ecuador & Los Angeles, USA)

Luz María De la Torre Amaguana presented at the Fulbright Commission in Quito for the Fulbright Group Study Abroad (2004) from University of Utah. In 2005, she was invited to give a public lecture and teach several days across the U campus about Indigeneity and gender, while engaged as Visiting Scholar at ASU. During fall of 2016, she returned to Utah for another public lecture and classroom intervention. She is a Continuing Lecturer at UCLA in Quechua. Her BA in Languages and Applied Linguistics from the Catholic University of Ecuador (1997) produced ground-breaking research on Indigenous Bilingual Education. Later she received a Master’s degree in Political Sciences at FLACSO (2006). She has published on bilingual education, the history of Indigenous women from Otavala, Ecuador’s Indigenous Movement and the national uprising during the 1990s, Indigenous concepts of reciprocity and knowledge production, as well as gender from the Andean perspective. Her latest project will explore further a publication on “What it means to be an Indigenous woman today.” We have collaborated on interviews and translations of some of her articles from Spanish to English in *Cultural Survival* and *I/We: Wo(men) of (an)Other Way* (2015).

Salt Lake, UT Dec. 5, 2017

**How do you self-identify in terms of ethnicity, gender, socio-economics, geopolitics and other relevant reference?**

I am Luz María de la Torre Amaguaña (**dlTA)**. My nationality is Kichwa, from the Otavalo

Pueblo in Ecuador. In terms of gender, society and the practices of quotidian colonialism have inscribed notions of gender and corresponding behaviors associated with being a woman upon me and so I consider myself a woman. I am female. I am committed to the human principles of justice and equality. Some would call it leftist, socialism, Indianism, indigeneity, with a politics of Sumak Kawsay [Good Life], where labels do not matter, rather grasping consciousness of the need to be vigilant about the most pressing social issues.

We must be committed to the notion that we all share rights as human beings. We all fight for freedom and social justice. Based on the general parameters that measure social classification by income, occupation, and education, I can consider myself as middle class. Nonetheless, I should point out that I was born into a humble, uneducated and illiterate family considered poor by most socio-economic standards because we had no reliable assurance of work and no education either.

Nonetheless, I feel I was happy living in a milieu that did not depend heavily on fatuous material wealth. I was not privy to intellectual spaces. However, I inherited formidable values which have allowed me to love my culture, and to grow up with a treasury of a wealth that today constitutes my social, cultural, and knowledge capital as much as my moral reserves that fortify me to endure the situations in which we live. This moment in geopolitics is very complex, since it stems from systems that constantly exhibit inefficiency and inadequacy for tackling our life challenges. The only things they continue to generate are natural, social, cultural, economic, spiritual and human catastrophes.

**How do you define activism, and how would you characterize your activism?**

**dlTA:** It is crucial within academic circles that we, Indigenous women, express ourselves with our own voices. Indeed, imagine the difference it makes on a student to hear about these topics from a non-native, albeit with passion, enthusiasm and confidence. Whereas, when we stand up in front of them, in a space [classroom/lecture] to which we have not been privy, the grave responsibility to express our lives within the academic realm becomes unique and formidable. To a certain degree this would be a change in the known paradigm; a great achievement that could mutually nourish us. The ultimate challenge is to find strategies to communicate this concept to a non-native audience.

I have spent my professional life interacting with leaders and trainers, and likewise training them. We, as Indigenous, all experienced the same process. Yet it is wholly another thing to be here in the States, educating those unfamiliar with my culture and our circumstances. We offer them tools, strategies, and education about something truly unknown. However, one of the most empowering acts of our endeavors is testimonial because there is no mediation, purely our words**.** Simply put, this is what we have lived. It is characteristic of the way to open new spaces: as Indigenous, professionals, where our words are listened to, respected, and most importantly replicated in each of our experiences.

**What are some other strategies and issues pertaining to opening up dialogue?**

**dlTA:** New issues are emerging, for example, allegiances between different Indigenous groups. In the 1980s, it would have been impossible to think about the Indigenous as separate nations, communities, and societies that could respect difference and share common ground. That idea caused great conflict. Nowadays the contention is less vocal and somewhat obscured, yet ongoing. It’s natural not to be able to unify our concepts of inclusivity. We have to respect the interest of each disparate group. Foremost however, we must examine societal challenges and interests, and with that focus and foundation, build common agendas. We have rallied around education, identity, ways to recuperate and salvage our culture. This proposition has allowed us to see that we can overcome any barrier.

Furthermore, we would never approach someone else and tell them: “we have your answer. Do this!” The answer will have to come from within. It is similar to our typical dances; we dance next to each other, opposite and all around. Slowly we come together and then recede, getting closer and then moving apart. It is a way to fall in love, to find things in common, and to abandon differences. Finding common ground has high costs; you have to give up some things also. We don’t have a recipe that says "Step one, you have to start this way.” No, what must prevail is primarily sincerity, that spirit, that reality of participating in events that must be changed. Because we cannot live with hypocrisies, which is what’s hurting us now.

On the one hand, we want to speak kindly, but in our daily life we ​​are completely contradicting ourselves. We have to get rid of many of our defects. There are forms of hidden, entrenched racism that persist, that in the end lead to "You are a nice Indigenous person, but deep down there are still some faults that keep us from coming together.” What if your daughter marries a person of African descent, or an Indian? Doubt remains. That prejudice must be eliminated. If your daughter marries a poor person, there too, they are judged for their economic condition. Enough of the hypocrisy.

To change your heart in this respect takes hard work and passion. If you really want to make a change, you must change your heart first. Then, change your personality, change who you are, and move forward with the rest. People believe “We are going to help the natives”; but *we* no longer need saviors nor have we ever needed them. Today we must inaugurate that other way of joining together as human beings.

The path we are on leads to a lack of unity of the Indigenous peoples of the north and the south, of whole nations, not only Indigenous, but Afros, mestizos, whites, and all colors. We need to come together, and be conscious of decolonizing the dominant matrix as we exhort "join us north and south.” The feminist movement in the beginning of the struggle fought for rights, but the feminists forgot about the Indigenous. That does not have to happen. The feminist movement has also retreated tremendously, and is now working on the issue of being a woman with differences, heterogeneity, a breakthrough. Nonetheless, much remains to be done.

**How does your work as a docent, involved with language training and building bilingual programs, relate to activism?**

**dlTA:** I have the great honor and privilege of working with students [at UCLA] from all social, cultural, political groups. I teach them language studies, specifically Kichwa; how to maneuver in this distinct linguistic system, and take the first steps toward communicating in my Indigenous language. It is a huge endeavor; opening a space for interculturality. They begin to become familiar with that other great world that they knew nothing about.

It starts with the structure of the language that is completely different. Hence it is like entering a new world, exploring new situations. This happened for me through Spanish, which I came to know here while I circulated in this space [US]. Spanish is called Castilian in Ecuador. I teach Spanish here, although it was labelled the tongue of the conqueror in my homeland. By teaching Spanish, I learned that placing value or stigma depends upon the angle from which you observe something.

For the students, we also generate a sense of the quality of what the language represents, or a form of vindication of the social and cultural “other”. US speakers of Spanish face the same battle we have. Spanish here is marginalized, and of small worth. Spanish has been converted into a way to disdain not only the tongue/linguistic heritage of the speaker, but also the subject speaking, even the person. I have rediscovered the disdain for Kichwa in Ecuador through the analogous practice toward Spanish manifested here. I witness and experience the same condition of exclusion, and yet it allows us to encounter ourselves and that enemy.

I also teach another class called “Life of Andean Indigenous people in modern times.” Many students from a variety of majors and disciplines take the class. As we discuss that diversity of opinion, by the end one realizes they too are formed by a certain epistemology that is different and geared to other interests. We talk about what their role is as well as hold discussions that lead to a profound consciousness about their role, initially as students, then as professionals. They gain an understanding of the ethical responsibility they must assume no matter the major. It’s an opportunity for them to put these lessons into practice, not just warehouse the ideas, rather to implement them for change.

This new form of liberation, an emancipating pedagogy, impacts them profoundly. They begin to see their real problems through this analysis. In this class, they combine methods of analysis with this experience of the Indigenous from the Andean area. They learn vast amounts, and immediately put it into action. It also puts their lives in perspective. They question themselves, racism, social stratification, the space in which they are developing. It is part of the process to humanize Pedagogy. We work from that premise. If not, they only collect theories, which need to be put into practice. I problematize this, and try to put this all into crisis for them. They have to explore how to solve a problem, not only from a theoretical point of view, rather practical from questioning the ink on their papers, the water they drink, from the cup of coffee, to where it came from? It asks them to question their own actions in life and what solutions they can offer in the real world. Many of us live complaining about life. **We need to shift from complaint to proposing solutions.** The Indigenous are doing precisely that in order to effectuate change and transformation.

**How have you been able to raise awareness of what it means to be an Indigenous woman, especially after years living and teaching at UCLA in the US?**

**dlTA:** The situations [living in Ecuador versus California] are different, but as humans, we do not differ from where we were born and where we grew up. Our background never disappears, because our original place is a force that is innate, because it is what has formed us, including our way of thinking, way of being, our attitudes. The fact of living in other places helps us to understand these other differences. Being Indigenous here in the US prompts us to think about other Indigenous women. In California, I have met many Indigenous women from all regions. There have been opportunities to think about strategies of how to fight, how to make life more dignified, with more respect. Sometimes I ponder the struggles in Ecuador in the 70s and 80s. In every case, we must dismantle a series of stigmas and prejudices that society imposes. Strategies become useful, those we could implement in our countries, during our times of struggle, when they are enriched by diversity. We hear that many women have struggled in poverty, and there are other women who have fought against exclusion and discrimination; there are many women who have fought for all different goals. That enriches our battle against the injustice that has been harassing women for ages. Being an Indigenous woman is always going to be a struggle because you have to have courage to face opposition, wherever we go. Just because we are in the United States doesn’t mean that we have already overcome the trauma that has been chasing us since we were born. We have to generate more elaborate strategies and formulas to overcome these forms of racism in society.

**Let’s turn to the problematic trope of the Indian as Problem, probed by intellectuals and politicians from the colonial period forward, and revisited last century by Mariategui, Gonzalez Prada, among others, in Latin America**.

**dlTA:** Honestly, the Indian Problem has been posited in those discriminatory and derogatory terms for too long and now we must change this discourse. When one refers to the Indian Problem, the Indian “thematic” always infers the Natives as the problem. First, we are not a problem, and secondly, we are not Indians. We are all aware that due to that historical misconception and accident if you will, that term “Indian” was used to subjugate us. The proposition upon which I have been focused over these past years assumes as a foundational base an acute consciousness of those salacious, erroneous, and misleading realities. I aim to counter that aberration by raising the issue of “re”constructing not only a new semantics around the term, but also fortifying the dignity and value of the Indigenous *Runa* [Kichwa] subject/agent.

Runa in its original Kichwa language means human beings. It [Indian Problem] is an expression, yet more insidious is the embedded notion of *Runa* as subhuman Indigenous person as we are positing it. There stands a mandate to deconstruct the implicit problematic of separatist entities, which from the beginning involved the constitution of two worlds, two republics, two eras, during the founding of the nation that proclaimed an explicitly divided White Republic and a distinct inferior Indian Republic. That exclusionist and discriminatory historical stain carries forward today. Our nation states, so called republics, and moreover, the corresponding social imaginary, promulgate the separatist model. Nowadays, **the priority is to elaborate the construction of an intercultural body, respectful of mutual habitation, accepting of diversity, where we learn to appreciate and exist with the unique ingredient of cultural diversity that makes our nation so distinctive and singular.**

For us [the Indigenous people], there is nothing odd about living among people of difference, because that is our norm and manner of being. Moreover, in addition to accepting sweeping cultural heritages, we have also integrated the so-called Western forms of living. We have mastered the language, learned your cultural lifeways; we have learned your positive and negative features. However, on the other hand, the so-called Western society needs to become conscious of, and shed its arrogant upstart, imperialist spirit in order to understand the historical debt it owes to contribute to the construction of a *Runa* world. From there springs a great uneasiness, because having lived here for years in coexistence, they [Occidental culture] have not taken the time or interest to know the other people with whom they share this space.

The most complex point in question relates to the other world; the so-called Western world and other hegemonic powers. Will they interest themselves in the forgotten, vilified, excluded people, upon which they haven’t even deemed it necessary to cast a glance or realize we form part of one, united reality? Because indeed, we should not forget that from the start, it’s not that the whites arrived here and settled, rather everything is a mixture of our cultures. Even the Spaniards derive from over 800 years of miscegenation with the Moors, Arabs, and other series of cultures. We must now banish these differences that have only served to construct a useful platform that legitimizes their [white man’s] injustice and ongoing larceny, domination and oppression, committed then and now. They are unrelenting and refuse to retire. For this reason, it is imperative to combat these antiquated and archaic ways of perceiving the world so as not to overlook the incredible array of diversity. We must contest, resist and extinguish these erroneous views of the Indigenous.

The earliest stages of the Indigenous movement, with its’ corresponding initial proposals that addressed the topic and attempted to vindicate the Indian people were nothing more than ventriloquists and intermediaries because they continued thinking that we were incapable of speaking for ourselves. Surely they had good intentions, even hopes of entering paradise, but in practice they continued repeating the same forms of defeasance of our people. We must demystify and dismantle that discourse to initiate a new era, wherein we commence as one to see ourselves as beings through bilateral conversation, not a pyramidal structure where they continue to look down condescendingly from the pedestal upon the “poor incapable Indians.” In reality, there is much left to be done, including motivating people to move beyond the trivial and superfluous things that keep us busy and occupied with petty, absurd, and wasteful activities. Empty hours deciding what dress to wear, or which brand to buy. We must delineate the social, political and cultural path that is more human, where those trivialities are replaced by the construction of alternative agendas, focused on the real concerns facing the world. The challenges we face are not so simple. We live in an unjust system, anarchic, unequal, abusive on every level, especially in economic terms, where capital garners more value than the creation of conditions that dignify human beings. That is the future. It took 500 years to destroy us, but to rebuild is essential and on-going. The conquest stole everything, then produced 200 years of a false and illusory independence and constitution of republics. Rebuilding is a long-term process. Like a telescope that projects onto a distant horizon, we must keep those long-term goals in sight and begin the process.

**What are the key challenges?**

**dlTA:** The first [challenge] is to rethink ourselves, without barriers of differentiation like inequality, rather with fortitude and enrichment so as to construct a more just, equal, and humane society. We begin by trying to understand the other; allowing others to be a part of the broader scheme of diversity. Beyond safeguarding human diversity, other challenges of vital importance exist. Economic security is one. How to overcome the injustice which has been the norm for centuries? Injustice has become normalized and is even considered natural. No one questions these injustices. Racism is legitimized; that form of discrimination has become natural precisely in order to abuse and exploit workers. Capital has assumed a central position, where material objects are of more value than humans.

The specific challenges we must begin to face and question: What is our due from the work we produce, what happens if we exercise our right to be employed, but to do so with love, dignity and care, and expect equal remuneration? We should be rewarded and paid fairly, as construction workers, maids, or senators and presidents. We must delegitimize these differences based on colonial oppression once and for all, and dismantle difference based on race, color, social status that are colonial vestiges of oppression. As human beings, we have grave responsibilities to live as one family, in one Ayllu (village) on this planet, our home. Nature placed us here and yet we are ungrateful, exploiting catastrophically her bounty. We must save our planet and protect and tend to our home. Our perversion with capital is related to our lack of consideration and destruction of the planet. The main axes are the economy and society but within societal relations reside men and women and animals. We often think, ah if I can only make more money and go to the store to consume something else, all will be solved. However, we must strive to live in greater harmony with nature and other human beings.

**Would you explain the Yananti as an alternative concept?**

**dlTA:** It's good way for groups to find alliances. We have many resources. ***Yanantin*** is another useful concept. It is an agricultural practice in reality. We, the Indigenous, have nourished much of our experience from being farmers, the space and practice where we have to do our own daily work and planting. We have been able to reinterpret and apply the elements of tending to the earth in other directions. *Yanantin* in agriculture means that when planting corn, maize grows, and we must pack soil in to support that plant, so that the wind doesn’t blow it over. The land that supports the sprouts from each side is called *Yanantin*, a complementary dualism. It's a metaphor that helps you understand all the behaviors of life. When a man and woman come together, he is a Yanan, because they both support each other in order to sustain the family and to support their own interests.

This is *Yanantin*.When we strive to unite these two groups, Western society and the so-called Indigenous, it will resemble and function like *Yanantin*. We are finding that way through a common goal that is held by two forces. *Yanantin* does not necessarily have to be entities with the same thought, rather they may be different. It is more or less what in the West is called the dialectic, understood as an eternal struggle of opposites. You will never be able to join or consolidate them in union. Impossible. There is no way to reconcile. However, *Yanantin* from the Andean conception are complete opposites, though those opposites are intimately united.The word *Yanantin* comes from *Yanapana* which means to help. The suffix "intin" means an inseparable union: opposites, but united. That is the man and the woman, because the man and the woman are two completely different entities in all areas, and yet by love they unite. For love they are together, in spite of all differentiation. That's *Yanantin*.

As for the Europeans, they must start listening. Even so, they have to start to hear other voices. Our voice must be heard. Listen to the South, listen to the Indigenous voice, listen to the voices of Indigenous women. That is, without meaning "yours is not worth listening to", because that is not our intention. *Yanantin* works. Let’s put these two things into practice.

With this type of thought the student says, "Obviously, I like this more humane way of teaching. This is another way of understanding the thinking process beyond exclusively limiting myself in reasoning." The two forms begin to coexist. Patricio Guerrero Arias, [[1]](#footnote-1) an Ecuadorian sociologist, developed this idea of the union of these two forces, of heart and reasoning. Academics are full of the reasoning function. Academe is pure reasoning, leading it to forget the heart, passion, and emotion. Meanwhile, our culture has a lot of emotion and heart.These two forces must merge, it is important. Passion and reason, combined with heart and affection cannot be undone either. These things together can make a rational, as well as emotional, human being. For example, any knowledge, thought, or reasoning together with other theories, for instance high ethics and morals, emotion, and gratitude would be ideal. The contributing factor is the *Yanantin*. Our collaboration group has tried to convert these ideas into pedagogy, where the heart and temporal reasoning come together.

**How does the poetry you are writing fit into this scheme?**

**dlTA:** Kichwa has been one of the tools that allowed me to create poetry because Kichwa is an expression of life itself, an expression of the emotion you have of seeing nature, or waking you every day, and to see your struggles concluded. They are expressions that you can say in words, in rhymes, and in literary forms. An essay may go too much into description, narration, and argumentation, while poetry simply springs from your heart, it springs from your feelings and everyday emotions.

Words just come out when you go through different emotions, for instance, when you are angry or when you feel like changing things, transforming the world, but you can’t do it immediately so you go through this terrain of illusion and dream. Through the terrain of emotions, things materialize in life as words. Words are an enormous force transformed in a literary way. It can be powerful because it can come out of your spontaneous emotion.

That is one way to look at poetry. It is a product of resorting to a language that allows you to talk about the need for immediate change that you can make in your own life and with your own quotidian elements. They may not be precisely transcendent, but your words may break through to the world through the tongue. Writing in Quechua fills me and gives me liberty to say what I desire. Sometimes I find it difficult to translate it into Spanish itself. Even more complex to translate into English. I first write in Quechua; I get those inner voices, that voice sometimes filled with a laugh, full of a fury, full of an emotion, or satisfaction, joy that you have met a certain goal. That is poetry for me; that expression is the human art of saying things through language, and through words in Quechua.

**What other questions concern you?**

**dlTA:** There are many questions like what is the new generation's understanding about these changes that have taken place all over the world? What is the role of the new society and new social groups?In regards to the upcoming generation and the students that are next in line to be professional: what is the model of civilization for these young people in this new world order and system? Starting with these questions we will move toward answers about the role the whole system has played in the last 200 years, or concerns driving the upcoming generation. We must think about the reactions to recent changes in my country, during this millennium, the last ten years? How have we managed to change the mentality of many people? Has there been success in transforming the thinking regarding the Indigenous, consider them as citizens? What did you learn in the last 10 years? What did you do in last 50 years? What things do they see as positive results in the last 200 years? What are the sources of divisions or poverty or hunger or inequality that has been generated? There is a series of answers that must be formulated.

**Any other comments?**

**dlTA:** Thank you very much for this opportunity. You have been one of the people that has really been pushing me, motivated me and been giving that strength to continue in trusting. Without that push I might have said “What am I doing here?” I do not think that I would have been able to continue to contribute because they have made us believe that we are not subjects of influence anywhere. But, this simple inspiration when you’ve said to me: "You are playing an important role in academics. You, as a Kichwa woman, are making changes", and when you invite me to be a part of your academic writings. It is empowering to see my name appear on these writings. Thank you so much for that and thank you for having trusted me.

**Irma Velasquez Nimatuj** (Xela Guatemala)

Irma Velásquez Nimatuj presented a talk on “Indigenous Activism and Social Change” in 2016, while on Visiting Appointment at Duke University. Currently she is at Stanford as visiting scholar. She has served as Executive Director of the *Mecanismo de Apoyo a Pueblos Indígenas Oxlajuj Tzikin* (Support Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples) (2005-2013). Her doctorate (2005) from University of Texas-Austin in Social Anthropology (Activist Anthropology) marks a watershed moment for Maya-K'iche' women’s educational attainment, though several others in this book are pursuing or have completed doctorates. She has also advised the Latin American and Caribbean office of UN Women (2014-2015) on Indigenous issues and contributes to UN through the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. She has published monographs and has an important column in the Guatemalan newspaper *El Periodico*. *500 years*, a documentary film, directed by Pamela Yates features Nimatuj speaking about the rising resistance movement of the Indigenous People in Guatemala, particularly during the genocide trials and some of her experience being an expert witness for the Ixil women.

Salt Lake, UT November 15, 2016

**How do you identify yourself (with regard to gender, ethnicity, socio-economics and geopolitics?**

**IVN:** It is a great joy, and honor to be with you Isabel, and to be able to connect better with you.

I identify myself as a Maya Quiché woman, originating from the urban center, a family of merchants, and coming from a sector that has had access to educational opportunities, financed by my parents. I have had access to healthcare, and good nutrition, extraordinary privilege, to which most Indigenous peoples are not privy. In addition, my training has taken place among Indigenous leaders, as well as non-natives, foreigners, ladinos, mestizos, and many others. Because of all this privilege and access, I developed the critical awareness that I have today.   
I also identify myself as part of a global world; although I do not hail from a village. Within that framework, I try to understand the Indigenous struggles, in my country, which includes the Maya people, the Garífuna people, and the Xinca people. I endeavor to connect those struggles with other people’s, in order to find the common ground of those who claim Indigenous identity. I see myself as someone trying to rethink reality, analyze the context, but also live fully in the historic moment into which I was born. I understand my life is a privilege, rather than embracing it as a disgrace, result of injustices faced in my country. I value this privilege of having the possibility to rethink in its totality the new forms of global collective resistance emerging.

**How do you characterize your activism? How has it transformed from its early stages described so well in your dissertation[[2]](#footnote-2)?**

**IVN:** There have been many changes over the last 10 years, since I wrote my doctoral thesis. In those intervening years, I have conducted an intense ethnographic study with corresponding political work, both internal and external to Guatemala. I have had the chance to participate in one of those rare opportunities in the history of humanity, of meeting men and women who survived a Maya genocide from 1975 to 1988. During this decade, I met with them, male and female, listening, meeting, and learning firsthand of the atrocities to which the Guatemalan State subjected them. This study was undertaken utilizing the tools of critical race theory, Black women’s feminism, Indigenous women’s theories, the framework of Indigenous worldview, and the corresponding networks of activist and academics from different parts of the world.

I have experienced substantial change, because I have reinforced the profound sense of this work being a collective endeavor. From a grassroots base, from people with little to no training, or limited access to rights, or the ability to fully exercise those rights, I realize great transformations of institutions and Nation-States are transpiring. I want to raise awareness because what I have discovered in all these cases of prosecution of crimes against humanity, genocide, and sexual violence against Indigenous women that are being tried in courts in Guatemala, is that these survivors of the holocaust in 1970s and 1980s galvanized the process, spurred by a profound conviction in the need for social justice before they die. Moreover, they feel responsible to do this precisely because they are survivors, and cannot rest until it is completed. They, women and men, are changing the system of corrupt justice in Guatemala. They are driving the judges. They are teaching us, university-trained, that their struggle not only will give them dignity, empowerment, peace but also a different visage, for them as well as humanity. This entire struggle has made me more humane and shown me that the Indigenous need allies.

For instance, the court case regarding the genocide committed against the Ixil people by the government of General Jose Efrain Ríos Montt illustrated the significance of combining the forces of Guatemalan Ladino intellectuals, mestizos and foreigners. Similarly, the contributions of activists, international and national organizations united together, brought those criminals to court. This demonstrates that if common goals had not been unearthed, this historic trial could not have been carried out.

Although the verdict was retracted due to formal issues, that is not important. For me, the greatest lesson is that we can work with our ideological differences, and hone a common objective which is to face the racial politics that sought to try to erase and disappear Indigenous peoples in a country as small as Guatemala. I’ve also become humble in the face of a reality, knowing that the only thing we can do in our albeit brief lifetime is to contribute a small kernel of corn. In my case, on my path, I can use academia with its tools and methodology to try and leave the world a little better than the way I received it. Since the journey along the path is collective, we must transform the face of academia, because academia pushes us to maintain projects and personal lives, isolated from the base. They taught me the relevance of collective endeavors.

**Is resistance possible at this time?**

**IVN**: resistance is not only possible, but resistance is necessary. The academy, with the capacity and resources it wields, should put them to the service of the creation of serious, long-term and profound process of contemplation and equanimity. Where individual leadership is not erased, yet collectively we try to maintain the sustainability of the space in which we are allowed to thrive and breathe.

During the last decade, the emerging reality, foreseen by the Indigenous vociferously, is one ofthe destruction of Mother Earth and of the spiritual, material, and cultural dimensions of life. For this reason, the political changes we seek must be aimed toward finding balance in life and in the natural world. Politics cannot serve to destroy the little remaining for our survival.

Despite the pervasive danger, it’s a remarkable time because Indigenous peoples have raised awareness and continue to proclaim the dire need for a new system of production and economics, both urgent and vital for human survival. Economic systems can no longer be based on mass production and mass consumption. The existing modernist project is in crisis, maxed out. Indigenous peoples propose an alternative system that responds to another logic entirely and breaks from the mold of what is already established. What matters most is the creation of spaces for interaction. Those spaces, we must acknowledge will be constructed with the intent of harnessing and confronting difference and contestation, but where ultimately leaders are obliged to negotiate.

Those who are desirous of transformation, will travel on that path. The rest will remain behind. However, the most critical aspect is the galvanization of the process. The fundamental long-term objectives we seek are: to address this unrelenting destruction of a once healthy Mother Earth, and stem the tide of the political retrogression from democratic rule. For this reason, the fact that Donald Trump won the presidency of the most powerful nation, is not a deterrent, setback or sign of finality, rather a test of our being.On the contrary, he challenges us. We have to respond with intelligence and capacity. More than anything else, respond together and united. It is an ideal time for humanity to try to ensure the dignity of all lives.

**Moving on to activist anthropology, your academic field. What role does it play today?**

**IVN:** Activist anthropology is a necessary tool that accompanies political struggle of the Indigenous People. Beyond that, there appears to be a concerted effort to make the social sciences disappear in the US and Latin America, so as to diminish their significance in disciplines like anthropology, sociology, history, gender studies, and others, and support a policy to decrease funds and relevance. Social sciences are perceived as subversive spaces. Thus, the policy of cutting funding, in order to devalue their significance.

Furthermore, these two decades of the millenium have also shown us the importance of these disciplinary fields, because they have inserted voices and the mandate to recognize certain populations and the rights of diverse people as subjects with rights on a global scale.

We must combat that erosion of knowledge, and find strategies for the empowerment of youth through the social sciences. Now more than ever, with Trumps win, critical race theory is essential, because one of the key instruments utilized in the election was racism. It was like hoisting a flag to try to coalesce the racial hatred that had been dormant in millions of US men and women. The racial hatred we attempted to bury in WWII has not disappeared. It was only shoved into the closet for a time. Now the door has been pried open, squarely placing racism on the global horizon, with dire consequences for marginalized people. More than ever, critical race theory helps explain what transpired, such that a man like him might come to gain power.

The battle for sexual rights found an ally in Trump underwritten by the conservative Right, and the rejection of those who choose to live differently from established norms. For women, gender studies may shed light on how a man of Trumps economic stature could treat women in this repulsive, demeaning and denigrating way. How is it possible given the advances in educational attainment and dissemination of information that something has not penetrated the psyche of women? How is it we continue to see the sexual violation of women and still his support garnered from women? Women’s studies must have reached a threshold beyond which ideas and transformation could not pass, which caused many ideas to stall.

Despite this, a perfect set-up for anthropology to evolve exists, and we can implement its methodology to understand these processes, and even invert questions in order to comprehend what we are living now. What we see playing out in the US is reminiscent of Guatemala under Rios Montt, when he ran for office and received support from the Indigenous, who then became the very target of the violence and genocide perpetrated by the armed conflict, even massacred. How do you explain that? An Indigenous population who voted for a military force that performed genocide on their people? That question has not been answered in Guatemala and must now be brought to the US. The answers are not just for academics, rather must be seen as critical tools to illuminate the reality of this population.

Sociology is equally useful. These are moments to reclaim political economy and not depoliticize economics, in thinking that Wall Street, revenues, and product prices will be the only determinants of our lives. In this regard, Marxism is crucial. We do not have to become Marxists, rather read Marx to revisit what he proposed. History is also fundamental. To understand these election results, perhaps looking at how history has been eliminated from our education. Various sectors were not aware of how Hitler came to power. He also employed a discourse that half of his population identified with. Trump may be twisted for some, but for others, he represents their most profound beliefs.

We must fight for decent budget in social sciences, and to preserve academic positions in those disciplines. Students must also continue to be supported, because they will help explain these social phenomena. Moreover, perhaps academia has in some manner become estranged and isolated from reality, and these processes may restore a critical view. Many activists have renounced academia. We should build bridges between both worlds.

I have worked in both realms: academic and activist. They are complementary. We note, activists delegitimize academics and academics vice a versa. We haven’t realized that both have corresponding potential. My experience in Guatemala as expert witness/ investigator is that without the theoretical, academic tools and methodological approaches, I would have not have been able to serve in that capacity and help to show the judges in court the inhumane crimes that were committed, answering questions like how, by whom, when and where. It is time to try to find the channels to work and reflect together. Clearly, the activists who are not college graduates have much to teach us. The role of academics, fortunate enough to attend university, likewise can be instructive. Last year, Guatemala experienced a series of uprisings and protests for almost eight months and ended up removing president and vice president.

It was not about academics with speeches, because there was no room for that. Rather there was anger and pain regarding the looting of our state, our resources, our taxes and the resulting 10 million people living in extreme poverty in our country.

Faced with this, neither the United Nations nor specialists bothered to analyze the corruption, even though we lived every day with it unchecked. There was corruption in buying a house, and even finding a bed in a public hospital, obtaining a job as teacher, and getting access to drinking water. What is the lesson here? We were not aware of our surroundings. Social scientists who are immersed in theoretical and academic questions, could not see or something prevented us from seeing reality. Alienated from reality, we normalized everything. Now we must return to the analysis and inquiry, reclaiming serious participative observation to see critically what is around us.

**What are your thoughts vis-a-vis what has been called the Indigenous problem?**

**IVN:** The issue of Indigenous people, life, and their struggle was determined in the case of Latin America by the Spanish conquest, and the creation of the “other.” It was a system upheld throughout the centuries. Therefore, it must be understood as part of a stage and intellectual movement that tried to explain the life and marginalization of the Indigenous Peoples. Yet these very explanations were oppressive principles because they invisibilized and racialized us, eventually leading to our position as inferior juveniles, unable to resist the oppression. Assuming the Indigenous as a question, or the problem, is to reduce them to objects, seen as a burden, which is part of the State and elitist discourse to negate our resistance movements. Why do you think they committed a genocide against us? Tired of this ignominious treatment, Indigenous People have organized and are rising up against this oppressor. It is about the most important Indigenous uprising of the 20th century. Entire pueblos realized that it was possible to take over and transform the state.

Today is another moment. It is the nation-states who are the problem. Multiple resistance movements exist in not only Mexico, also in the US, all of whom are creating a network and connections. Various native proposals are emerging, because they are communities living in adverse conditions who seek to transform modes of living and reproduction of their culture.

For the first time, Indigenous people realized that it was possible, that there was a way to transform the Guatemalan state.

**Please tell us about your professional training and background.**

**IVN:** My professional engagement is related to the international work for cooperation and development. Part of my responsibility was to try to support Indigenous organizations and communities that sought to transform the State so that their rights would be recognized in ILO Convention 169, in the UN Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and in other international frameworks. These are instruments that empower the Indigenous to transform their situation.

It went well at the beginning. However, at the meetings, the majority of people, brothers and sisters, questioned cooperation since their priority was to find their disappeared relatives[[3]](#footnote-3). Most of the cases showed me I was involved with a group of people who were survivors. Other cases involved women, raped and impregnated by the soldiers. [PBS Newshour declared the highest victimization rates were against Indigenous women.]

These judicial cases made me reject cooperation and rather, advocate for a legal approach. I could most ardently support them by becoming an expert witness, investigating and gathering evidence for mechanisms that became a technical way to give evidence of the crimes. With the expert testimonials, I reaffirm what the survivors have claimed already. I have tried to take on the expert testimonies as an historical opportunity to leave clear documentation of these lives, their testimony, social collective memory, by not invoking a technical specialized jargon, and utilizing a discourse based on collective memory. It is an attempt far beyond simple academic exercise. It absolutely cannot be mere intellectualization. I have attempted to make it more than an academic endeavor, mainly because I too, am Indigenous like them and a survivor.

Moreover, as an intellectual project it seemed an extremely racist and paternalistic model. That's how the western justice system works. I did not want to be part of that apparatus; nonetheless, it is one of a few spaces where justice exists. Right now, in Guatemala there is a huge need and there is little that can be contributed using academia as a base. Perhaps in five or ten years I will recant this decision, however it is the best I can do using my tools learned from anthropology and journalism to contribute to the plight of my brothers and sisters.

**You alluded to the shifting role of the social sciences earlier. Can you speak further?**

**IVN:** The social sciences have to help humanize law and the justice system, something I learned from the expert witness work. The role of all these systems is not only to provide justice to communities or people, it is above all, to humanize them, even 20 or 30 years later. There is no other way to prove this before the judicial tribunal[[4]](#footnote-4), to prove a survivors truth, and reaffirm these events.

Related to this is the subject of the right of Buen Vivir-Good Life. The discipline of Law could well benefit from these Native principles. Some Indigenous people have their way of defining good living, distinct from the South. Each group, regardless of being from Guatemala, Bolivia or Ecuador sees it in their own way. What is life? How should life be lived? What are the connections? With its different elements of human, nonhuman, natural, animal; what do these logics have to do with life? Honestly, constitutions will never be able to amass all these differences and visions of life. It is simply impossible, because they are extremely complex and at the same time, simple. For those in power, because they are unfamiliar with these principles, they are deemed worthless.

We should have congressmen endowed with deep sensitivity and knowledge of distinct populations. Unfortunately, those are not the people who come to power, rather they are experts in national and international business. Those in congress now seem to guarantee the progress of the business of the large transnational companies, who finance their campaigns. With regard to constitutions, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela have made significant advances, and must be valued. However, in the case of Guatemala, it will be almost impossible to see what might foster positive living conditions within our constitution. The Guatemalan constitution is an example of one of the most conservative documents in all of Latin America, despite the fact that the majority of its population is Indigenous. Faced with that formidable challenge, gaining a seat in congress as an Indigenous man or woman of conscience is almost impossible.

**Any comments about the state of the multicultural project?**

**IVN:** The multicultural project is agonizing now. One of the most important questions is the recognition of nature, with a commensurate materialization of rights. This spills over into “how are we going to survive?” How will we halt the agonizing? How are we able to contribute to each other? To what extent can we as a people help each other in building a new global economic system? One which surpasses what we have now, yet is an improvement and able to appease the majority who think that the current model is the only one. How do we shift business in order to make the deep change away from accumulation, at the expense and destruction of human beings, animals, and earth itself? How do we transform that system? No more romanticism; we are at a deep disadvantage when corporations have more power, finance embassies, and the role of ambassadors is transformed into profit-seeking agents and operators who control resistance in the countries in which they reside.

In Guatemala, the Canadian Embassy has defended corporations that extract gold, stripping the Indigenous peoples, ladinos and mestizos of their territories. They negated the consultation process and created profound social conflict in native communities and the country. The same applies to the German embassy, Taiwan, and others. We are not just talking about the US; that stage in which the North was the only one with corporate commercial interests has ended. There is a double standard, as these same countries promote the public defense of human rights and equality, while in our countries, they eye our territories, market their own interests and plunder the resources. They are responsible for the great ransacking of natural resources in Latin America.

**In what areas has a comparative view to other Indigenous populations been useful?**

**IVN:** We have a right, as Indigenous peoples to assume political roles in our country and to do something about the political affairs of our country. We have rights as Indigenous Peoples to execute policy from a different perspective. We have rights to reform the state that invisibilizes and exploits us, not only for ourselves, but for our progeny. We learn from the Bolivian case about the Indigenous movement and its interaction with Rafael Correa, the rejection of his policy, and the racism exhibited toward Indigenous, when he spoke of not “sitting on our treasury of gold-- the need for extraction as a solution for social justice.

The process in Bolivia with its highs and lows, and the contradiction that lead to an Indigenous man from the base, who comprehended the historical anguish of the population and managed to articulate it with passion, their demands and become president. How is Guatemala distinct, and why did we experience genocide? I am interested in learning about Peru and how some became involved in Sendero Luminoso, committing atrocities against their own people. How have some been annulled from their communities for that participation. How to transform that stigma?

There are no recipes for independence processes, which may or may not be the solution to a failing or absent state. Take the example of the Indigenous from the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua who during the Sandinista government were able to gain autonomy of territory and land. This was crucial, though not enough, given contemporary skirmishes between Misquito, Rama, Garífuna and mestizos for control of land and resources. It demonstrates the way in which the process of preserving and extending the production and guarantees for a subsistence existence have been denied. Therefore, the policy of keeping the Indigenous in poverty is a means to curtail self-rule and take away the self-sustaining lifeways of food consumption and self-sufficiency. How many times have we fallen into that trap?

In the case of Mexico, where I have greatest proximity, how does an Indigenous population of over 10 million people not have Indigenous intellectuals in high government posts confronting the failed and corrupt nation-state. If it is indeed this corrupt, why are there no Indigenous proposals on the table? The only one is from Zapatistas, who incited the world around? There are more than 50 Indigenous communities there, and so logically there should be that many proposals. I wonder how they have silenced and buried that movement, one so conscious of their situation? It is clear that there are multiple ways to eliminate the Indigenous by robbing them of their rights to self-production and fomenting the dependency of need. This challenge is common to every Indigenous group.

Let me give you another example. I remember as a child, that recycling was nothing extraordinary; it was part of life. We recycled milk cans, recycled jars of juice, made candles with these bottles, boiled water, and boiled nixtamal[[5]](#footnote-5). Everything was a process of renewal, everything that had to do with the husks, for instance. It was processed and used to fertilize the corn and to produce the grains. We were guaranteed food. What we needed was so little. Salt, soap, oil, which were like priorities. Clothes were produced, knitted, new dye colors were created as well as designs. Then we were told that we weren’t living in a developed way. We produced clothing, with local textiles and businesses. They convinced our ancestors to shift to inorganic production in order to increase the volume, at a cheaper price. Today the West markets the concept that everything organic is the best, the healthiest, but as Indigenous people, organic production has been a staple concept. All those western chemicals are killing us and now organic food is all the rage? Only available to the wealthy elite?

I have tried to strengthen and forge networks with my Indigenous brothers and sisters. On this path my own sense of self-awareness has been enriched. Though in the end, it spurs more questions than answers.

**Would you like to add anything else?**

**IVN:** I would like to thank you for this space you have unsealed. Being outside of Guatemala at the moment, creates more freedom to speak and recognize the contemporary struggles and challenges faced by Indigenous people from local to global, to extreme poverty and lack of access to resources. In Guatemala, one lives steeped in tension from all of the persecution occurring, and subjugated by an oppressive system.

**Aura Cumes** (Chimaltenango, Guatemala)

Aura Estela Cumes Simon completed her doctoral thesis under the direction of Dr. Rosalba Aida Hernandez at CIESAS. The study is entitled *La "india" como "sirvienta". Servidumbre doméstica, colonialismo y patriarcado en Guatemala* in 2014 [*The “Indian” Woman as “Servant.” Domestic Service, Colonialism and Patriarchy in Guatemala 2014*]. She has published extensively and continues to be a consultant for organizations that empower Indigenous women. I interviewed Aura in 2013 for the book *Indigenous Feminist Narratives I/We: Wo(man) of (an)Other Way (2015)*. This was the second interview she granted me, which fortunately was transcribed in its entirety here.

Chimaltenango Sept. 2017

**How do you self-identify?**

**AC:** I am Aura Cumes. I am a part of the Maya Kaqchikel people. *Kaqchikel* is a millenary term- it is one that has survived the processes of colonization. Regarding gender, I do not assume an identity as a woman. It seems to me that being a woman and being Mayan is a very complicated relationship, because in terms of everyday life and experience being a woman and being Mayan cannot be separated. Another term which some compañeras use is “poor,” and these are three links of the chain, in terms of a political struggle. I do not consider myself to be poor. I am not rich either, but the term “poverty,” which has a connotation of “misery” in other countries, has been a huge judgement thrust upon the Indigenous people. It is a term which puts us in a place of being subjects who are lacking, but we are not. Since the processes of colonization, a mechanism of constant pillaging of riches has been imposed on the Mayan people (as with other peoples of Latin America). Their riches have been embezzled in every sense- their spiritual and material riches, as well as their culture. It is a despoiling, which has not stopped them from taking everything from the people, precisely because of the resistance that there has been against it. It is a pillaging that continues and that rears its head again in every moment of history. I do not consider myself to be poor, but of course in the colonial political economy we are labeled as poor, and are treated as such. It is like being “Indigenous,” because before this term was invented in the colonial era we were not Indigenous. Being a woman is also a matter of dispute because it is an another term that has been constructed. These two terms, along with being poor, are the three characteristics that will give form to the struggle, because that is where they situate us. Therefore, what I claim for myself is my identification as a Maya. I do not claim myself as a woman like feminism does.

**How do you define activism?**

**AC:** I was interviewed by an online journal called *Plaza Pública.* During this interview I thought about my activism, which is not an organized activism, but one whichbegins with the mechanism of being able to rebel against various forms of racism. As a child I did not call it “racism,” because this term has only been used recently within Maya political action. We used terms such as disdain, humiliation and mistreatment, which we received on a daily basis.

My activism begins when I go to the market and someone calls me a “piece of shit Indian.” I do not accept that. From there I rebel, even though rebelling in situations where you have no power is complicated. When I used to rebel against the *ladina[[6]](#footnote-6)* woman who ran a store, I had little chance of winning, because the *ladinos* hold the power that is reserved exclusively for non- Indigenous in this country. For that reason, rebelling when I was a child also led to the consequence of stronger aggression against me. I remember my sister in those moments. She would tell me, “you shouldn’t react, because it will be worse for you.” Yet I recall my activism was ignited there. My activism did not begin with the consciousness building that took place later, just in that moment. My activism as a woman initiated when I was allowed to play an important role in the Bible School. I knew that I could do what they asked of us, which was to learn alongside males. I was also aware that when one is an adolescent, there is a separation in which it is the men who speak for the women, based on the biblical passage that states that women are to be quiet in the congregation because they are not allowed to speak. At that point, I began to wonder (as any human being would do under those conditions) how it was possible that those boys (who moreover were slower when it came to learning) would come to speak for us, simply because they were males. These are the things that cause me not to accept the conditions in which I exist. My activism is structured there. After we signed the peace agreement [1996] I found myself in organizations that are designed as Maya, and with women’s organizations as well. When I hear the purpose of their struggle articulated, I realize that to a large extent they involve something that I have been doing by myself. I rarely work for Indigenous organizations. If anything, I am closer to women’s organizations, but my activism continues to be largely individual.

**How would you characterize your activism?**

**AC:** Activism is a decision within the field or discipline in which we apply ourselves, because women resist and engage in activism in very different ways. If I go to the market, I come across women who are not organized against, for example, racism, but who are practicing activism or resisting in a different way. You can go to the market and come across women who are proudly Indigenous, and who have never been part of an organization that stipulates the patterns to follow in order to be a defender of the Indigenous.

Resistance exists everywhere. As I see it, one of the differences between the Indigenous women of Mexico and us, the Maya of Guatemala, is that we have structured a sense of being Maya without necessarily being *campesinas[[7]](#footnote-7)*. This does not mean that we are degrading the *campesinas*, but rather that we cannot assume an identity as *campesinas* when we have never had a single tract of land to work- we inhabit urban areas. My parents planted for a time, but it did not last long. There are many women who are merchants in the markets that cannot call themselves *campesinas*, since they have made a living in a different way. I say this because when I was living in Mexico they always assumed I was a *campesina*. When I publish my articles people write comments such as “yes, another *campesina* woman and her struggles”, but I cannot usurp a position that is not mine. I am not a *campesina*, because I have never lived that way.

On the other hand, many other *compañeras,* my colleagues that have the honor of being *campesinas* can claim it. The important point is that in Guatemala being Indigenous is not the same as being a *campesina*. This constitutes a more autonomous identity of being Indigenous, unlike other countries, even Mexico, where the more educated you are, the fewer ethnic markers you carry, in anthropological terms. There everything Indigenous is generally associated with *campesino*. So here in Guatemala, being Indigenous has a distinctive feature which is more autonomous in terms of the construction of the self, and the direction of the struggle.

Is it possible to be an activist and fight against everything that is happening? Being a political activist, questioning the system in an organized or disorganized manner is something very different from resisting, **because questioning the system is a decision that one makes with the real consequences that attend that decision.** On the other hand, resisting can be done in many ways without even having to raise your voice. There are many silent, unseen resistances that are effective at change of many things. More so than the kind of resistance where one speaks aloud and cries out. There are many people, like my own mother, that say “never go to protests, never react.” She (like many other women) has a way of indirectly questioning the system. However, she, more than my father, is the one who has taught me to be **proudly Maya with her silent form of resistance.** There are many people who, due to how sinister this country can be towards people who openly protest, do not openly engage in activism, because open activism is a decision that one makes along with the accompanying risks. Many women are not openly activists that nevertheless have made changes from their place in society, in the ways they are able to do it. All activism and resistance has as a result not necessarily to always question the system, but rather support it. There are many Indigenous people that consider themselves proudly Indigenous, for example here where I live in Chimaltenango. With their pride and their clothing, they are on the side of powerful groups in this country. They are the Indigenous people that satisfy the quota of multiculturality in those spaces. Being Maya is not a guarantee of always questioning the place of the Mayas, especially for those groups that have economic power due to their position as long-standing merchants. These are the contradictions of the present situation.

**What is the role of the social sciences?**

**AC:** Generally speaking, the social sciences are the sciences most closely related to the struggles of the *campesinos*, to the social movements, and to the Indigenous people. They occupy various spaces depending on the context in which they are found. If we speak of Mexico, Mexican anthropology is to a large extent a traditional anthropology that sees the “subject” as barbarous, and perhaps with an element of paternalism or maternalism, and in that way the “subject” is studied. I say this because of the time I spent in Mexico immersed in an anthropology that was very much traditional and tends toward expropriation. In spite of our encounters with the professors and our criticisms within the classroom, many instructors would not cede to the possibility of viewing Indigenous subjects in the way that we claimed. They assumed the authority of giving their “subjects” the place that they as social scientists wanted to give them. Thus, the anthropology that I had the opportunity to learn was very much colonial. There are exceptions- there are always groups of instructors that are doing everything in their power to decolonize the social sciences and establish a different relationship with their subjects. But doing everything they can does not mean there are not serious contradictions; it does not mean they are always listening to what the subject has to say.

For example, I remember in our discussions when we would say “do not treat us in that paternalistic or maternalistic way,” in response they would break down crying, because we did not recognize the action that the non-Indigenous subjects were taking and how they were risking their lives for us. That is not a dialogue. Many people feel that they are treated unjustly because they are giving part of their lives to other struggles, but in that case, the social scientist is making a mistake. If they have chosen the path of fighting for the Indigenous people along with women or whomever, it is a mutual struggle. We are embarking on a process of mutual liberation. We are not asking them for support or solidarity. These issues have not been sufficiently debated and we are very much immersed in that. The social scientists need to establish a mechanism of dialogue with us- we need to create a dialogic position with the social scientists, which *we* are as well. We too can be said to be scientists who expropriate with the people we converse with, because unfortunately that is the nature of anthropology and sociology. We are trying to contribute something to our society using what we have learned, but that does not mean we do not fall into the errors with which anthropology is burdened.

There are no academic spaces in Guatemala, there are no social sciences. What we have here is a rich production of an experience that in many other cases is only theorized. I appreciated the Guatemalan experience more when I went to Mexico, because there I found myself with young people that had gone from bachelor’s degrees to master’s degrees and then to their doctorates. In my case I was older when I went to study for my doctorate, and all of their discussions were purely theoretical. There were discussions about “if Foucault slept, what bed he slept in, if he smoked” that to me seemed like huge sessions of wasted time, sessions of entirely irrelevant discussions.

We Guatemalans, on the other hand, had experiences to theorize, such as of genocide, of structures and forms of violence and racism. In Mexico, they would kick us out of the classroom every time we brought up the topic. This type of occurrence exists in Guatemala also because it is a very small and chaotic country. This circumstance is actually a great resource, which results in the impossibility of theorizing in written form, because in this country there is no place to study and write. There is no work, so there may be *compañeras* that don’t have a job and do not have the luxury to say “I only want to write.” Those spaces do not exist. Moreover, the few academic positions in Guatemala are occupied by *ladinos*, because here academic spaces are racialized by both male and female *ladinos*. The rationale at times follows this pattern: “we are women, thus we have no spaces,” but *ladina* women have many more spaces available. Many of us who have pursued study in the academic world have no spaces for professional engagement, because there is no academy. When an opportunity arises within the limited academy, those that have more privilege in the racialization process are those who ascend into the academic world. Nonetheless, we have a rich experience, and there is nothing to envy of other locations that own academic spaces where they may produce, yet lack our Indigenous experience.

**How do you respond to the notion of an Indian Problem?**

**AC:** The Indigenous problem is a completely racist and colonial term. It was used in Latin America in the 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s when the *criollos[[8]](#footnote-8)* held parliaments to ask “what do we do with the Indians?”, because the colonial process erased the fact that the Indian is not the problem, but rather the problem is the process of pillaging. After the colonialization, the structuring of the liberal processes with their idea of progress constructed an impoverished Indigenous person who would be the *cause* of their own poverty. Therefore those history-erasing years have caused the term “Indigenous problem” to become naturalized. The Indigenous problem says that we are the problem because we are incapable of developing, of integrating ourselves, of forgetting our backwardness to be able to aim for progress, development, etc. It is very much a colonial term, and at this point (at least in Guatemala) we do not use it in academic environments, and in fact, we ought to problematize it more forcefully. Here the Indigenous people are not the problem, the problem is the constant pillaging of the Indigenous population that continues to this day.

**What are the most productive spaces for transformation?**

**AC:** I have no community. There are many Indigenous people, like myself, who cannot go to a small space which they can call a community, or a space that is structured on a communal basis. There are many women who can; if you asked them, “what is your community?” it is clear to them. I live in this place called Chimaltenango where my parents immigrated to fifty-five years ago, and where I have absolutely no employment opportunities available. My work is on a national level. I consider my community, the place where I take action, to be the space of the Maya people. To pair “Indigenous” and “community” is somewhat bold, because not all of us Indigenous people live in a community [comunidad colectiva] that can be recognized as such.

My most daunting goal is to continuously counter the colonial domination that defines the lives of the Indigenous people even today. With the exploitation by means of extraction of our natural resources throughout the country, this colonization is even more evident. Domination continues to define the Indigenous by denying their political proposals. For example, the constitutional reforms that were rejected by congress a few months ago. They delineate the political place of the Indigenous people in the sense of not listening to their proposals, or listening to them, and then labeling them as ideologized/ideological or supported by international cooperation. We, the Indigenous people, continue to have no political status in this country, and for that reason the dominant stereotype of the Indians as servants continues to exist. The notion that we must be supervised, and that any political proposition we have is suspected of being subversive, or supported by international cooperation, becomes justification for them not to grant us political status

Within the Indigenous populations, we strive not to replicate the lifeways inherited from colonial powers. In that colonial structure, differences are necessarily put in a hierarchy of inferiority to superiority wherein, although there is no reason that the condition of being a man or a woman should imply the arbitrarily-constructed position of inferior or superior status. The Indigenous people designate this division in a manner similar to the *ladino* world; it is between who orders and who obeys. It is an ideological construct that we as Indigenous people have hauled along. If you are old, you are worth more; if you are young, you are worth less. Creating differential status in hierarchies is of course a colonial structure that we as Indigenous people have inherited. In many cases, there are people (primarily men) who defend the structure of control over the lives of women. I am opposed to all of this. Many within the Maya population criticize me for my opinion because there are many men and also women that deny the existence of these power relations between us that do in factexist. What is also important is to reclaim the millenary principles, premises that are necessarily contradictory, and which are surely burdened with hierarchies, but when one reads them in the ancient texts, like the Popol Vuh and other books, or in the oral reproduction of the Mayan languages, we realize that we continue to be the heirs of a world with an epistemological richness that we still have not forcefully vindicated. In that epistemological richness, we have a political horizon of relations between men and women that is different from the occidental model, and those political horizons are the ones we have to put at the base of our struggles.

One of the methods that I have supported is establishing a dialogue with the past. This dialogue is going to be tense and contradictory, because nobody really knows what our past was like, but establishing this dialogue implies identifying what there is, what remains, and what aspirations there are. It also implies looking for new ways of understanding the life and the world that remains, and therefore placing new epistemologies in the dispute of epistemologies that are currently shaping the reality of the people. Thinking [cognitive] is crucial- I know that feeling is in vogue right now, but I vindicate thinking and it is important to find a place for it. True, we have underappreciated feeling for so long, but it is important to insert thinking in the debate of ideas taking place in this country, and from there to turn it into a mechanism and a strategy [to shape our existence]. I also vindicate thinking- cognitive process because I do not know how to do anything other than what I have learned- to write, to think, to speak. Everyone thinks, but in this case, it means thinking in all dimensions about a specific topic and a specific problem. We live in a world where ideas are very important, where writing is very important, which implies you can fight from there, and thus from that position, we do it.

On the other hand, I also accompany several women’s movements such as that of the *comadronas*. The *comadronas* are what are called “midwives” in other areas, but that translation does not reflect what the *comadronas* do in Guatemala. They are women that in many towns or communities handle up to ninety percent of births, but who are nevertheless controlled and persecuted by the health system. The *comadronas* are women that have much to tell us about the construction and vision of the Indigenous world, that world that to a large extent has been unseen and misunderstood, but still persecuted. I have supported the movement of the *comadronas* in the sense of giving visibility to the colonial forms of control that oppress them as Maya, as women and as inhabitants of the rural area. They are heavily persecuted by the health system which blames them for maternal deaths. The result of this impugning on the part of the health system is the invisibilization of the real cause of these maternal deaths, which is not necessarily at the hands of the *comadronas*. We have established this. We have written about who the *comadronas* are, but we have also established dialogues with the Ministry of Health. We are creating a political group of the *comadronas* so that they can also construct their own ways to contest control of the official system. I am working with them. I am also supporting the *tejedoras* (weavers), which is another movement of Indigenous women. Both the *tejedoras* and the *comadronas* are women who, in many cases, have never gone to school. They cannot read or write, but they are women who possess great wisdom.

In these cases, what I do as an anthropologist is just another job that resembles the work of any other woman in this country. As an anthropologist or an activist, I can never have a position of superiority. Quite the opposite- when listening to the *comadronas* and the *tejedoras*, their great wisdom helps us understand a world that we must vindicate. I do not place myself in their struggles in a position of superiority or inferiority, because what happens in that case is that many academics say “all right, let’s go to talk with the women who have never attended school.”

We all hold a part of the truth. We have all been constructed by some ideological mechanism to an extent, as we can witness in church and other places. So I position myself with them in a way that opens the possibility of a horizontal dialogue: I can criticize them, and they can criticize me. I am very happy to be in these two movements of women, which are not movements emanating from the urban centers or of women that work in ONGs (non-profit, non-governmental organizations). Rather they are women who live in their communities with very real problems, and who in this moment, want to seek recognition as well as abolish the control by, and the extraction projects driven by the State.

**Would you consider yourself a feminist?**

**AC:** At times, important subject matter in our struggles arises for which there is no name, because the word does not exist. I am not a feminist. Neither a community-descended [from the comunidad/community] feminist, nor a decolonial feminist, in spite of the fact that I am in all of these groups. I am a part of GLEFAS (Latin American Group of Studies, Training and Feminist Action). They know that I am not a feminist. I support the struggle for decolonization and the anti-patriarchal struggles. However, I do not identify as a feminist because I do not believe that what I do only stems and can be understood from the perspective of feminism. Feminism is only a part of what I do, and when feminism arrogantly places itself in a position of saying “until we came along, women had not opened their eyes,” it immediately co-opts the struggle. I do not want to be co-opted by anyone. **The epistemologies that I am trying to vindicate in this moment do not come from feminism.** I respect feminism and I have learned from it, but I do not identify as a feminist. The necessary critique that I make of the version of feminism that has arrived here in Guatemala is that the history of women does not begin in Europe or the United States. Here the history of women and of their struggles always begins when the lives of women are being threatened. That premise permits us to observe and think about the past, the struggles of women in the colonial era, and even earlier. However, in the colonial era and during the dictatorship, in the era of genocide, an important women’s struggle emerges. If we think ignorantly that until feminism in the 1980s came along women had never opened their eyes, it closes our mind to the broader endeavors of resistance by women. For that reason, I do not accept it. My dialogue with the past is a premise that allows me to think that this dialogue can take place anywhere.

On the other hand, I do respect the notion of communal organization as a possible basis for lifeways, which communal feminism and other approaches to Indigenous struggles are trying to salvage in the face of the extraction projects here. The lands and riches that pertain to an Indigenous community really do not belong to anyone, because they are not held in the name of a single individual. Yet that impossibility of understanding the nature of collective struggle makes me think that the communal, the collective, and the communitary should be spaces that organize the lives of people anywhere in the world. In our communities/pueblos, there are many cases where it is structured in this way. I come from a place that is not an Indigenous communidad [community] because it does not function that way. Yet that should not suggest that Guatemala and Latin American are not organized to a large extent along communitary processes.

We should give credit to the comunidad for what is its’ communal essence.

The community is something that I respect, value and also vindicate from that stance, but I do not consider myself a feminist, because that implies subordinating myself epistemologically to feminism, which is something I reject as aforementioned. You can say that my struggles resemble those of feminism, because people immediately identify me as a feminist, even though I am not. Apparently, something I say must resemble elements of the feminist struggle. Another imperative is the vindication of our cosmovision of life. It is important because we exist, and our cosmovision is real. Arrogantly, the capitalistic and occidental world does not want to recognize the existence of these people.

**What are the biggest challenges you see?**

**AC:** The current struggles are hugely complex. The fact that many people are heading to the streets or protesting in different ways is related to the fact that in this moment, institutions like CICIG (International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala), or the work of an MEP (USAID Monitoring and Evaluation Program) as well as a committed Public Ministry have uncovered so much evidence of the many forms of corruption that it is impossible to continue hiding them. Unfortunately, for a long time corrupt entities in conjunction with the twisted way in which power has been erected in this country were covered up by the rumors spread by anti-communist groups who claim the struggles of the Indigenous people, of women, and of the social movements are necessarily communist-based. The social movements have been fighting for a long time to make corruption evident, though they have not been justly heard because they have been branded as communists. When other sectors fight against corruption, this dominant misconception in Guatemala gives them greater validity. Nonetheless, I am happy that there are many people protesting against the mechanisms of corruption. Apart from just observing it, we see where the power is in this country, and in whose hands it lies. It is an important step, but it is not entirely supportive of Indigenous people. Right now, those who are against corruption are opposed to the constitutional reforms we propose, and to the very revisions that oppose the politicians who have handed over the Indigenous communities to transnational corporations. Even so, the fight against corruption is a step that can help to uncover other forms of power in this country and for that reason it makes me happy.

**What does it mean to be an Indigenous woman today?**

**AC:** I do not speak from the perspective of an identity, but from a condition. Yesterday I was rereading the words of Ginés de Sepúlveda when he and Bartolomé de las Casas were debating whether or not the Indians had souls. Sepúlveda said that “the Indians are slaves by nature, as the animal is to man, as the wife is to the husband, as the son is to the father,” etc. What he was trying to understand was a completely hierarchical world, which for him is the nature of the legitimate order of things. We are living in a world perfectly structured in that way, where hierarchies make a lot of sense. But in that hierarchical chain, we Indigenous women are placed on the lowest rung. For a long time I have been questioning feminism and gender theory, because every time it tries to study violence against women, it goes to the domestic arena. In the home, this theory sees the Indigenous men as the culprits, which obfuscates State violence and institutional violence against men, the violence transpiring in the public domain and streets where Indigenous men are not the victimizers. Now, if we keep the place of Indigenous women in mind (and here I refer to the *comadronas* and the *tejedoras*, and to the women who were violently raped during the war), and we observe how power is structured around women, we realize that any human being who is ranked higher on the power structure can dispossess her in any way. A *ladino* man can dispossess her; a *ladina* woman or a foreigner can dispossess an Indigenous person, and Indigenous men and women in “better” economic conditions can do the same. Indigenous women are the lowest in this hierarchy. They have the possibility of being displaced in so many ways. How can we visibilize domination from that place? It is important to construct it, and it is exactly what we are doing with the *tejedoras* and *comadronas*. It is not the same to observe the domination from a place of privilege, like a *ladino* man, a *ladina* woman, or a foreigner who observes the oppression in this country.

Therefore, our place in society is one of multiple dispossessions, but these multiple dispossessions give us the possibility, if we do it consciously, to analyze the power in myriad ways, and therefore we have the possibility of laying out a way of understanding domination, which is not one-dimensional. Instead, it gives us the chance to discover the various aspects. However, we are not the ones who produce epistemologies, science, or politics, and for that reason, every person who wields that power, manages to add another dimension of what they see from their perspective. If we, Indigenous women were able to speak, to render the shape of the domination, and our vision of the possible solutions, we would make an important contribution from the place of multiple displacements in which we have been located. We could also have a place in which we would be able to contribute to the understanding and to the solution of an issue that in this moment is only intelligible to a limited extent. We have the historical possibility of a distinct struggle. In terms of identity, I do not know. I am not going to start folklorizing or romanticizing. I leave it that we face many struggles in which we are involved.

Juana Batzibal (Guatemala City, Guatemala) Coban, September 2017

**How do you self-identify?**

JB: I am a Maya Kaqchickel woman, that is my primary identity, with a commitment to struggle. That is to say, I seek change not only for women, but also for People and Nations, in this case, the Maya People of Guatemala, who strive to put into practice autonomy and self-determination. We also aim to reinstate and reclaim the concept of “Buen Vivir – Good Life” as a paradigm, which in the West has been considered an alternative to save humanity. It is a new paradigm for Westerners, however for us, as Ancient Pueblos, it is a millennial paradigm. It is the basis and sustenance of the Maya civilization.

**How do you define the term activism and how would you characterize your activism, if you accept that term?**

**JB:** I do identify myself as an activist, yes and no. We assume two and three roles at once. In my condition of being a woman, one contributes by way of research and training. In the case of Guatemala in particular (due to the dynamic that is born from the defense of territory and Mother Earth), naturally we are engaged in activism. Also, we need to manifest political proposals for structural changes in this State in which we are living. As you may realize, today increasingly there is much turmoil confronting our governing bodies and individual citizens, equally so in the legislative bodies as well as in the executive. There is a fissure that begins with the State structure and the Nation. In Guatemala, there is a state without a nation, whereas there has been a nation without a state for awhile. That state, which is constituted from the Greco-Roman model, does not correspond (nor respond) to a nation that is based on a holistic and cosmogonic way of thinking. There has been a fundamental clash, from the moment of political and legal development, during the period of creating laws and codes, wherein the entire population of the Indigenous People, were excluded permanently from the process. Regardless whether one is Maya, Garífuna o Xinka, or one of our mestizo brothers who live in poverty or in rural areas, no one was included. That marginalization obliges us in many circumstances to have to engage in activism, but we cannot separate or isolate activism exclusively within the political realm, or within research or training. We must imagine our contributions in this permanent battle in a more integrated way. For this reason, I see myself as an activist 100%, yet I also detach from the term activism. I am a social anthropologist.

**Is resistance and activism possible in this moment of 2017**?

**JB:** It is happening. In fact, it has always been in play- not only in this time, but years ago as well, ever since we started to expropriate our lands from the multinational corporations, who had been supported by the Guatemalan state. Lately, our territories have fallen into the hands of these corporations. The most difficult part is that not only do they control the lands, but they are destroying the territory through their extraction projects, like mining, hydroelectric, monoculture, and petroleum. There are a huge number of large companies that are entering our territories and removing, absconding with everything of value, our riches, from Mother Earth. Moreover, they have triggered the outbreak of a series of diseases in our people. They have fomented social unrest, and these conflicts are what have caused a divide in our tribal communities and families. There are those in favor of the companies, because the tribal community members are bought. I refer to heads of families, community leaders, and this causes complex clashes amongst us.

Thus, from this example, it is clear, we are permanently implicated in activism. There are protests at the national level as well in each regional level, in every linguistic community. Sometimes there are protests against the very real and dire circumstances in which these very communities are living. This has to do with the capitalist paradigm as well. There is a colonial economic model of extraction and accumulation, which does not allow us any other alternative other than confrontation in this manner because we [Indigenous people] are not participants or beneficiaries, nor are we consulted or meaningfully involved in any part of those projects.

In Guatemala, and other countries of Latin America in the world, ILO Convention 169 from the International Organization of Labor, which in theory and mandate should require consultation with the nation-states before initiating projects of any kind, be they: economic, political, or administrative. It all goes unheeded. Consultation and coordination are not undertaken. In addition, the consultation we have conducted in our own communities, and our organizations, the State refuses to recognize.

They do not acknowledge the link and role that these Indigenous consultations play. Neither still, do we seek to have the State alone conduct its consultation prior to the concession of our territories. These are the real and daunting challenges we must face and fight. In that sense, women like us, who confront repressive authorities as in the case of police, anti-protest squads, the very army, and also challenge real troubling examples, like recently in San Juan Sacatepéquez, where sisters were incarcerated or orders for the capture in Ixtahuacan against the Indigenous. There are various people who have been confronting these forces and actions, like the sisters of La Puya en San Rafael las Flores. Of the numerous communities that have been affected, many are the women who have resisted for months, even years against that invasion in our territories.

**How do you understand the function and relevance of the social sciences today?**

**JB:** As science, as disciplines, they should always be at the service of society. The issue is not about the science itself as much as the people who devise and administer the sciences. In many cases, the social scientists utilize their knowledge against the people in our pueblos. We have experienced this situation clearly in Guatemala, because even some of our Maya brothers and sisters with academic backgrounds have been coopted in that way. In terms of economics, it has a similar impact on the Indigenous peoples. In our country, knowledge is not valued, and those who attempt to educate themselves are not recognized for the effort they put into their education. Thus, because their employment does not carry much economic value, the companies abuse and exploit workers. The companies have more resources and know the importance of having people from the community in their pocket in order to secure more profit. Therefore, the first thing they do is coopt as many s possible. They offer them key positions, in theory, because in reality they are not given decision-making power. However, by means of providing them a salary in essence that is much better than they would normally have with our organizations, necessity obligates our brothers to cross over to the other side. Unfortunately, then they put their knowledge to use for the corporation, rather than for our organizations. We have witnessed this on various fronts.

Therefore, in their purest form, the social sciences are good. Any science is valuable to the extent that it is applied reasonably. Yet we realize the economic reality, as in the case of University of San Carlos, which is an institution that had historically been in solidarity with the Indigenous people, yet 16 years ago they were coopted and disappeared from our struggle. This is to say, it is not so much that the social sciences are dysfunctional, rather the issue concerns how the social sciences are manipulated and used as tools of oppression by individuals.

Knowledge is very important for our struggles- for anthropology, sociology, social work. I wonder about how to realize this interdisciplinarity so as to advance concrete proposals. If we changed from not only approaching problems from a discrete discipline, rather adopting an integrated perspective, with the social sciences, legal studies, administration, economics, psychology, with all of these amalgamated, we could advance satisfactorily. However, that is precisely the opposite of what happens since we must specialize in particular disciplines, which impedes our ability to interrelate and correlate our knowledge. Ultimately we clash. This is the current problem, even though it is not only relevant to the social sciences.

**Speaking about decolonizing methods lacking in the social sciences**.

**JB:** That is a fundamental point. Social science has taught us methodologies, techniques in which we see the individual as nothing more than an object. During the era of my studies, the concept of the “informant” was defined as exclusively a person who might be a subject of “legal scrutiny” or a “political subject”. The relationship was of “I, the investigator,” and that research subject was mere “informant.” We have been trying to resolve that dilemma, in order to visualize research precisely where there is a different focus. It is a relationship of “you-you”. As researcher, I know nothing more than the other person. I, the investigator, only know something different from those who convey it to me. The person gives me information they know, and in this manner, we complement one another, and that is the fundamental point. One of the basic principles of my work, and certainly fundamental to my culture, is complementarity. When we speak of complementarity, it is not necessarily only between men and women. It is the complementarity between humanity and nature, which in our research is “subject: investigator.” Both of us convert to status of political subjects, if we really want to impose a positive application onto all scientific knowledge. To this extent, the word decolonize is key- how are we going to apply science from any perspective. Instead of speaking of knowledge from the imperious egocentrism predominant now, rather can we adopt a collective perspective?

**How would you respond to the colonizer’s oppressive trope that essentializes the Native People as an Indian Problem?**

**JB:** We have slowly quashed these concepts. For many years, they have labelled us a “problem.” Nowadays, they continue thinking along those lines. The crux here is that the Indigenous pueblos do not concur, and we do not see ourselves as the problem. Yet the problem lies within the State that cannot visualize the actual composition of the entire Nation. Neither can, or does it understand that the economic model, that is functioning and imposed by them, is flawed, and if they continue to utilize that economic model, then “we are the problem.” However, with respect to our own model of development, they are the problem. The question is how to find a middle ground where we all can be participants in our own development? Beginning with that middle ground of the public sphere, all those in public office have a responsibility to truly see, understand and represent their specific nation. Here [Guatemala] those in the government seem not to know the history of their people. They base themselves in the philosophies of those [non-Maya] governing the State. However, we must realize that it is the Maya philosophy, the very principles and values of the Maya cosmovision, that **they** do not know. For them, the Maya philosophy is a thing of the past. The Maya lived in Tikal or those [Maya] currently alive who they consider to be ignorant, illiterate, and unable to contribute to development.

Nonetheless, we are the ones responsible for the economic growth of this entire Guatemalan nation. In that sense, we are not the problem. Neither are we an ethnic problem, as Héctor Díaz-Polanco called it. The ethnic question has nothing to do with this subject. We are a pueblo, a community of people, who seek our own development through autonomy and self-determination, which implies a return to, taking up if you will, of the concept of Good Life [Buen Vivir]. That is the paradigm we are trying to recuperate from the perspective of our ancestors.

**What are the most daunting challenges facing your people and self?**

**JB:** One of the biggest challenges for those non-Native who wield the economic and political power is their inability to grasp the nature of our worldview as First Peoples. I, myself, cannot visualize across the boards everything in this context that refers to our territory. I, as Juana Batzibal, cannot say much about a thing, if I am not immersed in the totality of the experience. In this regard, it is a challenge for the Indigenous, and for women, it is even harder, because there is a principle in our community, that of duality and complementarity, with all ways of thinking that have been imposed on us before. There is no doubt that machismo also prevails in our communities. Thus, a woman is three times stronger and more robust than anything she faces because she needs to overcome and surpass fragmentation in our families and our communities. Beyond that, amongst us a problem exists as well. We, as Indigenous women, sometimes do not respect our own vision for the feminist movement. We always consider that the feminists must work *for* Maya women or other Indigenous women everywhere. The politicians are stuck in a mentality that we are juvenile, or incapable of proposing action or concrete plans. We must make everyone understand there is another way to envision contestation and change, a different way to understand life, and that we can chime in and add our energy and strength in order to change patriarchal thought that has been enshrouded within the Guatemalan State.

**Cristina Marin (Mapuche)** email/skype November 2017

**How do you self-identify with regard to ethnicity, gender, geo-politics and/or other aspects?:**

**CM:** I, Cristina Marin, I, recognize myself as member of Mapuche Pueblo, in the territory of Wal Mapu, that is to say the land of the east, also Puelche. Mapuche means People of the Land, our cultural identity is Kimún. Our territory is Wajmapu and our language is Mapuzungun. I am a Werken [Spokesperson] for the community. Our culture is matriarchal. Because of that matriarchy, and in support of them, I work in the field of gender studies integrating the perspective of First Peoples. In that capacity, I am actively involved in the annual national meetings and forums that discuss the rights of native women in Argentina. In addition, the topic of global economics impacts us heavily given that many of us are the heads of households, providers, and even more since many of our men do not have easy access to employment. Many of their jobs are temporary.

Likewise, we also engage in more militant forms of public protest for education and health policy, reform and equity, though that stems from voluntary interventions. Implicit in that challenge are the structural and soft non-economic barriers of a capitalist country where it is daunting to impose or institute the transformation of consciousness toward respect and protection of biodiversity or *Itrofilmongen* [natural law]. Biodiversity is related culturally and spiritually for us to everything that surrounds us- environment, animals, and people.

I consider myself first and foremost a militant social Mapuche Tehuelche [Mapuche word meaning fierce people]. Therefore, I insist on the recognition of our People’s preexistence and legal right to our territory.

**How do you define activism? How would you characterize your engagement as such, and is it possible today in 2017?**

**CM:** With regard to activism, activism is a constant in our lives. It is part of our daily struggle and our resistance.

What is our intercultural modality in this regard? In the state or condition of participation, we are true and genuine to our communities and the organizations constituting them which then spills over into our conception of education. We want to live and learn as First Peoples.

How does this modality apply to our community? Through acceptance, initial consultation and respect for history. From each *lofche* (the territorial space with its own natural borders, like rivers or pathways, ocean or mountains) we organize our social structure. In that space, we live and commune as families, determine the social reach of our communities. Families are our basic unit, then integrated into the broader system. In the *lofche*, according to their territorial identity, descendance (ancestry), customs, and knowledge is the foundation. Each community or *lofche* develops around its own cultural dynamic, a product of their customs that have been passed down and transmitted from generation to generation, including the assets on their land. We validate and accept the idiosyncrasies of individual locations and place. Our actions are designed to propitiate and guarantee resources that strengthen our identity with authentic, genuine participation and self-determination of the communities and organizations of our pueblos. We want to speak and honor our original oral language: Mapudungin, as much as its spiritual elements and the art we produce. Rio Negro is represented by several organizations: CAI Consejo Asesor Indigena, Coordinadora del Parlamento de Pueblo Mapuche, and Consejo de Desarrollo de Comunidades Indigenas (CODECI).

**How would you respond to the colonizer’s oppressive trope that essentializes the Native People as an Indian Problem?**

**CM:** First we are not Indigenous, in the understanding of the term that relates in any way to indigent or poor. We are not aboriginal either since we do not have to speak of specific origin, because we are the origin itself. Aboriginal refers to ab-from the beginning or origin in Latin. There is no need to reference any origin because we have our own origin. We are not Indians since as we all know the “Indian” is from India. Thus, in response to this issue of an Indian problem, I can provide viable solutions, though this would occur only after the honest recognition of our preexistence is confirmed. Based on that acknowledgement of preexistence, the existing constitutional norms and laws can and should be applied. We speak of the right to intercultural education; however, in Rio Negro there are four schools on the Mapuche territory that are administered, conducted and advanced by an overt condemnation of the actual communities they serve and the refusal to teach the Mapuche oral language of Mapuzungun. Since 2003, we have been demanding the right for fair and equal education. I am talking about education such as is postulated in the Argentine constitution, and national and international agreements.

**What are the challenges facing you and your people?**

**CM:** The greatest challenge is, and will be to achieve real recognition of the twenty-four First Peoples pueblos here, their cultural and spiritual traditions, their rights as preexisting Peoples, and their rights to free participation as previously mentioned.

**What is the role if any in 2017 for the social sciences?**

**CM:** As a teacher in Social sciences, the most fertile and effective area of intervention in which we can acknowledge, learn, and have others recognize our rights, is in education. Education of not only our citizens and about our philosophy, taught in the disciplines of language, literature, and economics, but education of others about who we are and what we believe.

**What does it mean to be a Mapuche woman in 2017 for you?**

**CM:** I work in a secondary school, with a vulnerable population in terms of economics that consists of a high percentage of descendants of the First Peoples of the area. It is a school where the majority are not aware of, and do not recognize these rights of First Peoples, and deny them. Everything I alluded to before is part of that reality. As a Mapuche First People’s woman, I carry a huge burden and responsibility to recover, preserve and promote our spirituality and philosophy. I have an opportunity in both schools where I teach to impart the philosophy of our people, educate them about our rights, and teach them our language Mapuzungun. That is what it means to me.

Eryn Wise (Apache Laguna Pueblo) Phone Interview November 15, 2017

**How do you self-identify with regard to ethnicity, gender, geo-politics and other relevant markers?**

**EW:** I am Jicarilla Apache and Laguna Pueblo woman, born near and raised in Dulce, New Mexico by my grandmother. I moved and lived 13 years off and on in the Twin Cities with my Anishinaabe, Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota family. I use “she, her, hers” as preferred pronouns. I am a queer, two-spirit, pansexual woman, and do not lay claim to any political party. I am a human being, and a protector of the earth and the land I inherited from my foremothers and ancestors. I work as the Next Generations Coordinator/Organizer for Honor the Earth organization. I am what many call the Mom for the International Indigenous Youth Council, which formed at Standing Rock; a group comprised of members of various youth groups, including the One Mind Youth Movement and Oceti Sakowin Youth & Allies.

**How do you define activism, your engagement as such, and is it possible today?**

**EW:** Many people think of the term activism/movement work as a way of laying claim to yourself. They think in terms of titles, a titleship, or as an ownership of personhood; not really activism as a verb. Activism is action you commit yourself to. For me, activism and activists are the folks that are recognizing the past given to them, carved and forged by the people who came before us. We are doing this work for the people who come after us. Many folks who call themselves activists may not be committed to the entirety of this work or ownership of that title. I like to say I am a human being, who does the work that needs to be done for future generations. I characterize my work as a facet of my indigeneity. Indigenous people are born connected to the land, and we are reminded constantly that we are of this land, and because of this land we are allowed to exist. My brand of movement work entails reconnecting to the earth and helping people reconnect to their origins. Remembering that it’s not just one person’s story, rather the story of the collective millions who have come before us and will hopefully come afterwards, if what we do now, makes an impact. It will have a lasting effect for more protectors and defenders of the land to come and give way to new life. There will be defenders and fighters, regardless of what day or year it is in America. Everyone has the ability to rise up and fight back, in whatever capacity they have.

Some people think activism has to be radical or that it has to be loud or visible. A lot of the activist work I have seen of late has been very quiet and subdued, in silent walks, or kids simply making art in their neighborhoods. The youth I work with right now are putting together exhibits without any real coverage because they feel it is something they have to do. There is so much people can do in terms of creative resistance through various forms of art, music, and poetry.

I was in Canada last week and an artist/activist wrote a poem about *Canada 150* and the on-going genocide against Indigenous peoples in a country that’s seen as progressive. There are so many ways people are resisting that do not look like what our elders did, or resemble what our adversaries think that it should be, according to their preconceived notions (like setting things on fire or looting). Many of us are here resisting in new ways. We are tired of fighting, and our means are changing. As we progress into the coming years, with the Trump administration and the fossil-fuels industry that we can’t seem to let go of, I feel we will see more and more activism that doesn’t look like anything we have seen before.

**How would you respond to the colonizer’s oppressive trope that essentializes the Native People as an Indian Problem**?

**EW:** I honestly don’tfeel I need to do the work of dismantling or decolonizing these old tropes, but rather reclaim them. If this is your familiar terminology, fine. If we are the problem, if you want to kill the Indian, then damn right, you have an Indian problem. Every time you try to kill us, we keep coming back. We are unrelenting. People need to realize that when they showed up they erroneously thought we were not going to fight, and our prayers were not powerful enough to continue on generations down the line. There will always be resisters who keep cropping up. Not believing that, is actually a disservice to themselves. Many keep underestimating what the Indian problem really is. The “kill the Indian, save the man”, is not who we are. We are actively trying to advocate for our rights to be viewed as modern day fixtures in a society in which we are a part. Many people have it in their heads that we are just some antiquated version of ourselves, existing on the outskirts of society. In reality, we are people with power, taking up some valuable space in society. Whatever preexisting notions people had about Indigenous folk are about to be heavily reevaluated. Everyone has a voice now. Standing Rock was a catalyst for Indigenous people to get their voice back, and we are more than ready to use it because we have been muzzled for far too long.

**What are the greatest challenges you see facing your community and your person?**

**EW:** Institutional racism that comes in varying forms...we lack the necessary education to succeed within this racism. We often lack the resources, and the champions in our community to make or leverage any resources that do come in, a viable resource for our communities. We have severely limited access to so many resources supposedly made available to us though we are underserved communities. Institutional racism is one of those issues we face.

Severe mental health disorders, which no one looks into, because we are being undersold to begin with. On top of the racism, people often look at our communities and assume we are lazy. However, we are communities that have been systematically traumatized via verbal abuse, sexual assault, emotional abuse we face from our educators, law enforcement, health care professionals who have sterilized our women. Other exploitation in the form of church communities that come into our homelands and brainwash our children and even sexually assault them. One of the biggest threats is outsiders, not the Native people, but the non-native, mostly white communities that come in with their god complexes, thinking that they are going to be able to save us or help us in some capacity, but ultimately they only end up doing more damage than good. They have a need to service their own guilt. I would hope white guilt would stay out of our communities, because all it does is takes us further away from the end goal of recovering from what their ancestors did to us**. It takes three generations to flush trauma out of your blood memory and we can’t even get one generation away from our most recent traumas!** From there stems the reality: fossil fuels infrastructure is built and the man-camps accompany them. Then comes the influx of drugs that enter into the community to service the man camps. Think about how the pipelines impact our communities and ground water supplies, leading to higher carcinogens and rates of cancer. When those go up, more children are born with cancer or birth defects. The list goes on. It’s not a matter of what the largest challenges are, rather what ISN’T impacting our communities.

**What does it mean to be a Native American woman today for you?**

**EW:** Showing up more than anyone has before. My grandmas laid a path, carried a lot of burdens, being closer to the process of removal and displacement from their homelands. Those traumas were very real for them, such as, the boarding and residential schools. They did as much as they could with what they were carrying. However, it is my job to do more than that, more than my mother survived, after their mothers. I have to show up today as a Native American woman, as a mother, an auntie, and a caretaker, and nurse, and protector. I have to show up and be the Mama Bear, the doctor, the provider, and sure there is food and people are clothed. I feel every Indigenous woman today is stretched beyond what we strove for before, when we just had what we needed to survive. It is our duty to make sure everyone makes it through alive, and also does well. It’s also my duty to acknowledge that as an Indigenous woman I am uplifting my two-spirit, trans sisters, and making sure that they have space to hold of their own as well. **There are many things we were doing because we are bringers of life, the original protectors and lifegivers, but now we are protectors and defenders more than ever. We can’t just let it be our men anymore. It has come full circle, and we are required to fight together again, not just one or the other, rather all of us. Acknowledging the duality that exists between the feminine and masculine, and all that is between. Recognizing it is not just you or me, but all of us.** Asking, “How can I uplift and support you?” That is the charge for Indigenous women today: to uplift and support others.

**Would you like to add anything?**

**EW:** Many people have the misperception that because the camps were taken and closed in Standing Rock that we have gone back skulking to our reservations and disengaged. People would be remiss to think that there is not another wave coming. Like the ocean, it pushes its waves forward and then draws them back out. Though the tide is out to sea right now, people would do well to remember that we are coming back. It will be *en masse*. Everyone is more upset and willing to fight even harder than before. Everyone needs to remember they have the opportunity to be on the right side, or the non-existent side of history because if we don’t do something about this immediately, none of us are going to be here.

**Callan Chythlook-Sifsof (Yupik, Alaska)** Salt Lake,October 2017

**CCS:** My name is Callan Chythlook-Sifsof. I come from a small village from the west coast of Alaska, Bristol Bay; a town called Aleknagik. I grew up there; a town comprised of roughly 200-300 people, 500 miles away from Anchorage, only accessible by boat or plane. I was on the US Snowboard team from 2006-2014. I was raised in the town and when I was 13, I moved to a ski resort just outside of Anchorage, and then at 16, I made the US team, travelled the world, and participated in Olympic qualifications. I competed in the 2010 Olympic games.

**How do you self-identify?**

**CCS:** I am Yupik Eskimo. In Alaska, there are two different cultures of Eskimo or Inuit people. I say Eskimo because my grandpa called himself an Eskimo. It is the easiest term to refer to my people, primarily because up until around 10 years ago, no one knew, what Inuit meant. The south is comprised of the Yupik people, and the North, Iñupiat. All circumpolar nations are composed of varieties of Inuits from Greenland to Canada to Alaska. We are based on the same ethnicities; there are a few words that cross the entire spectrum of that circumpolar region. I am Yupik Eskimo and part Iñupiat, but I grew up in the southern region of Yupik. My grandpa Adam Triplik did not speak English until he was 10, and my great grandparents never spoke it. They died in the 1990s, when I was a baby. I essentially fully grew up in the Yupik culture, rich in Indigenous traditions in North America as well as Canada. In Alaska, the Inuit people tend to be more intact because of the remoteness of the villages. Furthermore, Alaska did not become a state until 1958, so the colonization happened later than in other parts of North America. It left communities of people alone, like grandpa with his age group, who did not speak English until they were grown. I identify mostly as Yupik because of that richness of that culture and my lack of familiarity with the Northern Iñupiat side.

Regarding gender, if you research our culture from an anthropological perspective, there are all kinds of gender norms that people specify or outline for humans. Yet it is common for people who grow up in such a rich cultural setting, I mean culture as every day, not textbook theory, a daily practice, we see it other ways. It is rare to have gender inequality; for instance, the notion a woman stays home sewing furs while the men are out hunting. That is not how our culture operated. People might be pregnant and stay home, but other than that, women participated equally with men in many activities. Obviously, I am not a foremost expert; my grandpa could outline cultural norms better. However, in my experience, because I grew up out there, I did not think of myself as a girl. Everybody goes hunting or fishing. Once I moved out of the village, that distinction between gender expectations was one part of the culture shock; I noticed very distinct roles of women who do this, or men that, or the ingrained [Western] culture that women might not participate across the board. There are outsiders’ white cultural norms that bleed into, along with western culture, and invade our villages. I saw gender binary of that sort, but I did not think of myself as a “I am a tomboy for hunting”. It was really only after I came out about my sexuality that my awareness increased. Now I identify as queer, gender neutral, but at the same time, I try not to identify with any label, because this is where my heart comes from, and I identify just as Callan.

In terms of economics, I have had distinct, stark stages that have provoked introspection through contrast. Let me speak to the different cultures with which I identify and form a part of me, so you can grasp the way those cultural tags have shaped my economic outcomes. I have a deep cultural identity. I cannot choose this cultural identity with the Yupik people, because it’s what I grew up around. It is inherent to me. There are other parts that have had an influence as well. For instance, I happened to like to snowboard in the village, yet did not identify with it. I knew nothing about the snowboard “culture.” I was the only person I knew in the village, who snowboarded other than my brother. There was no culture at that time involved in snowboarding; it was just a hobby. I never identified as a snowboarder because I didn’t know anyone else in my early years in the village. Then once I started snowboarding professionally, and moved to the ski resort outside of Anchorage, through middle school, I definitely ended up assimilating into the snowboard world. It is really different in Alaska as opposed to here [Salt Lake] or Park City. It is not quite as much of an industry. I became part of the snowboard industry and culture, and simultaneously was a kid from Alaska, who had no clue about it. I spent middle school just being one of the kids who snowboarded every weekend and day, engaged in our activities. and then once I made the US team, it took me a step further. I became specialized as one of the top performers of the sport, and it was no longer a hobby any more. You are a practicing professional.

There was a different echelon of people who choose to take it from a hobby onto that special path. There are people from all over the US; one teammate from West Virginia, a place you might not imagine snowboarders are from. You meet people from Michigan and unique swatches of America: all white people. At the Olympic training center, I was the only person of color. There are probably 200 athletes there on any given day. It was pretty crazy to be the only person of color, but it became normalized. It wasn’t something I thought of at first. I compartmentalized every stage and tried to be in the moment, wherever I was. I never thought “here I am a village kid, and live this type of life” or “here at ski resort, I live this other life.” I never quite identified with any of those stages, except for my Inuit culture. In fact, it is as though I was a tourist in all these stages of life. Once I was competing fulltime, I was dating a woman from the Swiss snowboard team, and spent a lot of time--about 3 years-- travelling back and forth to Switzerland and time in Europe with her, and that was yet another part of Callan. I felt like an alien jumping into each of these experiences, though in a good way, perhaps a tourist or more like an observer of the world.

**How would you characterize your activism, if you identify with this concept?**

**CCS:** It comes from my mom. When I was at an early age, she was really a fighter, an activist, a feminist, though not self-identified as such. She has always been an activist, not about only one issue, rather about women issues, Indigenous issues, even reading parenting books. In a world where there are many smart people, coming from the village, she wanted to learn. You and I were talking about how white people speak for native people. In the era when I was growing up, there was a lot of white influence coming in, MTV and cable starting up- that socio-cultural colonial imperialism of the modern era, which took place here [lower continent] a while ago, it began there [Alaska] in my youth. So, we were a pure culture that began to have negative things starting to happen and seep in.

My family is highly respected in the Yupik culture. The Yupik word for Wormwood [Artemisia tilesii is a perennial, non-woody sagebrush species for revegetation] in Alaska is Caiggluk. It’s an important medicinal plant for our culture. My last name is the English spelling of that (Chythlook), which missionaries gave as our family’s surname. Caiggluk was my great grandfather’s (Thomas Chythlook) original Yupik name. The history of that is that my great grandpa’s first and only name was Jaflik, and that was because he was what we call angakkuq- roughly the Yupik translation for the word shaman or medicine man. That word has many meanings and applications, but ours is one example of the many families who are highly respected, and live in shacks or hut homes. You will find many white teachers and doctors, or people talk down to these elders, who of their own right are very smart and capable people. That disrespect became very visible. I remember an example of when I did not use deodorant in late elementary school. I do not think any child should. But the teacher pulled me aside to ask if I had running water in my home. Even as a kid you would get all kinds of “input” from white teachers. My mom was very protective over me because of that. She was very intentional also. She would sit down with me to talk about every issue A to Z: what it means to be a person of color or to be in a classroom with a white teacher. She would read all kinds of Indigenous books. I remember she would read Winona LaDuke and Sherman Alexie. That was the environment I grew up in with my mom who would outline these things, preparing me to remain strong in the face of these challenges. She always reminded me to hold my ground in the face of this potential discrimination. Her influence is very directly related to my opinions and thoughts today. For instance, the need I feel to express them and combat them directly. **For me, activism means carrying on my mom’s spirit for fighting for what is right because I was privileged to make the US team, I had a different childhood.**

When I was sixteen, I went to an excellent private college prep school in Anchorage, the only one of its kind there. It garnered respect and consistently offered high quality teachers. I was afforded the advantages of having a venue in high school, a platform to talk. We wore uniforms, which I pretended to hate, but it actually was an equalizer. It started in high school. One of my classmates would make racist jokes about Native people, calling them drunks. I got positive input from speaking out about that.

I had made the team at a young age, at 16. In other activities, it [activism] wasn’t necessarily a choice, and I don’t think many athletes spend their free time doing volunteer work, but I did. The reality is I did inherently feel the need to dedicate my time when I wasn’t working out or competing; it was part of the job I had undertaken to speak out to kids in schools. I got a lot of requests once on the team, and more through news reports, I would always say yes. It was a natural process to use my voice and accrue respect. It came easily, and it made me feel free. It is easy to talk about important issues when people are listening to you and asking you to talk about them. It felt normal and I wish I had kept track of the speaking engagements. The number of volunteer appearances I made is huge. I never kept track, but I went to villages. I saw the rest of the team who generally were supremely focused on their self. Maybe it was an active rebellion from the norm of the team because it was my outlet. The snowboarding culture wasn’t natural. I did not get enjoyment out of the really selfish world you have to put yourself into as an athlete. Maybe it was a counterbalance to that world. Perhaps an outlet to release myself to others and not be exclusively in my own sphere.

Now that I have retired from snowboarding professionally, I have gone from a perspective of using my voice in that way, to something else. I have more time where I can work on things for other people. I want to utilize the next stage of my life productively. I attended the Climate March, the first one in NY in 2012, and this last one in DC 2017. I wrote an op-ed piece for the NY Times about the Pebble mine. That marks where I got a start in the climate world toward advocating. The first year I made the team, Northern Dynasty Mines, the major owner of the proposal for the Pebble mine in Bristol Bay was slated to be the largest open pit mine in North America. Back then it seemed it was definitely going to happen, and they had already implemented plans to make this giant mine, and the fact is it is located on the world’s largest salmon spawning grounds, millions of salmon that are the lifeblood of that whole region. People depend on the salmon flow; its inherent to our culture and practices, but also our subsistence and our food. In that whole area, people live in what the outside world calls shanties. For me, they are beautiful comfortable homes with good food and good people. There isn’t a healthier environment. When outsiders come, they see a wasteland, people living in poverty and shacks. In some ways that is true, but for me it is a world, intact, where people are active, they go hunting, provide for themselves off the land. My uncle Mo’s family would live off of a commercial fishing salary all summer for his ten children making it last all winter, because of the food we have available to us. The mine was threatening to my family and all of the region and our way of life. When it happened, I started to attend protests against the mine. Ironically, Northern Dynasty mines asked to sponsor me. Of course, they would want to endorse me as a Native athlete and figure in Alaska, and the endorsement would help the mine develop. Progressively it has become a big issue. I have been involved with the conversation for the duration, in whatever capacity. Now it is back on the table with lots of battle and talk, actually it is a constant battle. Also it has been a long conversation. I have dedicated time to examining the mine and the downsides related to it, which lead me to working with other issues that are equally important and damaging to other communities.

On a different note. Recently, I have had an idea for a project for my village. The biggest obstacles to trying to implement change is funding and money, as well as time and effort. The US team gets rid of equipment every year and for each Olympic cycle. I reached out to the US team about the unused equipment they plan to purge out of the training center to recycle it. I want to get it donated or find a grant to pay for it to be shipped to Alaska to the village where I grew up. In the modern era, people really need gyms. There is a certain percentage of the population who can’t practice subsistence culture, or go outside every day. For some reason, they are stuck, and that leads to other problems around the community. I want to develop a gym, with potentially moving into other programming, and then take the idea to other towns. It could start with a gym, and then transform it into another entity that provides scholarships for unique activities they propose. There are not a lot of opportunities for kids who want to do something off the beaten path. For people like me, there are and were scholarships available. However, there are not a lot of funds if you want to do something different. Funding is crucial, for any native person and especially for marginalized communities, because lack of money is the biggest barrier to any idea they have. What happens when you start with a gym, a physical facility they can utilize, and then turn it into broader conceptual framework of growth for people.

Another piece is to continuously speak to kids. As an athlete, I talked about how to empower yourself and tangibly get out in the world and do something, like being on the US team. My primary goal in these conversations has shifted a bit. I feel it is important for kids to understand the value of their own culture, especially now that there is media from the outside world. Kids want to watch TV and copy what they see out there. I want to turn that back onto them to show kids the beauty of their own culture and how it allows one to stand strong in the world. Once you understand yourself, you can stand up strong knowing it and use that strength of our culture to propel kids forward.

**How would you respond to the colonizer’s oppressive trope that essentializes the Native People as an Indian Problem?**

**CCS:** I am familiar with some readings on this topic. Coming from that village, I know there are so many problems. It may be biased, but as an Indigenous person it is hard not to look at the behavior of the white People, who come into our village, and the occupation by them, even from the nicest who go there with the complete lack of understanding of who these native people are. It seems impossible for a well-meaning white person to come into the village, without having some preconceived thoughts. While they might not realize about their Western grounding, and not think about us inherently as the Indian Problem, and yet this is so culturally ingrained, if you think about the Indigenous. When you deconstruct why they use that term, it is because people of that era were exposed to and heard those ideas, and the idea became a fixture of white America. When you are raised a certain way, you can’t escape. In terms of value, white people go into the village and either come out with the perspective “poor Natives” talk or a well-meaning, “poor natives who live in shanties…they do not know how to live and need someone to come take care of them.” Which is what missionary work is designed for. Or else it’s a “fixing of the problem” when in fact, people are content and proud within their culture and do not need to be fixed, or told how to change. People are not ok when they are manipulated and fragmented, pieced apart. Even what is happening right now. That concept is from long ago, and yet it is still relevant. It extends to everything. It could be talked about forever, since that is the world we live in.

Indeed, there are so many different parts and pieces of the pie. Think about land. In Alaska, we are given Native allotment that many outside people want now. When my grandpa died recently this white family contacted us to offer a small lump sum. The native lands are being bought by the white people with money who want this private land in one of the most beautiful places in the country. There are so many tangents to follow related to this issue.

For instance, today I just got a comment when I posted for my grandpa, for native kids, and the outdoor community on Indigenous Peoples’ day about the kayak. Strangely, the outdoor sports community appropriate many things related to the Inuit culture. The kayak was invented by the Inuit people, and my grandpa handmade kayaks his whole life. I posted “This is my grandpa, his name, and one of the kayaks he built.” A longtime white man who ironically, married a native woman, another complexity to decipher and deconstruct of intermarriage, is one of the worst types of white men to go into the village. He posted, “you sound like a proud niff.” That is a derogatory term for native people, that white people call us. Everything from a white lens seems to adhere to the perspective of there being an Indian problem. If you deconstruct why, it is because during that era they were exposed to publications and the culture of white America, and the lens by which they view things. It extends to everything and is the world we inhabit.

Even I have experienced this. When I was on the US team, racial slurs and rape jokes and horrible things were commonplace coming out of the mouths of young white men on the team, testosterone filled young guys, who were applauded for those comments. Being the only Indigenous person not only on the snowboard team, but the entire team, and the entire industry as one of the only persons of color, I was a problem. I was concerned over racial jokes, though the coaches might have a different perspective. It was apparent that my problem with that culture and community was that I was one person of 20 who travel together, yet spoke out. The coaches by law are required to listen and pay attention to those complaints, but it was apparent, I was an annoyance. Outspoken Indigenous women are not something people like to hear, validate or give voice to. The effect of this idea is far-reaching in all parts of my life.

One more example from when I went to the Peoples’ Climate March. Because my authenticity of being Alaskan is a problem for some, and especially for white people in the snowboarding industry, Alaska is highly desirable. Everyone wants to get to Alaska. It’s the pinnacle, the tallest mountains, best, deepest snow in the world. In terms of professional sports, saying you snowboarded in Alaska is measure of your success. At the Climate March, left and right professional athletes kept telling me about Alaska, consistently anywhere I go, when I meet someone from ski or snowboard world. “**I** went to Alaska. Let me tell **you** about it. Let me tell **you** about a remote place that I skied”; it was like an ownership. No matter how many times I tell them I grew up there or look them in the eye. It doesn’t matter, because other people’s stories and their experience is more relevant. Their occupation of Alaska is more important than my presence of being there. Also, in some strange convoluted way, it makes sense, my success apparently contradicts their success.

**What are the biggest challenges facing your village and you personally?**

**CCS:** Alaska has changed a lot, and has gone through different stages, since I was little. Colonization has increased ten-fold since my youth. Many changes and some good. For me the biggest challenges are the many new things happening among the new generation, young Indigenous people who have taken advantage of scholarship opportunities. Some have gone to Ivy league schools and represented the Native community well in the white world. Much effort from older and younger folks than me has gone into to trying to allow native voices to be heard.

The downside of the movement to assimilate into the white world in a better way than previous generations, and to grow with white values is that many traditions are not focused as before and the values have shifted. It is our erasure. We look more at achievements. The gaze has shifted. However along with acknowledgement of those achievements, we need to look at the holes in our culture and ways to make it intact.

The flip side are the huge problems like drug abuse, a lack of resources, and alcoholism has affected every aspect of our lives and every marginalized community across the globe. That is a product of colonialism. We need to be conscious in the native communities of those intricacies. In native communities, people learn one step at a time about the white world and how to interact, whereas a comprehensive look at what colonialism is and how it relates to success in the white world or abuse is important. Adopting a broader lens for looking at things. We don’t try to assimilate into the white world, though we do have to interact with the white world, while still maintaining our values and way of life. We must stay with our strength and hold our heads high knowing we are not white. We need to see how to go forward, in a new world where you can’t go back, since modernization happens so rapidly. Take time to look at it all.

**CCS:** **What does it mean to be an Alaskan Yupik woman today for you?**For me it seems like a lot of contradictions. I feel the strength of my people. Yesterday I stared at a picture of my great grandmother. In my village, there is a generation of women who are so beautiful, strong and rugged. I saw in an older generation of my grandpa’s peers and friends growing up, a quiet strength and peace. I can’t describe it. I feel that strength, assurance and knowledge as a woman.

I feel the products of colonization; serious misogyny exists in the village nowadays. In commercial fishing, I have felt as a woman that I needed to fight to be recognized. I feel that difference between the older culture, the strength of that healthy womanhood, and the really dysfunctional part where there are huge rates of domestic violence. On a daily basis, verbal degradation of women from people I love and cherish. They are part of our Native culture, but do not practice the Native values. They practice the white values where it becomes an adulteration of the new Native value of what women are worth. Mostly I feel strength, then dysfunction, and sadness for many marginalized Native women. I look to my role models from when I was little. I feel gifted and blessed to be a Native woman.

We are getting smarter in Alaska, even if there are many polarizations occurring there. I know we are lucky because having spent time here in Utah on the reservation, I witnessed how accessible their land is to anyone from California to Washington DC. People can go there and buy land to live on. Whereas the Native people have what we call -- ancient sun dance lands, other people can buy property wherever they want. Certain lands have been taken away. The reservation began in the 80s. It once was big. Slowly over time, when you look at the aerial maps, you can see the government and bureaucracy are literally taking away the lands. Land is the most important issue in Alaska, because we are thought of as having so much. We are seeing people move in rapidly, which is inevitable. We need to look carefully at our land, how we value it, and be sure we have the ability to determine what happens to it. It is all we have left. Once it’s [land] gone, our culture will be eliminated. Thus, land in Alaska is the most important issue.

I love being able to talk about these things, especially in Salt Lake, I feel privileged to have a venue to speak, tell their truth and reveal their perspective.

**Sara Curruchich (Maya)** Guatemala City October, 2017

**How do you self-identify with regard to ethnicity, gender, geo-politics and other relevant markers?**

**SC (Sara Curruchich) :** I am an Indigenous Maya woman from San Juan Comalapa, Chimaltenango, one of the many First Peoples affected during the internal conflict in Guatemala. I am 24 years old, though in a way my personal development and identity formation have required deliberate thought. To some extent, my development has even been truncated, given my background growing up here in Guatemala as an Indigenous person.

To speak about my identity, as well as about being part of an ethnic group, of an Indigenous People, bears great weight and complexity. This identity carries with it formidable challenges, such as racism and discrimination, which are prevalent in our country and around the world. In Guatemala, even though the majority of the population is Indigenous, racism and discrimination toward the Indigenous people is ubiquitous as expressed by many non-Native individuals in our nation-state. That discrimination and racism sets us apart into disparate, inequitable stations of life. Most Indigenous populations do not have schools or health centers; and do not have, in many places, something as basic as the three distinct food groups, for example. That discrimination leads to Indigenous people unwillingly having to assume a lower socio-economic rank, not because we want to be or should be, but because we are denied participation in terms of work, opportunities, and access to resources.

**How do you define activism? How would you characterize your engagement as such?**

**SC:** I have undergone a process of strengthening my identity as an Indigenous person, and in particular, of being a Maya woman, descendant of grandmothers and grandparents. My process of reinvigorating my identity has been similar to that of many other women who have encountered these obstacles. Personally, I spent a year in which I felt ashamed to identify myself as an Indigenous woman. This was not intentional self-rejection, rather because I was forced to come to the city in order to study, given the dearth of schools near, or in my town that would allow me to pursue studies on my chosen career path. I was ridiculed and found myself in situations of discrimination and racism that were hurtful to me at the time. Yet, by the same token, although it caused me to disavow my identity as an Indigenous woman temporarily, I rekindled this part of me after concluding that experience. I do not regret any of that process. Every time I am able to share it, I do so generously, because that past fortified me, and it is the reason why I'm here now. I present myself proudly as an Indigenous and Maya woman.

**Do you have a sense of optimism regarding activism and change?**

**SC:** Yes, there are many people who feel optimistic, and I would very much like to contribute in my own way. I see music, my form of engagement in the realm of art, as a very powerful tool. Through music you can share messages, make an impact, and raise consciousness. It can bring awareness.

One of the reasons I started making music and felt it expressed my resistance was precisely because I saw the many inequalities imposed upon Indigenous people, and specifically directed towards us as Indigenous women. I was acutely aware of the discrimination we confront, and the opportunities we are denied. The destruction of our land, the dispossession by the State or the military of First People’s identity and property is the reason why I want to focus my songs on raising awareness and making this situation visible to the public.

I do believe that somehow this is a type of activism, primarily because I do not want to continue complicit in the conventional pattern of musical composition and performance. I refuse to sing only about love, about couples, or anything cliché: my songs reflect a desire to sing about the contact that the Native people have with the earth, with the air, with the wind. Somehow, even though the colonizer desired desperately to oppress us and sought to steal our possessions, even to deny us that fundamental connection with the earth, I want to express in my music the essential condition we feel that unifies us, binds us to, and with, the whole universe.

In some way, it is also through music and the collective nature of that experience, I would like to contribute with the rescue and vindication of the identity of Native people, of our language, and also contribute to the eradication of discrimination and racism.

**Is activism possible today?**

**SC:** Definitely yes. Unfortunately, we live in a country that represses us. Even after the completion of a 36-year internal armed conflict, criminalization of human rights defenders is ongoing. Criminalization targets those who are defending their territory, their land, their water, and currently those who are engaged in the defense of equal human rights for all.

We are facing a situation in which, unfortunately, corruption continues to prevail throughout our country. Corruption is prevalent in the military, above all, and also within the political system of power. The economic entities that have exploited Guatemala historically are trying to silence us in a violent manner too.

Nonetheless, there are many people in Guatemala who are trying not to remain quiet, and carrying on in a peaceful, non-violent way, showing and saying things as they truly are. That resistance is to some degree like a slap in the face to the entire system that continues to want to oppress and repress us, and does so through violence and aggression.

I have met several people who believe they can begin to clear a path for the next generations, a path with transparency, with justice. I know people who sing. I have friends and colleagues who write songs, who paint or dance, or who do theater; each striving to create alternative, peaceful types of activism. The system wants to take that form of expression and resistance away, but fortunately, without success.

Therefore, you see there is a way to continue doing activism. The most important thing is always to stay the course and persist in this activity. Because we are not the same as those military groups, or all those powers that have always wanted to repress our people. If they give us bullets, we give them songs. We give them poems, and that non-violent approach is one of the greatest ways in which we can raise awareness, and in which we can contribute to the structural changes needed in our country.

An artist friend once told me an anecdote about a military group that wanted to kill Sandinista artists, many of whom were male and female community leaders. Someone else told him no, don’t fear artists, rather take care of them, because artists carry messages in a very peaceful, yet significant way. Their way can contribute to change. And thus, here we are, many people trying to contribute through their art. Even though the State tries to silence them, there is very big resistance.

**What are the challenges facing your people?**

**SC:** One of the greatest challenges is finding ways to eradicate discrimination and racism. Unfortunately, in our milieu, discrimination has become naturalized. Let me give you an example: A couple of months ago there was a controversy regarding a textile shop, which had named their business *Maria Chula*. They produced bags, with markets abroad and nationwide. When I spoke with the owner, she told me that it had never occurred to her that Maria Chula could be a derogatory term emblematic of this normalization of racism against Indigenous women. If you knew the historical meaning of “Maria Chula” in Guatemala for an Indigenous person, one would appreciate it as a very derogatory term.

If you are speaking to a Native girl or boy, in the colloquial language of Guatemalans, one says, "Hey you, Maria" or "Come here" to people in order to mock or refer in a demeaning manner to women and Indigenous people. This was an unfortunate situation, because many entities felt the use of this name crossed lines. A group of women filed a complaint with CODISRA asserting the use of this name was derogatory towards Indigenous women above all.

The case caused turmoil, as well as a scandal, though apparently, a majority of the population felt it was not an example of discrimination. For me, that is where the huge challenge lies. I wrote about the controversy on my social media page. It turns out that as an Indigenous woman, I've had situations where I'm walking down the street and am offered a job by someone, anybody. Indeed, they offer me work, but to clean houses, or to take care of children, for example, or to make tortillas.

That was precisely one of the examples that I wrote about to share and broaden the conversation on the actual terms and language that are used contemptuously to refer to Indigenous peoples. To my surprise, I received sundry responses. Many comments first said “as an Indigenous woman **I** had no right to comment on these issues,” or that “I should not be where I am.”

Moreover, they claimed that **I** really should be in a tortillería [tortilla production], or that I should be cleaning some houses. That is one of our challenges. Maybe it will not be possible to effectuate a complete change and transformation, but the fact that this subject was broached and moved onto the table for societal discussion, speaking frankly about the rampant discrimination and racism, which continues to be normalized in our country, has been a big step.

In schools and in institutions of learning, the claims that women are not suitable for positions or for any kind of engagement in those spaces continue. One of the greatest challenges therefore is to fight for equality and to be able to balance our rights as women and as Indigenous women.

Stamping out discrimination and racism, we might find ourselves in a country with people who practice equality, with equity, with that respect, not only to and for people, but for the land. This in turn, would give way to the possibility for Indigenous women to be able to choose and compete for those positions. I don’t mean to say that we are not fighting now, but barriers exist that prevent us from being able to hold and situate ourselves in political, cultural and educational spaces of power.

**How do your respond to the colonizer’s essentializing trope of the Indian Problem?**

**SC:** The phrase “Indigenous problem” is an ever-present structural problem that continues to exist. It stems from deep-rooted discrimination and segregation that our country still exhibits. The ongoing classifications and determinations as to who can access certain things, who will be denied, who can enter some place, and who cannot enter another, are real.

I speak frequently on this topic because this is one of the biggest issues we must address: racism and discrimination towards Indigenous people in general exists. As Indigenous People, we have received comments on why we exist, even using contemptuous lexicon for those who are from the “interior” of Guatemala. Some complain, why do we [the Indigenous] have to come to the city to protest or revalorize our institutions? They have no comprehension about how their ignorance affects my village, and moreover in some way, the entire population.

Nonetheless, our exclusion has not diminished. It is a complex, complicated problem because in our society, certain classes hold onto resentment against the Indigenous people and refuse to look beyond the constructed superficial reality. Indigenous people have suffered greatly throughout history; communities have been razed, women raped, women have had fetuses removed forcibly from their wombs. Enormous atrocities have been committed.

Even today there are those who maintain that all this is an exaggeration. Somehow this blindness stretches for some individuals so far as to suggest that the Indigenous people are the problem. Moreover, there are many who believe that the Maya or Native people of the villages no longer exist, and think that the Maya, for example, only existed thousands of years ago. Also, another misconception and stereotype is that we claim our identity and self-identify simply to elicit compassion, or request money, or as economic parasites. During the history of Guatemala, specifically from 1960 to 1996, the 36 years of the internal civil war, there were many forced disappearances as well. In some way, the fact that many of the families have not been able to recover the bodies of their loved ones means that there isn’t any healing or closure because even today they keep searching, looking for, and seeking information. Even witnessing this, many people are so blinded. Perhaps it is not their fault, rather Guatemala itself and those in power who deny us the knowledge of our own history.

They actually think the families are throwing childlike tantrums when they keep saying, "I want to find my daughter," "I want to find my son," "they took him, I want him back." They still think that it's just an excuse, if you can conceive of this, as a means to justify or to gain some kind of financing or handout.

Why do other people think this? It's because of the mediocre education that we have in Guatemala. During one’s childhood, as young girls, we are taught that Guatemalan history is comprised of three ships that came and took away the gold. Then they left, and that's the whole story. They do not tell us how people were massacred. They do not tell us that despite all that, even today there are many people who are still being murdered, who are still being robbed, people from the communities that are still being raped, for example, and who are still criminalized for wanting the same life as others. We do not know our history. Knowing our history is crucial in order to take those big steps, so that they do not see us, the Indigenous people, as a problem, and in turn we are lead to believe we ourselves are a problem.

**Which spaces offer the most promising engagement for the transformation of our consciousness on these issues?**

**SC:** All spaces should be sources to build awareness, not exclusively our homes. I have met young people, young women who take to the streets, or go to a public plaza to meet and to talk about the issues that are happening in their village.

In music, you can sense the power for transformation. Like music, the consciousness doesn’t need to occur in a place or on an elaborate stage to raise awareness. Just somewhere simple will do.

This conversation could be on my stage. Right here I begin to raise awareness. I interact and create that link with other people. Its impressive, although some want to continue denying and want to silence us, many people are still talking. However, perhaps they do so in a quiet way.

We mention this methodology in the work of unity building, solidarity, and movement work. This work means going to one person and talking, and then proceeding elsewhere, though not being totally exposed, rather initiating things in a very calm explicit way. There are definitely several people in all parts of our country who think in this fashion, and who are beginning to make incursions of a peaceful subdued nature in their own villages.

This does not mean that we have already managed to establish equality or that we have reached 100%. If this peaceful consciousness building taking place now were enough, Guatemala would have already changed. It is beginning to, and that is a great achievement. Nonetheless, we often are informed only by some unexpected means about events, since the media often only respond to other majority groups’ interests, and ignore the issues pertaining to the Indigenous people.

We believe that one of our most ambitious goals should involve the transformation of individuals. It's planting that uncertainty and those questions, for them to ask, "why is that happening?", "Why are you here?", "What are you asking for?” For example, if you change a person’s attitude, or start to gestate a flutter of new ideas and sensations, something is gained, and something big is achieved.

It does not only happen with the demonstrations; it happens with speeches or conversations; it happens with music, with everything. And yes, it is not only something that I want, it is not only something that a small group wants, rather a critical mass of people who really believe in being involved and making changes of all kinds. We refer to political, cultural, and artistic interventions everywhere. Furthermore, that somehow we, the Indigenous Peoples, begin to reclaim those spaces, and have the confidence, will, and understanding that we as Indigenous peoples are capable and should have a say and have a right to exist and participate in all spaces, like everyone else.

We do not claim, nor have penetrated in all those spaces, because they have been seized and appropriated from us. We hope a path for unity will continue, through individual construction and collective changes in consciousness in all of Guatemala. Obviously to have that you need to have a solid foundation, the desire to be open, and also a willingness to delve into history.

It is something very personal, and for me, I cannot move forward without seeing what has happened before this moment. Therefore, it is crucial that we know our history, and also fight with, or challenge our history in order to change our future and to be able to work effectively with our present time. We must know and share with all our people.

**What issues does your community face?**

**SC:** Unfortunately, there are many companies and their corresponding scaffolds of support around the world. Guatemala is no exception. Guatemala has suffered a lot, and even with the promised benefits from the arrival of corporations, Indigenous communities endure much plunder, and such terrible inequality.

In Petén, very recently there was an eviction which resulted in displacement, uprooting of the people living in that area. The community was forced to go to the border with Mexico. The Kaibiles[[9]](#footnote-9) took over the only school. It was not enough for them to simply usurp the property and place. No, they destroyed all the houses, burned them, and invaded the school. They left a piece of wood hammered into the front door that said Kaibiles, so that if people returned, they would know who had been responsible. We hope the people will go back to their homes now, because that land belongs to them. Yet I wonder what it will feel like to return and see that sign on the door of the school saying *Kaibiles*. This place of learning they built for children with so much effort, love and such dedication. That scenario plays out for many populations.

The State keeps this all quiet, and the media also never mentions anything about it. They always show us the Indigenous peoples just as the problem, as the conflict, as those who cannot leave history behind, or abandon that which has happened to us.

It is important that the media, not only national, but also with the collaboration of international media, bring to light what is really happening in our country, the truth about Guatemala. There still is a lot of discrimination. Murders continue, leaving girls and boys orphans, because they are supposedly defending the interests of the companies and military interests.

In Guatemala, many say, "Guatemala is all of us." Guatemala is not all of us! Show me Guatemala as a beautiful Guatemala, as a Guatemala of colors. In Guatemala, the Indigenous people do not have opportunities. They deny us these opportunities. Indigenous women are pigeonholed with the only option being to simply work as housewives or domestic help.

What is more, Indigenous women who work in homes are exploited. In Guatemala, no one talks about exploitation in the *maquila*[[10]](#footnote-10) factory, or that the *maquila* factory does not pay taxes. There is nothing said about the rivers being contaminated, and that children are born with skin diseases. We are not talking about the percentage that companies accrue from their activities that ultimately are exported out of our land of Guatemala, and no one talks about all the destruction, the spoils, and murders perpetrated. We do not talk about any of that. It is important to mention, because they want to silence us. They still want to instill fear. A fear such that we may not realize that we all have the power and should turn against them.

**What does it mean to be an Indigenous woman?**

**SC:** As an Indigenous woman? In some ways, it feels as if we are sacrificed. The role of an Indigenous woman is very important as well as the role of Indigenous people throughout the world. Our role is to be a part of the construction of the path of peace, of justice, of cosmic equilibrium, of human equilibrium, and of a connection with everything that surrounds us. We, as Indigenous women, although they deny us many things, must continue fighting for our grandmothers, for everything they fought for, for the women who are here now, and for the women who are coming. Why? We are that hope, we are the light, and we are that force.

Amanda Blackhorse **(Diné)**  Tempe, AZ Dec. 12, 2017

**How do you self-identify?**

**AmB (Amanda Blackhorse):** First my tribe. I am Navajo Diné- a citizen of the Diné nation. I am from the Saltclan, born for the Táchii’nii Red Streaking into the Water clan. My third clan from my maternal grandfather, Tsi’naajinii Black Streak Forest People, and my paternal grandfather was from the Salt Clan. I am from Big Mountain, Kayenta Arizona. I am a mother, Indigenous woman, and a social worker, who is employed in behavioral health services for a tribe in Arizona. I am a behavioral health clinician assisting clients, adults and children who are in recovery from substance abuse, and with kids who may be exhibiting behavioral problems or might have gone through some trauma in their lives and need help recovering. I have mostly worked off the reservation, and in urban centers, because I have dedicated my life to advocating for Indigenous people, in whatever capacity. It is an innate choice that you make when you have discovered what decolonization is. It is a part of me. I have worked for my tribe and Indian Health Service, in the past. They were, and are, a colonial structure that can be very oppressive to Native people. There is always that struggle when you are in the behavioral health field; challenging colonial systems like health care, that sometimes can clash. When you want to address historical trauma and health care, it is complicated.

**How do you define the term activism and how would you characterize your activism, if you accept that term?**

**AmB:** Activism has had a bad rap. I struggle with using that term. It is a term constructed by settlers to marginalize people who are trying to challenge oppressive systems. People have referred to me in that way at moments. I will say I don’t have time to challenge these terms. I like to identify with the notion of being an advocate for my people. Activism or advocacy-- my work is definitely rooted in challenging colonial structures. Thinking about how it is so deeply ingrained in our lives that we do not even think about the oppression we are facing or our people face. We do not think about them, but they are there and very present. My work is about first addressing yourself. Learning about the process from your own perspective. Especially in social work and behavioral health care, we often are telling people about how they can fix their life and fix problems, but have we ever undergone that process ourselves. It is very easy to tell someone else how, even if we have never tried these solutions. It is important to question ourselves. Do we ask: Have I ever tried some of these things? It is important to work on ourselves and simultaneously address other problems.

Identifying oppressive systems and structures, confronting and dismantling them. Sometimes we can replace them, however other times there is no substitute to an Indigenous-defined solution. In other cases, you just completely dismantle the problem. That is what we are doing with the Washington [Redskins] team. We are not trying to replace our word, rather eliminate it completely from that context. When it is gone, people can choose whatever name they want as long as it is not Native-themed or Native-based. It is really about dismantling these systems that are designed to subjugate us, keep us in categories, boxes so harmful and oppressive to Native people that define who we are, even though we do not see that image as defining us. However, the images and symbols do define us on a national level. People look at these images and think that is what we look like. We know that it is not the way we refer to ourselves. Regardless of what we say or do, these systems of power define us, and are the baseline of our identity. The mascot issue, with regard to the Washington team’s name change, is a symbol of how far we have come. We have begun to achieve the humanization of the Indigenous people, and once the name change occurs, we will emerge into a different time frame of how we are viewed on a larger level. It is a symbolic shift with regard to the Native people. We are so much a people identified as a “dying culture, a people of the past, old people.” Now people call us modern Indians, whereas I ask were we old? Why refer to us in that manner? We do not say the modern Caucasian or the modern …we are people first and foremost. We struggle to prove that.

**Is resistance and activism possible in this moment of 2017?**

**AmB:** It’s happening at many levels. You have the women’s movement reacting to Trump, the #*Me too*, *Black Lives Matter*. All those movements are present and continue. It is interesting that we often do not see white activism termed radical. Brown people are labelled as activist, and it turns into a negative thing. We end up with an FBI file and that kind of treatment, rather than other folks who are labelled as doing advocacy work without the threats we face. It is distinct labelling, depending on the color of your skin. People become irate about topics like the police. When I make comments on social media in support of, or promote BLM on social media, I get folks coming back at me about *Blue Lives Matter* or *All lives matter*. It automatically becomes a negative thing. What if I share something about the Women’s Washington March, one does not receive pro-patriarchal messages, rather its praise, good and positive all around. When you share something that challenges xenophobia, issues around immigration, the Muslim Ban, people say “You are anti-American, or you are against the flag or hate veterans,” which is not the case. Activism comes under attack, especially for a person of color who is doing advocacy work.

**How would you respond to the colonizer’s oppressive trope that essentializes the Native People as an Indian Problem?**

**AmB:** I have a friend, Remy Johnson, who does digital work. He is an *artivist*. He uses his art to create images that make people think. The other day he showed me a sticker he made that is called the Indian Problem; the individual is holding a Molotov cocktail, and wears a feather head band. Remy tries to use the negative images to combat this stereotype. They always label us as being a problem, “you people hanging on to this and that.”

We went to a rally last week where the Washington team was playing the Chargers. One man walked by us, a Chargers fan, seeing we had been asking people to stand with us. As he approached, he had his shirt covering his nose, said “you all smell like shit”. We had been asking the Washington fans to turn their shirts inside out and join our protest. Comments like that bring you back to that issue and the history of Indigenous people here. I know they are ignorant people, who say whatever they want. However, when you get into the mind of average everyday people, that is precisely what it looks like and it turns into armed resistance against us, when we protest. There was a peaceful group of us, women and children who were marching, about 20 or 30 people. What have we ever done to any of them? We were faced with armed people, standing there protecting what? Property? They told us we had to leave. Were they going to shoot us, protecting that piece of the parking lot. It takes me back to a bad time.

**What are the most daunting challenges facing your people, community and self?**

**AmB:** Our issues are so broad, and diverse; there really is not just one. There is no one answer either. I focus on the issue of our identity and taking back our stolen identity. Not redefining it, rather reclaiming it. The biggest issue regarding the Washington team is that the football culture is so deep, and so strong in this country we must get into that culture and change it. I don’t like the idea of shifting culture from within because you can lose yourself that way. However, we must dismantle this system and culture of football. It is so deep. Look at *Take a knee*. I was hoping that would be the end of it, and bring football to its knees. Imagine if every player were to take a knee. If the NFL would take sanctions against the players, and every single player would take a stand, not buy into this system. We are still in the movement. At the height of it, I hoped that would happen. However, the culture is so strong. It is a start, but we have to figure out a way to deal with that giant.

**What does it mean to be a Diné woman in 2017?**

**AmB:** I don’t know what is happening, if it because of my age, or with a heightened sense of decolonization or this stage of life with children, or being a part of the advocacy movement, but I feel pride. I have a strong sense of being a woman, and understanding the power I have as a Diné woman. Asserting who I am as Indigenous and confronting patriarchal systems oppressing us. It is hurtful and frustrating at moments. Society does not teach us to be confident and self-aware. They tell us “you can’t do this” or “it isn’t that way” or “you cannot come into our space.” However, I am comfortable being who I am, and being able to teach my kids to respect and honor who they are. Once long ago our community was comprised of strong women, who would not allow others to do these things to them. She was a provider for herself and community. She thought of herself as strong. I reclaim that spirit. Across the boards, as Native People, I recognize the barriers- need for decolonization, overcoming psychological trauma and everything we have internalized. If you bring 100 people into the room, ten will learn. Then those ten go out and teach another group. For me the question is how do we get the information out to our people so they can learn. At times, social work and behavioral health services do not allow for those conversations. I have over a decade of experience in social services. I create the safe space from which people can begin to heal.

**Davina Smith** (**Davina Spotted Elk) (Diné)**  Salt Lake, UT Oct. 2017

At the time of the interview, she was Director of Operations Utah Dine Bikeyah. She later was attending University of University in the MA Leadership and Policy Program. Currently Executive Director of SLC Air Protectors.

**How do you self-identify with regard to gender, ethnicity, geopolitics?**

**DSE:** My name is Davina Spotted Elk. Davina Smith is my maiden name. I identify as a Dine’ woman, which is Navajo, as we are known. I’m also identified by my clan system, which in my language is Tachii'nii Tabaaha, as a female, a Dine’ woman. Politics? No. If I were in the white man’s world, that would be different. But where I come from in my culture, I identify myself as a woman who is head of household, who provides for my children. Being the eldest of my siblings, I’m also the provider for my parents as well because now they are at elder status.

We take our clan system from our mothers. We look to our elders. Our grandmothers. We know at some point in our life we will be identified as an elder so we have that close connection to our grandmothers. We watch how they present themselves. How they promote balance and harmony and also protection in the land. Of course, the most important is our connection to Mother Earth so that’s where we gather our strength

At the time of birth, our mother’s will hold on to our umbilical cord and then they bury that umbilical cord in a place of significance. For me, mine was buried on my grandmother’s home. What that represents is a link to that home, to that area. Whenever I need rejuvenation or a place to gather myself, I know that is a place. This connects our female grandmothers. For me, it helps me identify what I need to do as a woman, a Dine’ woman, in how I behave and, how I think. We are told we need to hear with our eyes and the words that we say, we have to speak with clarity, with power, with conviction and advocacy. I learn from my grandmother [Katherine Smith], who had always defended her land, where she was born, during that moment back in the ‘70s when she was practically forced to relocate from her homeland [Big Mountain]. It terrified me. I learned from her what she did to protect her area, her land, protect where her umbilical cord was buried. I don’t see myself as an activist. I don’t see myself as a feminist because I learned from my grandmother whatever is important for you, whatever you know is going to affect you or your children or your generation, you go and advocate for them. You go with a positive mind and a positive heart because if it’s something that’s important, you need to advocate for that.

**How do you define activism and how would you characterize your activist or resistance work?**

**DSE:** Growing up, it was through my grandmother that I came to know activism. Though I am no longer on the reservation, I first saw on the reservation what needs to be done to protect myself and family. However, nowadays I see two worlds. I grew up on the Navajo reservation. I grew up in the hogan. I grew up without electricity. I slept on the dirt. We lived like that; drove on dirt roads. We had to drive miles to get food, clothing or water. That upbringing in that space was important to me. From that space and experience, I developed a sense of what was happening to my people. The Navajo people and how we, to this day, call it rural country. We still have no running water, no electricity and continue to drive on dirt roads.

The healthcare system and our education system is still horrendous. The history of the Indian education school system is by far, one of the most detrimental, historical traumas for our Navajo people, because of the boarding school system. I, too, was in the boarding school system. I did experience abuse there, not only physically and mentally, but also sexual abuse. I still have to gather my strength from my elders. When I look at my grandmother, my mother, my aunts and my parents who were also part of the boarding school system, I know they experienced the same things as me.

From these experiences, I might have been a person who followed a path of alcoholism or substance abuse or even suicidal tendencies. I don’t because who else will be there to advocate? who else would be there to speak about those that don’t have rights? Those who aren’t able to speak about these traumas that we’ve experienced.

I look to my grandmother because she was a person, at age 13, who was given away. She ended up having 12 kids. She built her own one stone house. She was also physically abused by her husband, yet I look to that as strength. I know what she went through, which gives me strength. I know whatever I endure, whatever I see, whenever I go and I speak or help anywhere, I know I can do something.

**How has your professional background informed your definition of activism?**

**DSE:** It’s given me the experience to advocate for children. I worked in the Salt Lake City School district. I was a continuing education coordinator. This goes back to my experiences in the boarding school system. What I’ve always done for our Native students was provide support, educational, academic, and financial resources.

I learned how to write grants. One of the biggest issues I’ve seen for our Native students is that being in such low income economic status is a disadvantage. I see where other students, the white students are able to go into clubs, prestigious clubs or activities. I began to understand how to do grant writing so then I could apply for grants and have that funding apply to our Native students.

I created connections through the community. I made sure all these resources were available for the students, but also for families, because I know there are barriers for families who have come into the schools. These families have this feeling of giving up their power. They weren’t empowered in our educational system so I’d go in and mediate. I’d have the administrator understand where this parent was coming from. If the student is late, at least the student showed up, let’s congratulate them.

Regardless of what situation the families face, if a support wasn’t in place, we needed to address the root causes and help them survive and achieve in this system that wants them to fail. I know one of the issues we still have today is the school-to-prison pipeline. That is one of the things I look at: how to eliminate the school to prison pipeline, because we must have this awareness and understanding in order to support our Native families and students. Believe it or not, the number of Native population we have in urban cities is growing vastly. Just this last year they reported over 10,000 Native families in the Salt Lake City valley area. The reason is because more and more Native families aren’t able to find employment on the reservations, so they look to the cities. It grows every year.

With that we need more and more support systems, like Indian education coordinators. Behavioral health is another issue. Thankfully, we have a local urban Indian center where they have an outstanding behavioral staff. For our Native students because of that historical trauma from the boarding school system, I’m able to reach out to the Indian Urban Center and say, “Hey, we’ve got this child that needs some behavioral health support. Let’s link them together.” I have read in order to connect and build bridges, based on my experience as much as my learning on how to best support our Native families and students.

I also have a hobby of documentary film making. Thankfully I completed some documentaries with KUED. The three documentary films are “Navajo”, “The Long Walk”, “Trail of Tears.” The other is “We Shall Remain.” We did a local documentary filming with the local tribes of the State of Utah because our history books do not indicate clearly what tribes are here in Utah. My focus was, of course, on my people, the Navajo, the Dine’ people. The last documentary film I worked on was called “Unspoken” which was on the Native American boarding school system. I feel we are all visual in some ways, and in order to have a better understanding and perspective, I use documentary film making.

**Do you have any other experience with film?**

**DSE:** I got my start in feature films. I was in “Geronimo.” I had a wonderful experience, but at the same time I knew there was something wrong. It was a small part as a Native wife whose husband was being hung. I remember going to the makeup area where they said to me, “Let’s dress her up, but let’s make her skin a little more reddish, or darker red. Let’s spray paint her hair black.” And I said, “Why?” “Well, we need you to fit that part of an Apache.” I said, “An Apache does not have red skin. They do not have dark skin. In different regions throughout the U.S., we are all different. We all do not have black hair. We all do not have red skin. And so, please, I’d like to go as who I am.” Well, we compromised. They made my tint a little darker, but they did not spray paint me. That was my first understanding, revelation really, of how Hollywood has stereotyped Native Americans, or American Indians.

At that point, my role was before the camera, yet I was always intrigued about being behind the camera. I always wanted to see how film making was done. There was a documentary film on my grandmother called “In the Heart of Big Mountain.” This was during the time when the Navajo land dispute took place in 1973. President Gerald Ford signed, indicating there would be a line, a barrier, that drew a map indicating where the Navajo people were going to be located and where the Hopi people would be. Where the Hopi people reside on the Hopi reservation there lived a small group of Navajo. They were to going to be forced to relocate. My grandmother was in that group, with a few families, and she was one of those who said no, along with the other elders. “We are not moving. This is our homeland. This is where we’ve been.” A documentary filmmaker came and wanted to do a story on her. I was about 12 years old. I knew what was going on. The idea of relocation was disturbing to me because that’s where I used to play. That’s where I helped herd sheep. That’s where we had our festivals, our harvest gatherings, hunting. It was hard to take in as a 12-year-old. The documentary filmmaker [Sandra Sunrising Osawa] had interviewed my parents, my father, my grandmother, my aunts. She had asked me, “Do you want to be filmed? Can I interview you? Do you know what’s going on?” And I said, “Yes.” Then I said, “Who’s going to see this film?” And she responded, “Oh, there’s going to be, hopefully, thousands. Maybe even people all over the world.” I was so shocked. I froze and said, “No, I can’t do this. I want to, but I can’t do it. That’s how many people are going to watch me? I can’t do it.”

Well, from that experience, not speaking up, it created this drive inside of me to never again, miss an opportunity. I was going to take them whenever. I still have not fulfilled that request from when I was 12 years old. I missed an opportunity. If that might have saved my grandmother from forced relocation, I should’ve taken it.

She passed on a year ago, and thankfully she was never forced to relocate. I speak about my experiences as an Indigenous woman, as a daughter, as a mother. Most importantly, as a mother because I have 4 kids. Now I’m a role model for them. My kids have actually grown up in the urban city, so it’s my responsibility to teach them our culture, to teach them the language, to teach them to speak up for themselves. Thankfully, my oldest daughter understands that. She’s actually planning to attend the U in political journalism. She understands where I’m coming from. We have a close relationship because she knows of the sexual abuse I endured in the boarding school system. Her first year of college, she had a similar experience as she entered the university. We have that connection. We’re there to support each other. For me, I was only able to open up about my experience 4 months ago. That’s how long I kept in silence. When I knew what happened to my daughter, I could no longer do that. I could no longer not open up. I could no longer hold that in. I had to talk about it. When I opened up to her, she knew that I knew what she was going through. That’s the bond we have.

But the advocacy also concerns knowing we can now express our horrible experience in the boarding school system. I can now voice what that feels like. In the boarding school, first of all your identity is taken away, and second of all, the abuse that you feel, the sexual abuse…yeah, it’s the most traumatic. I remember in the documentary film when speaking with and listening to all the individuals that I interviewed, in many cases that was the first time they were able to open up to that very traumatic experience. It was emotional for us, but at the same time, it was finally a release of what they felt for so long. These individuals were much older than me, in their 50s or 60s, so for them to open up was a way of healing. It really was a healing process.

**How has your recent work followed this path?**

**DSE:** When I first came here to work at the university back in 2005, I was asked to sit in with the committee discussing the wording of the mascot, and the name Utes. I went to the Park Building where I would meet with one of the associate deans, I believe, and the main concern was changing the name of Utes to a more appropriate name, maybe like the Hawks or something. We gave her our reasons for the change. I didn’t know the whole issue or what the whole story was about. But I do know, first and foremost, having a mascot of an Indigenous tribe or what we hear, the NFL Redskins or the Chiefs, is very detrimental to my people. It’s very offensive because we don’t want to be represented in those ways. Here, I visited campus and I barely saw anything that represented the Ute tribe. The Ute tribes are different bands. There’s the Northern Ute, the Southern Ute, White Mesa Ute, Colorado Ute. They’re not represented here. That’s one thing I expressed. There’s no visible representation so how can you claim that identity with no understanding of where the Ute word comes from. If anything, some people, say, “I think they’re extinct. They were here hundreds of years ago.” That was my first experience working directly on an issue of that nature.

At the University of Utah, we had a teacher training program, where we recruited American Indian students that wanted to become teachers. Secondary, elementary, ed psych, high school counselors. We had undergrad and master’s level students here. We successfully graduated 44 Native students through the College of Education. To this day we have students that are teachers, school counselors, principals, administrators, and even a few have gone on for their doctorates. To see that kind of growth here at the U, was of great benefit, because I know for American Indian students, you have to gain their trust. For that person studying in a new place, maybe it’s from the same tribe, but also knowing they’re Native, there’s that instant trust. If there is someone you’re unfamiliar with, it takes a lot longer for a Native student to gain that trust. However, it hurts in the long run because they have a hard time understanding the school system and the courses. Furthermore, there’s the lack of understanding about where that family is coming from. Here, having that understanding, we were able to work with the professors to build that cultural understanding, so when they were teaching, they could be a positive influence with our students who wanted to also become teachers.

**DSE:** A year ago I went to Duke University to do a presentation on the documentary film, *Unspoken*. When I flew in, that was actually the day we were waiting on the results of who was going to be our next president. I remember sitting in the lobby and I went to have dinner. I was in North Carolina and it was the turning point… the key moment regarding if it was going to go towards Trump or towards Hillary. I remember sitting there and saying, OK, here come the results for North Carolina. I could just see red, red, red, red, and I could hear everyone in the lobby and in the restaurant booing, saying are you serious? Are you serious? That hit me. This is going to be our next president. I had this sinking feeling, thinking it was spreading to the West coast, and they don’t know what’s happening. I remember my family was calling me. My husband, saying, “So, what’s going on out there? Have you heard the results?” and I said, “It’s an all red state in North Carolina.” He said they hadn’t heard yet in Utah. The next morning, I get a text from my oldest son who was going to college in Western Wyoming on a basketball scholarship, and he said “Mom, what’s going to happen? What are we going to do?” To hear my son ask that, I had this surge of anger. I went into protective mode again. I texted him back and I said, “We’re going to grieve and then we’re going to keep moving on like our ancestors have done and we’re going to continue. We will still have awareness. We’re still going to fight the good fight. We’re still going to protect our people like we have for hundreds and thousands of years. So, what that means for you is you’re going to stay in school, you’re going to go, and get your law degree because we’re going to need more Native lawyers in your era, in your time.”

As an activist, sometimes I don’t feel like I’m am, but in fact, that’s who we are and have always been. I take it from my grandmother. I’m not a feminist. I am of my clan which is my mother, my grandmother and grandmothers’ before them as a protector of this land. Because no matter what, at least we have Mother Earth.

**How do you react to the colonizer’s oppressive trope of the “Indian Problem”?**

**DSE:** I’ll start from my tribe, to fully understand how we view this issue. Let’s say, our ceremonies, to which we have a strong connection. We know the meanings; we know the prayers; we know the songs. For us, to translate that to the outside world, the white man’s world, sometimes it’s very sacred and protected. We’ve been stripped of everything, our language, our identity and so those ceremonies are kind of what we still hold on to. I understand that fully. But at the same time, if someone on the outside world would understand those ceremonies, the meanings, the prayers, the songs, they would have an understanding of where we are finally coming from, in terms of wanting to not only say it’s not only an Indian problem, it’s all of OUR problem.

For instance, global warming. For however long the Indigenous people have known there was a global warming problem. There are many times that Indigenous people have tried to speak to those not of color, to communicate the message that there is something going on with our Mother Earth. Wake up! We need to stop drilling coal. Rethink the gases that are causing harm. Our herbs are dying, and some we use, are becoming extinct. It also must come from our people. We have to get educated and be more vocal in what we do. It’s frustrating for me, though I’m always supportive, to see African Americans, Latin Americans, Hispanic, who have so many renowned scholars. What about American Indians? This all goes back to the boarding school system and the trauma of that experience. Of course, it stems from being on a reservation where there’s so much need of resources, especially financial resources, for us to grow. The educational system there is so poor. We’re still evolving, but I wish it were at a faster pace.

**Would you like to add anything else about the boarding school experience?**

**DSE:** I kept quiet all these years since my youth. With the knowledge I have now, I wish I would’ve opened up a long time ago. I’ve had the experience others endured, and I didn’t say anything. Now that I’m able to open up, I know, first and foremost, it wasn’t my fault. I know that, but when I hear other women, say “Oh…let’s not talk about that, I don’t want to hear that.” In fact, I feel strongly we must talk about it. Please. I see that holding in what I have for so long, it does something to you. For me to release it was a feeling of (strong exhale). I feel so much better. It changes you. It changed me and actually, unfortunately, it impacted my marriage. I’m now going through a divorce. Of course, other things have occurred, but it did impact my marriage because of how I viewed things, how I look at things. Why did I hold this in? I feel so much better now that someone was able to listen to me and not judge me for what I thought for so long was my fault or be ashamed or that I couldn’t tell my husband because he wouldn’t look at me in the same light.

And so, when I hear that, I want to hear it. I know your pain, but I want you to express it because it’s a feeling of finally letting go of something that was eating you up inside for so long. That along with everything I’ve experienced, like racism, are the things that fuel me to now say, let’s talk about this. Instead of arguing, let’s talk about this. Why do you feel that way? And I’ll show you why it impacts me. Let’s sit down and talk about this. We have this restorative circle. Let’s sit down in the circle and find a solution and also hear our pain, respectfully, so we can find a solution to overcome this. But if we don’t, that’s fine. I have a chance to hear them. They heard where I’m coming from. I definitely can’t change their minds. I can’t make them do what they want to do but as long as they know where I’m coming from….that’s where I feel my activism is going to be the most beneficial.

**What are the biggest challenges or fears your people and you personally face?**

**DSE:** Our current presidential administration has prompted, not fear mode, but questions about what’s going to happen with our financial resources. The Bureau of Indian Education was under the federal government system, now it’s subject to Betsy DeVos. That system is going to be slashed in terms of funding, which will impact our special education programs. It will affect behavioral health services, and our mental health support for Native students. It will also change our Head Start programs, our food, Indian health care system, etc. All these governmental programs potentially disturbed, which means barriers. When you have more barriers, they interfere with development and growth. There is a high rate of diabetes on our reservations and alcohol abuse, substance abuse, suicide. These cuts in funding, leading to fewer resources, may result in a move backwards, instead of forwards.

The challenges are definitely no longer solely of physical punishment, of the physical abuse of before. There are still issues pending regarding the special education system. One thing I’ve noticed here in the cities, is we do not share a familial system. On the reservation, we have that network, that close knit tie, and here in these cities, it’s so hard coordinate and create. We have our local urban and youth center to build cohesion. We have a parent or parents working two jobs, different shifts, so you’ve got to tag team. Who’s going to take care of the little one because daycare is so expensive? They’re still living paycheck to paycheck. They don’t have the nearest aunt or uncle or cousin nearby to support them. What happens then is you have one of their other kids from the family, who is in the school has to skip a few days to take care of their young siblings. Couple that with a lack of understanding from the school system. The school thinks, “they [Native Americans] just don’t want to go to school, or we [Natives] don’t care. If mom and dad don’t care, then why should we [White people] care?” No! I say, let’s find out why this is happening because they have a right, just like everyone else. We are not going to push them out of the system. They have a right to go to school, so let’s figure what’s going on with the parents. I’ve tried to stress this point so many times to administrators. Let’s see what that hole in the process is so then we can connect it back for the Indian family. I often ask: “Is there understanding?” Many times, without cultural understanding, when we sit down at the table, we hear the parents’ frustration about the school not supporting them. One the other side, the school asks why the parent is not supporting them. Let’s figure this out. When both are able to open up about what’s going on, one comes to find out, the school does want to help, and likewise the parent does want to collaborate, all for the benefit of the kid. There is no backlash of I don’t care what you guys think, my kid doesn’t need to go to school. The school realizes the parents do want their child to be educated, but there’s a problem at home. The next step is to find those resources, and sort out what we can do. In the city, they don’t have the familial system. This creates an urgency to understand, maintaining constant understanding, diversity trainings, community awareness training, and even at the university level. We do a lot of research down in the community, if we can get that awareness out there and find out what’s going on, then I think that would be a step moving forward in how we could eliminate this prison-to-pipeline, eliminate our low graduation rates. There are many Natives on the reservations surprisingly that go to Ivy League schools. I went to Duke, where I met some Navajo students. I was so excited and thrilled to hear that they were attending. Why? Because they had that familial support on the reservations, they had that family that was on them constantly to succeed.

I am only one person. I can’t overlook 449 students. My focus is at the high school and middle school level and I realized I was leaving out the elementary students. Having more resources in that field and changing the job to a full-time position, would have helped. I know they needed that. There are times I worked beyond my hours. It was on volunteer time because I am familiar with the need and how important it is. One day I would love to be on the school board for the Salt Lake City School district. There was one person of color on the school board in the past, but no longer. Salt Lake City School District is diverse, and the representation in positions of power do not reflect that diversity.

**What does it mean to be a Diné woman today?**

**DSE:** As a Native American woman or Diné woman, I grew up understanding who my people are. I grew up with my grandparents in a hogan which, to this day I would never, ever take back because it gave me an understanding that I have a path to follow, a path to lead, and that is of balanced harmony, walking in beauty. My grandmother once told me before she passed on, “when you become my age as an elder, you will need to have your own song to pass on. And that song is of everything, of every stage of your life that you’ve overcome, whether it be hard trials or something else like the birth of your kids, in education, activism. Make sure those are things that you have as you move on to be respected as an elder, as a grandmother.” I carry things from her words. When I became a teenager, I wanted to lose my identity as a Native person. This resulted from the assimilation forced on us in the boarding school system. In that different world, which was a white man’s world, I was afraid. I was ashamed of the color of my skin. I covered myself. I no longer spoke the language. I no longer went to the ceremonies. I no longer performed the dances. Then, when I became a woman and mom, I realized my need for my culture. I need my identity. I must know who I am to continue this process. Those are trials that I’ve come to understand. I wouldn’t go back and change it in any way because it gives me strength. Whenever I’m not balanced in the city, I can always go back home and find rejuvenation there. I know that now. I can connect with my mother who is a Navajo language teacher. If the language that I miss can’t come out of my mouth, I can talk to my parents. It gives me strength. I can go anywhere in the world and get up before the dawn and greet the holy people to the east. Now I know that. That knowledge and awareness gives me energy, determination and balance. I take that legacy to heart, in how I carry myself wherever I go. How I speak. How I listen. I understand now because I’m coming of that age. Also as a mother, I have to carry myself in a certain way, because one day my daughter will be the same. My son will have a wife, and will have to know how to treat her with respect.

**Crystal Tulley-Cordova** Diné Salt Lake UT October 2017

**How do you self-identify with regard to ethnicity, gender, geo-politics and/or other aspects?**

**CTC**: My Name is Crystal Tulley-Cordova. I identify by saying Crystal Tulley-Cordova Tódích’íi’nii nishłį́ Ta’neeszahnii bashishchiin Hashk’aa hadzohi eí dashicheii To‘aheedliinii eí dashinalí. Those are my matrilineal clans; how I identify where I come from. I am of the Bitter Water Clan, Born for the Tangle Clan. My maternal grandfather’s clan is the Yucca Fruit-Strung-Out-In-a-Line. My paternal grandfather’s clan is The Water Flows Together. My identity of who I am today has definitely guided my path to where I am today of being a student at the University of Utah and a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Geology and Geophysics, studying water across my tribal homelands.

The way I identify myself is not the norm. There’s no bubble or slot that I’d be put in based on who I am and where I’ve come from. I grew up on the Navajo Nation, which is the largest land based tribe in the United States. Growing up there, poverty is high, unemployment is high and, a lot of times, coming from those types of areas, you’re not represented well outside the boundaries of the reservation because they identify you based on the statistics. Economically, you’re put in this general pot of being less than, or less fortunate. However, my identity is very rich. Not in the sense of economic worth, having a lot of property, a lot of money, things that are important to a lot of people out there in the world. But I am rich in the sense that I know who I am and where I am from and where I am going. I have a large support system that helps me to get to where I am destined to go. That support system: I count my wealth like my grandpa used to count his wealth and that’s by his family members and friends. So, I am a wealthy person.

As far as gender, I am a Dine Asdzáá. The simplified, less meaningful English translation would be a Navajo Woman. Being such, I have a lot on my shoulders. From growing up in the traditional cultural sense, being the woman in the family is not only the strength, but you’re the backbone for the family. You’re the one that keeps everyone together. You look out for those that need help. And you’re not only about helping your family, but helping the community. There’s a lot of responsibility in this regard from where I come. I recognize that responsibility and realize that my destiny of where I need to go with my career is not for personal gain, but for more of a communal gain and how I can help a larger community.

**Would you please explain your professional work?**

CTC: My research examines the hydrogen and oxygen variation in water throughout the Navajo Nation, the Four Corners region of the United States. It allows us to examine the fingerprint of water and be able to study how waters are related. With ongoing climate change, the Southwest is susceptible to climate change impacts, especially Indigenous communities, including many Native American and Alaskan Native communities in the United States. They are more susceptible to climate change impacts because of the places that they live, and their livelihoods. In the southwest, the amount of water that they have relates to how they are impacted. The Navajo Nation is really reliant upon water. All human beings are reliant upon water for sustainability. I see my research as an opportunity to investigate a semi-arid to arid area, but an area that is very similar to other areas throughout the world. Water is an important resource for everyone: people, animals and plants. There’s great impact that my research could have, not only for the Navajo community, but for the rest of the world.

**How do you define activism? How would you characterize your engagement as such?**

**CTC**: Activism. It was a term I was familiar with growing up as a young child. I can remember my father, who has been an environmental activist for a long time, introducing me to the word. Not in the sense of semantic definition, but by acting. By doing so, I do recognize the definition of the word, but not only that, I recognize the responsibilities that come with that word.

I identify with the word and the definition because of what I’ve seen as far as people I’m familiar with who have done activism. In my research, I talk about an issue that is important to others and explain how that issue impacts others. For example, water not only impacts humans and their drinking consumption, but it can impact the growth of microorganisms. It can impact the growth of vegetation for wildlife. In these ways, informing people of climatological patterns related to precipitation is a way to be able to be an activist for water. I can say how important it is and how much of a limited resource water is. It isn’t a resource with unlimited supply. We need to be environmental stewards of water in a way that is equitable for all living beings, humans, animals, fish, insects, vegetation, etc. Beyond people, since I come from a Native American background, we think of everything as living. Though the bushes and trees outside can’t verbally speak to us, we can become advocates for them. They need water as well. The microorganisms that may sometimes be pesky to us depend on it, too. At springs, throughout the Southwest, there is life that’s reliant upon the water that comes from springs. In return, that whole cycle for sustainability of life in different areas throughout the world cherishes water. My work focuses on the Navajo Nation, and from that background I am interested to see how water impacts different parts of life.

**Is activism possible today in 2017?**

**CTC**: Yes, I am optimistic in the sense that I can only control myself. I can be the change that I wish to see in the world by making decisions in my life, which I hope are for the betterment of the world. Based on the type of teachings that I grew up with, it’s not only that we think about ourselves and our present state of being. I have to think in the same way my ancestors thought before I was here, or before you were here. They knew that they would have descendants; they knew I would be here. In that sense, I have that responsibility to think about those who have yet to be born. I see that responsibility as change that brings optimism. As an Indigenous person, I have to think of generations beyond myself. There are a lot of people that don’t have that frame of mind. If we all engaged in an active movement taking into consideration seven generation beyond ourselves, including all living organisms we could be in a better state of being. I see that as my responsibility, to make a ripple in the water where I can. To throw a stone in a big ocean. That’s a little harder to see the ripple, but if I threw a pebble in a small pond, I am able to make change within. This is the more optimistic side for me, because it is a change that I am able to make an impact on, especially if there’s a community that would be familiar with me and willing to work to be a part of a team to create change.

**Would you share with us what you mentioned about your son?**

**CTC**: My son’s name is Naabaahii (Na-ba-he). Diné translation is Defender of the People. When I had him, I hadn’t thought of a name for my child. In Navajo cultural teachings, when you are pregnant, you don’t plan ahead. You don’t buy clothes before the child is born. You don’t prepare. You wait for that life to enter this world and then you begin to make decisions. It wasn’t until a few nights later, while I was lying in bed recovering from having a child that I began to think: I have a son. Before I had him, I didn’t know he was a boy. I didn’t check his gender. But seeing that he was a boy, I really wanted to give him a name that meant something, a name that had strength to it, but also responsibility, a standard for him to live by. His name means Defender of the People. I’m not a fortune teller. I can’t tell what the world will be like when he is older and can make decisions for himself, but I hope that when he is at that point in his life and can make decisions for himself, he is able to make those decisions on behalf of a larger community. To be able to be an advocate for those who don’t have a voice, whether that be wildlife, or the environment or maybe it might be people with disabilities. Maybe he can be a voice for them. I really wanted his name to be able to be something so he could carry responsibility. Even as he is young, now he doesn’t really know the meaning of his name, but I’m trying to teach him how to share and think of others. At the same time, I want him to be a defender of the people, not in a bully sense, rather to be a protector for all. A protector for all living.

**How would you respond to the colonizer’s oppressive trope that essentializes the Native People as an Indian Problem?**

CTC: Classifying things as an “Indian problem” for me, has a negative connotation right away, especially thinking about the history that Native American people have gone through with westward expansion, putting my ancestors in encampments, taking them away from their tribal homeland. Thinking that the Indians are always a problem. I have seen that negative connotation of being Indigenous as something that is bad or something seen as “less than”. If you’re from an Indigenous background or if you’re Indian, there’s all these negative things that are wrapped up in that definition of being Indian. We could think of these negative stereotypes. Or what people might think of as positive stereotypes of being Indian, like the color of their skin, how they act, or substances that may impact their life. There are all these different things we can think about.

But in considering a problem: If you just state, there’s a problem. That tends to have a hierarchal meaning that someone else is saying **we’re** a problem. It really is based upon the definition of who has the power to say the words, which would be equivalent to arbitrarily applying the concept to any other ethnicity. They’re a problem as well. This creates an inequality for people in thinking that way that one is higher than the other by using terms or stating that an ethnicity or a people are the problem when there is an opportunity to see what skill set people have. So, for example, being Native American, what type of skill set do we have?

In my particular case or field, what skill set can I bring as a Native American person to STEM, to science? The type of background that I can bring based on the fact that I have this knowledge and that we’re not the dominant creatures on earth. There’s a whole cycle of natural being, a natural state out there that we need to take into account. If we mess with one thing, it’s going to bring imbalance to another thing. We know this well given the current state of the atmosphere.

With regard to being Native American, we have to inform others that don’t follow those types of teachings, and tell them this might be a different way of thinking. That’s why I really enjoy the interdisciplinary type of work and research that I do because I can bring those ideas to the research that I do. I’ve been really successful in the research that I’ve done. It’s a large study area, similar in size to West Virginia, and the four-year duration of my study is also unique. The research methods that I’m using haven’t been used before. In our culture, we’re taught “Tó eí iína at’é” meaning “Water is Life”. This teaching has been influential in my studies. I dedicated my dissertation “To those who have come before me, who have taught the importance of Tó eí iína at’é.” This is an acknowledgement for my ancestors, people who colonizer’s deemed part of the Indian problem.

**What are the challenges facing you and your people?**

**CTC**: We have intergenerational trauma. The Navajo people have had to deal with a lot over the past hundreds of years. My great, great, great grandparents came from forced encampment. They were enslaved by the United States government in Fort Sumner. My great grandparents, grandparents, and parents were put in boarding schools to be assimilated into someone or thing that other people wanted them to be. It’s important to think about the current state of the Navajo Nation’s challenges with the knowledge of all that’s gone on before.

A lot of times, when people talk about the Navajo Nation, it sounds like: “Yeah, they’re the largest land based tribe, but their unemployment rate is really high. Their graduation rates are really low. Maybe less than 50% of their population lives on the reservation. They have a high poverty rate.” There are a lot of issues on the Navajo Nation. Including natural resource related issues. In the news now, is Navajo Generating Station, a coal burning power plant. Questions include should the Navajo Nation continue operation? Should it end? Should the Navajo Nation buy the mine and run the generating station?

There are also issues related to domestic violence. There are issues related to not enough police enforcement on the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation has their own police force, but there are proportionally fewer police officers that cover a really large area. We can think about these problems. And go on and on, perhaps think about problems dealing with alcoholism and health-related issues. Or the health-related issues that come from our food security issues, for instance. Our health-related issues come from the fact we are a people that live in a food desert where there’s only 13 full serving grocery stores on the Navajo Nation. Also related is poor diet that leads to diabetes and heart disease. There are abandoned uranium mines that have led to health issues. Navajo people have different cancers and more health-related issues directly tied to their environment. We have veteran-related issues that Navajo people deal with. If you’re not familiar, Native Americans serve in the country’s armed forces in greatest numbers per capita, more than any other ethnic group. We have people returning from war, and they don’t have the services they need. VA Clinics are hours away; they’re not around the block. A lot of people are dealing with PTSD.

There are many issues on the Navajo Nation. It’s like anywhere else in the world.

**Are there any solutions to our global challenges you see more promising?**

**CTC**: Yes, if you state a problem, there has to be a solution to the problem you are acknowledging. For example, I can’t change the whole Navajo Nation and all the problems people associate with it. Even within my family, with whatever issues individuals might be dealing with, whether they might be a veteran or a survivor of domestic violence or whether they might be a recovering addict from an addictive substance. I only have the opportunity and power to make changes for myself. I see education as a way to improve my life, my family’s lives, and my community. By becoming more educated and having more knowledge about growing up outside the Navajo Nation, I can see possibilities for solutions. For me, one area in which I can be of assistance is with natural resource management or environmental challenges. That’s what I’m doing now. On the Navajo Nation, there was not a lot of quantitative data out there that described precipitation patterns. The background I have allows me to bring awareness to water related issues, not only in and to the academic and scientific community, but trying to get my research out to tribal water managers, tribal land managers, tribal biological wildlife managers as well. For me, that’s where I can help.

I’m only one person. I try to encourage other people to bring awareness to issues important to them, and to help in areas that they are passionate about. In 2016, I spoke at the commencement of my old high school, Window Rock High School. I encouraged people to find their passion, find the way they can make a difference in the world. The difference I will make is going to be related to environmental issues. I have cousins that are teachers and they are making their mark in education. I have other relatives that are in the health field and they are helping people manage their health concerns.

In retrospect, the only way I can make a difference is by being a positive example. I try to live my life in a way not only as a good example for my son, trying to be a good human being in this large world we call Earth, but also as a good human being wherever I go. The world’s issues are going to take a lot of time and a lot of people to make it better. We need to work collectively and provide solutions.

**Anything else you would like to share?**

**CTC**: I think the only other thing I’d like to say is that although our skin pigmentation may be different, although we may come from different cultures and different backgrounds, we’re still all humans. We are a part of a great cycle of life. Beyond that, we’re part of a larger living planet, and that planet…there’s only one planet that we have to live on. Yeah, NASA is doing explorations to see if there is potential to live on other planets, but right now there’s only one planet called Earth. **We have to think collectively on how to save this planet we call** **Earth**.

**What does it mean to be a Navajo woman in 2017 for you?**

**CTC**: Today being a Navajo Woman, or thinking about what it is to be a woman, especially a Navajo Woman takes me back to the time when I had a *Kinaaldá* ceremony. A *Kinaaldá* ceremony is a puberty ceremony, a coming of age ceremony. I think about all those songs that were sung by the Medicine Man on my behalf the last night of the ceremony. Those songs were of Changing Woman (*’Asdzą́ą́ Nádleehé*). I remember how hard I had to work for those 3 days of my life, grinding over 100 pounds of corn by stone grinder, and being with my paternal grandmother every day at our homestead to abide by the teachings that she grew up with, the teachings that she was passed down to me, about what it is to be a woman.

To be a Navajo woman today to me is to be able to remember our sacred matrilineal role and accept the responsibility of bringing life into this world. Bringing life into this world is a sacred responsibility, and a sacred responsibility that is not to be taken lightly. That’s why I’m really thankful for the partner that I have to raise my son. My son, not only is he Navajo, but he’s Mexican. It’s important to have him know both sides of where he comes from. To be a Navajo woman, I have that responsibility to be able to share all I know with him. I want him to know first he is *Tódích’íi’nii*. He is of the Bitter Water clan. He comes from a long line of prayers. I recognize that in myself, too. I am the corn pollen prayers of yesterday. The corn pollen prayers that were said in the early morning and the late nights by my ancestors that prayed for those who were to come after them, to make a difference in the world.

**Victoria Tubin** **(Kaqchikel)** Guatemala City September 2017

**VT:** I am Victoria Aurora Tubin: Maya Kaqchikel. I am a professional woman, graduate in sociology, as well as having obtained a masters (MS) in communications and development studies. I am completing a doctorate in social sciences. With respect to gender, I consider myself a Maya woman. I do not identify as feminist however. I oppose patriarchal paradigms because they oppress Maya women, generating a series of injustices against women. I do not consider myself feminist, rather as a woman who fights to make visible the injustices that Indigenous women face. As an example, our quest for the vindication of the struggle that recognizes First Peoples is foremost and this mainly because our history has been distorted and misrepresented. We have, and are told a history which is not ours. For that reason, I discuss concepts, among which is ethnicity, an abstract word that does not embody or reflect one of the key problems which we, First Peoples face (particularly women) of racism. Racism is a problem that encompasses much more than just ethnicity, since it stems from concepts of race, inferiority and subordination of some people or one group, while others are elevated and considered superior to them. This has to do with power relations. The discussion revolves around our positioning ourselves in a global era and context, a phenomenon impacting Indigenous Peoples more than others, because there is an overriding push to globalize everything without taking into account the particular conduct, lifeways and ways of interacting with nature. In this manner, those involved in resistance work have been able to enter the conversation. A sense of defiance has been passed down through generations, beginning with the resistance to the invasion of the Spaniards. Undoubtedly, we have experienced tremendous moments of violence, most notably the last one during the internal armed conflict of our civil war. Now we are in another phase of the global era, with the continuation of development models imposed from afar, yet what we strive for is the insertion of new development projects, that are geared to the pueblo and the people, instead of for the benefit of a few. The prevailing model of development has brought with it a series of destructions, especially of our identity, our livelihood, our existence as First People, our relationship with the land and earth, and the universe. Most importantly, it has caused a loss of our identity as First Peoples.

**How do you define and characterize your activism, if you accept that term?**

**VT:** I characterize my activism as a leadership of resistance, because we are not living in a framework of logic that disputes discrete moments, rather it is that resistance of saying out loud “we are First Peoples, and a part of humanity, with all of the corresponding human rights. We have individual rights, so why then do you not permit us to live according to the rights inscribed in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples? [[11]](#footnote-11) Why don’t you make that document effective and apply those standards and principles for the Indigenous people, and women? Why do you reject the premise of those documents by obviously negating our rights to participation and existence in the modern world of the global era? I say world because this refers to places far beyond these borders. Here in Guatemala, the First Peoples are discounted, overlooked and neglected- considered worthless. Racism, violence, and everything we experience is quotidian and determinants of our lives. Taken from their point of departure, the actions of the government, reflected in the national budget provide less than one Quetzal investment in education and health of Maya youth, whereas the Latina or mestiza (mixed blood) receives the benefit of 4 to 6 Quetzales per child. This is where the gross differences in the apportionment of funds for the Indigenous, the uneven guarantee of equal rights, and abominable disparities in freedom and protection of rights for First Peoples in Guatemala becomes evident. We do not benefit from the established laws and rights nor enjoy the same level as everyone else. For these reasons, I consider myself a woman of resistance, part of my grandparents’ and ancestor’s struggle for freedom.

**Is activism possible at this moment**?

**VT:** It has been difficult. Fierce repression targeted in the last few years against the Indigenous Peoples is a worldwide phenomenon. In South America, there are many Indigenous who do not live in places where they are accorded the right to protest. They can’t express their criticism, due to the arrival of large multinational corporations and megaprojects underway on their territory. We see an invasion of their lands. The first thing the corporations do is capture the leaders, arrest them, kidnap them or assault them, something occurring here in Guatemala too. There are various Indigenous Guatemalan Maya leaders incarcerated and imprisoned here. There are women with outstanding orders for their arrest, solely because they are defending their lands.

The prevailing dynamic is violent, much more so than before. I refer not only to physical, but also violence that is epistemological and discursive in nature. This means accusations against people are easily fabricated in order to appease and uphold the interest, benefit and profit of a particular economic sector seeking to discredit these struggles. Yesterday, I heard a discussion on the radio about charges of corruption relating to our president of the Republic. It was striking that they did not touch the structural problem, only the current crisis as though an isolated case. Moreover, a defender of the government actions said: those on the extreme left, who are manipulating this case against the president, are Indigenous, working through Codeca (an organization primarily constituted by Indigenous peoples). They say the Indigenous are extreme and destroying Guatemala. This is precisely the discursive violence to which I am alluding, in which they accuse the First Peoples of not having the same legitimate rights to protest as others. This opens up a key question of legitimacy, which impedes the vindication of our struggle.

**How would you respond to the colonizer’s oppressive trope that essentializes the Native People as an Indian Problem?**

**VT:** There are many aspects to address here. First, when we refer to an Indigenous problem, let us remember who initiated and posed this “question.” They are speaking about a different reality and a distinct context. It is an epistemological problem, so how it is addressed in academia, in economic discourse, and the discourse of our government is distinct.

When they say the Indigenous problem, it is rather like adding one problem to another. For them it is not structural and we fundamentally understand this issue posed in distinct ways.

When they refer to this problem, it is regarding our clothing, or that we are thinking about land which is not arable or useless. What they do not say is that they need our land for their megaprojects. It is an epistemic problem: those who pose it, how they frame it, and how they hear our demands by those questioning the State.

**What are the challenges facing you and your people?**

**VT:** There are many challenges, among which is the vindication of the dignity of Indigenous Peoples. For instance, the complexity and trials of being here at the university. It is not easy to be in the university, because we number few, in fact, only two professors. We do not have long term employment security, rather we are given a contract for six month intervals and then are reassessed at the end of each period. This turns into a very complex situation, given the insecurity and uncertainties of not knowing if you will have a job in the future, income, or have to look for a employment elsewhere.

Furthermore, the same “globalization” has generated much unemployment, even if one is a professional, white collar, there is no assurance. This turns into a kind of survival for us, instead of living with dignity; it is a daily survival. It is a challenge with respect to resistance, which sustains us in our defense of our territory, our cosmovision, our customs and lifeways, and desire to continue being who we are, Maya. That is the challenge facing us as Indigenous People. To identify ourselves, continue being part of, and being recognized as male and female citizens, which we are, with all the commensurate rights and equality. They always treat us as though we do not wield those selfsame rights and as though we are not entitled to equality.

**What is the role of the social sciences in 2017?**

**VT:** It is remarkable to say this, but it appears that in this day and age of globalization, the social sciences do not carry the same value or meaning as before, and might even be eroding or eliminated. However, at the same time, this situation may serve as a strategy in some perverse way because the social sciences are contributing theoretically and epistemologically. Certain tools permit us to comprehend these current and historical contexts, and the structural barriers existing today in our society, not only in Guatemala or the United States, rather worldwide. Obviously, the social sciences must pass through a form of codification, because up until now they have focused on Eurocentrism and Occidentalism, instead of a social science based on the contributions and knowledge of those excluded from the production of scientific knowledge, silenced, or viewed as subalterns. Therefore, the challenge for the social sciences is also how to construct a social science that is not only western, rather more expansive, with the caveat of democratizing knowledge. How do we understand knowledge and not-knowledge? There is absolutely nothing which can be characterized as *not knowledge,* even though the Eurocentric academics teach us that precise fallacy.

**Which if any are the most effective spaces for change work?**

**VT:** There are spaces where change work is happening. Moreover, the youth are involved. The system imposes certain conditioning on us from our childhood, through communication media and education. These are a whole series of discourses around behavior. However, it is also true as the classic sociologists claimed, not all of society is necessarily submerged in this logic. There will always be those who escape cooptation, or are not completely within its’ clutches. Youth tend to be able to do this, and for that reason, even under the aforementioned constraints and conditions in which one must dictate classes at this university [USAC], I am motivated to go before students, even in situations of racism, some violent and others less aggressive, and albeit challenging, to impart knowledge in the front of the room. It is challenging to stand before them, yet it makes them viscerally see that reality has many shapes and faces. There are many ways of perceiving it.

Some of my past students have become sensitized to these issues. They conduct themselves in ways perhaps they might not have done, if not for these spaces. It is easier to imagine those transformational spaces for youth and young adults, rather than older adults.

There are many promising spaces where women and the First Peoples have begun to recognize and understand their own history exists. Although it is not overtly expressed, on the occasions we have initiated discussion about our reality, individuals have shown their desire to dig into, and understand their heritage. We can approach this subject of dealing with, and identifying the most daunting social hurdles, from the perspective of our own lived experiences and from within distinct social settings. In some cases, the major complaint has to do with water insufficiency in their homes, some attribute this to the municipality, whereas this is not the case. The problem is environmental, and the corresponding destruction. Then the question is one of figuring out how to look for this space of transformation, take advantage, and flesh out the problem in its entirety. In addition, there is the issue of corruption, and impunity, what does that mean? Who is involved, and why are they behaving in that manner? This facilitates the comprehension by people of the complexity of these challenges and that we have responsibilities as a society to own and implement.

**What is the role of Social Sciences today?**

**VT:** There is much to say regarding Guatemala over the last few years and our current situation, especially with regard to racism and exclusion. From the time of the institutionalization of our nation of Guatemala, the Indigenous Peoples have not been recognized as citizens. In the last year and this current year of 2017, we witnessed racism during the electoral reform of the political parties, wherein the heightened visibilization of women and the Indigenous peoples was central to the proposition. In congress, of the 158 deputies, there are only 22 women, and of those women, there is only one Indigenous woman. Same with the magistrates, mostly men. If we try to ascertain how many are Garífunas, Xincas or Mayas, there simply aren’t any.

Those were the changes sought by the modification of the electoral law and reform of political parties, yet the congress, who made the revisions, did not pass them. Those articles were omitted. The same thing happened with the question of constitutional political reforms in regard to the system of justice. There were articles included, mostly because there are areas where people still utilize the Maya judicial system, to mete out justice. These are community/Pueblo forms of justice that are specific to the place and Indigenous people there.

Therefore, in the judicial reform process, we included that article. Even before the deputies read it, they criminalized the article. Once it was known that the Indigenous would be in positions of governance, that those “savage” Indigenous would be implementing and replacing the existing system, causing the disruption and potential for two distinct states, it was considered an absurdity. Everything was taken to the extreme, eliminating the two articles, and thus closing the discussion.

These are reflections of the extreme racism in place in the very institutions of our Republic. Thus, the Indigenous are not part of this nation-state rather remain as foreigners in our own homes, with the edict that this is the way it should be. The crisis surrounding the respect and recognition of Indigenous peoples is obvious. It is becoming progressively more egregious in terms of the globalization processes, the implacable homogenization, the erasure of First Peoples and their replacement with Guatemaltecos or Chapines.

**What does it mean to be an Indigenous Woman in 2017?**

**VT:** I feel so proud to be a Maya Kaqchikel, especially when I know that the erroneous history they have taught us since primary school is not our history. When I have gone over my ancestor’s history and was made aware of the accurate information about their lives, it is a beautiful history that stirs passion in me. I have strong, deep roots, and feel immense pride in this heritage. In contrast to a nation that denies us, which throughout time has violently treated us as women and Indigenous, considering us inferior, at times I have felt the arduousness of our course. Somedays it is worse, and yet, precisely in that despicable challenge, I find sources of courage and determination. In situations like this conversation, I am inspired with a light to continue onward and know this world must change for my sons and daughters, in order to live in a better world.

As First Peoples, we do not seek to return to that pre-Columbian life as it was prior to colonization. However, we do request respect in a globalized world, and recognition. Moreover, Western society should acknowledge that we Indigenous have much to contribute, be it knowledge or other realms. If we were to create a different kind of society, a different world, we could live in equal harmony and prosperity.

**Antonia Benito (Maya Poqomam)**  Guatemala CitySept. 29, 2017

**How do you self-identify with regard to ethnicity, gender, geo-politics and/or other aspects?**

**AB**: I am Antonia Benito, a young Maya Poqomam woman from the department of Esquintla. I am currently working in the media for Radio Qawinaqel, which broadcasts in Maya Poqomam, my native language. From there, we also carry out local jobs. I belong to organizations at both a local and international level.

In terms of economics, each of the communities manages from within its own space. We do this in the Qawinaqel organization as well, in the way that allows us to publicize the work that the people do. Speaking of economics, the women within the communities manage their own economy by making our traditional clothing, among other things, which is an important factor still managed from within our communities.

**How do you define and characterize your activism, if you accept that term?**

**AB:** We may not actually use the word “activist,” but the people do, and the way the people perceive activism is determined by what we do. I cannot say that I am an activist if the people that surround me do not see it that way. If they do begin to see it that way, it’s because the work we are developing in our communities is going well, and happening in such a way that they identify with what we do and the role that we are taking.

**Is activism possible now?**

**AB:** Resistance is inherent to the work that we do both in terms of communication and organization. We try to maintain our own way of looking at life based on the Mayan cosmovision. It is a worldview of still resisting, of using our traditional clothing (which you can see as we walk freely along the streets), of using our native language wherever we are. Because if things were still like they were twenty years ago, our language, our own way of viewing life, the participation of Mayan women in different spaces might have already disappeared, but we are involved in the daily, quotidian vindication task of trying to keep this type of participation alive and to strengthen it.

**Where have you seen the greatest changes?**

**AB:** Change can be made in all spaces. The question is how to go about finding those who are allies, those who really occupy those spaces, whether the space is political, economic, social or educational (which is another one of our strengths). Regarding the realm of communications, it is about finding a place where you can really make substantial changes, changes which serve as an example for the generations of Guatemalans to come.

**How would you respond to the colonizer’s oppressive trope that essentializes the Native People as an Indian Problem?**

**AB:** We are essentially Original People from First People’s Communities, and historically they have seen us as a problem, but we have been able to demonstrate just the opposite. There are Indigenous professionals in different areas, and there are also Indigenous people who are not professionals that are examples to us as young women. They are people that make changes in the country and develop a way of organizing themselves. They have been an example to us because through them we continue to learn about how to communicate in the communities, as well as the ways in which we can keep our own ways of valuing life, language, communication, organization, and economies vibrant. We are still alive. I do not believe we are a problem, because if we were, if they still viewed us as they did twenty years ago, we would not exist anymore. But we are strengthening ourselves. I can assure you that in the present time, with women and Indigenous teenagers, the subject of duality in Mayan spirituality is fundamental. Another achievement has been the addition of elderly people to the Network of Indigenous Youth of Latin America, which shows that right now efforts are being coordinated in different spaces.

**What is the role of the social sciences today?**

**AB:** In media, the biggest challenge is security, now that activism is stigmatized in our country. Recently we were discussing it and we said that we now see our community leaders are being criminalized, just as they criminalize the reporters that do their jobs in a totally different way, because we aren’t in the national or corporate media, but rather we try to provide media *for* the communities and *from* the communities. Speaking of communities, the support that they give to authorities is minimal, as is the level of importance that they are granted. The effort continues from our grandmothers and grandfathers, and the generations that follow in this fight.

We work in media from within the communities in the native Mayan language. We work with the nearby population and offer financial support to female entrepreneurs, those whose work is based on the idea of strengthening political participation by young people who are already involved with making changes from a local to a national level. Therefore, what we do is make all the work that these young people are doing evident. And we do not simply remain in the local realm--in the moments when we are able to come in contact with young people, with activists, with people from other communities on a national level-- we try to evidence the role they are developing for a true change in this country.

T**he media is fundamental to being able to create criteria, to be able to facilitate tools or panoramas that show what is happening.** The most important thing is to be able to make people’s lives easier. We must evaluate the evidence that the media uses to transmit information, because it is true that you can use the media to manipulate information, something that currently happens with some media outlets in Guatemala. Therefore, it is fundamental that as citizens we always keep track of what the different media outlets are saying to be able to form our own opinions. In this way, the media is fundamental and important. We have to know how to choose which media outlet we use to inform ourselves. Something else important to consider is that social networks now play a fundamental role by disseminating media in a completely different way.

**Where have you noticed positive change occurring?**

**AB:** Perhaps there have not been solutions with results that can be seen already, but what is evident is that the participation of the youth and women is becoming increasingly present. They are becoming more articulate, and we hope that through every effort made by the organizations, the youth and the reporters, they can obtain long-term results, something that we may be doing already. Therefore, we hope that these connections and the changes they are making right now can create collective results for everyone.

As young people, we have a great responsibility and national commitment. We have this responsibility with the communities as well; being able to make evident that we are interested in real changes in our country, not just superficial changes that they have tried to get us to believe through the corporate media. We have been seeing in these days that young people have indeed assumed this role. I can attest that during the protests of 2015, and specifically the marches of September 20th of 2017, a great many present were young. Above all, it is important to see the alliances that universities made in order to show that we are also committed to change in this country. It is encouraging to see that young women are assuming that role. Right now, there are tools of protection that may not be one hundred percent visible- the youth and the Indigenous authorities are still criminalized. But we believe in a change, we believe that the participation of the people makes it clear that we need legal reforms. In this case, we are really hoping for the electoral law to be reformed, but we also want them to keep the different sectors in mind so they do not play games with us again, so they do not make us believe there is a change when it is only something superficial to make us calm down again. It is our responsibility as young people, as different fields, to be able to join forces so that we can make changes in our country, and to let the young people know that they should be vigilant of what is happening in this country so that history does not repeat itself.

**What does it mean to be an Indigenous Woman in 2017?**

**AB:** Being an Indigenous woman is an honor, because from the moment when we begin to communicate in our language, we know that all of this information that we are sharing completely changes its meaning when it’s translated into Spanish. We know that we are so different from other cultures, but live with the same purpose-- collective well-being-- which is fundamental for our Indigenous communities as much as everyone else. The ability to communicate in different ways so that we can express ourselves is fundamental for us as Indigenous women, as is being proud of being able to wear our clothing without facing discrimination. Above all, we are becoming professionals more and more frequently, from within our own communities, better able to express and convey our identity.

**Would you like to add anything else?**

**AB:** I would just like to thank you for showing that the Indigenous people, the Mayan people, still exist in Guatemala, and that we continue to fight so that this country will continue to change more and more.

**Liliana Hernández (Maya)** Guatemala City Oct. 2017

**How do you self-identify with regard to ethnicity, gender, geo-politics and/or other aspects?**

**LH:** My name is Liliana Hernández. I am an Indigenous woman and a lawyer, and the first woman to graduate from a university in both my maternal and paternal family. That makes me feel very honored, and it is a greater duty to use the profession that I studied in service of my community and the Indigenous people of Guatemala. I fight for justice, for the collective rights of the Indigenous people. With my testimony of life and struggle, other women feel motivated and inspired to move forward, to change those traditional gender roles which state that they should only be at home making food and taking care of children. I do that as well, but I also have a profession. I project myself onto my community and on all of the Guatemalan population in the struggle for rights.

I am a woman of struggle. A socially-committed lawyer, which means a lawyer that is not simply in their office waiting for clients, but one that fights for the fulfillment of the rights of Indigenous women and Indigenous communities, especially in the defense of natural resources. I have had the opportunity to join struggles for the defense of rivers and other water sources, and for the defense and the recovery of lands. This gives me the certainty that we are contributing to the eradication of many inequalities- not only of an ethnic origin, but economic inequalities as well, **because when a woman is economically independent, she can also be free to better face the violence that exists against women**. She can overcome and survive situations of violence. If a woman has the possibilities and opportunities as well as the economic means to move forward, it can contribute to reduce the inequality gaps facing women.

I live in Guatemala, a country that is racist, discriminatory, patriarchal and misogynistic, and in that context, I fight by means of my profession as a lawyer. As an activist, I participate in social collectives and in other spaces, like organizations or spaces of analysis. This means **often our actions of resistance are not simply in accompanying a group of people in a legal sense, but rather in equipping these struggles with the understanding about rights and protest, and through social networks**, offering messages of support to the demands of the population, not only of the Indigenous people. We also support the citizens that, in this Guatemalan context, fight against the impunity and corruption of this nation in which we, the Indigenous people are not included, and where women also have no place. In support of the inclusion of Indigenous women, I have participated in endeavors, initiated by the government and from social organizations, specifically the *Defensoría de la Mujer Indígena* (Advocacy for Indigenous Women), an institution which was created as a product of the peace treaties, with the intention on the part of several women that it would be for Indigenous women. However, within the structure of a racist nation, this institution has also faced discrimination. **There is structural discrimination on the part of the nation towards these smaller opportunities to assist Indigenous women**. The entire struggle, and these recent experiences reaffirms our commitment that we must do more work and leave a legacy of life for other generations to transform our situation.

**How would you define activism and characterize your activism?**

**LH:** I identify as a defender of human rights. The term activism does not seem to have a course, a clearly defined purpose. My activity, my position in this society is as a defender of the rights of Indigenous people, of Indigenous women.

**How would you respond to the colonizer’s oppressive trope that essentializes the Native People as an Indian Problem?**

**LH:** **The Indigenous Problem has been a justification on the part of the colonial state to erase our history and, furthermore, to justify the pillaging of all of our cultural elements.** Not only the external material aspects of culture, like our fabrics, traditional medicine, architecture and gastronomy, but also the seizing of possessions and resources, such as rivers, mountains and territories.This term which states that we are a problem currently has a new meaning, because they call us enemies of progress. When the Indigenous people take a stance, when there is resistance against the imposition of extractive projects, they consider us a problem all over again. The World Bank and the financial banks consider us to be a problem, and the government as well, because we are “enemies of development or terrorists that reject progress.” Therefore, this term is still used in the present to justify this pillaging.

**What are the challenges you face today?**

**LH:** Some of the biggest challenges are extreme poverty, the lack of opportunities, the lack of access to quality education and healthcare, and the lack of governments (on both a local and national level) that are committed to providing the human rights that we all have a right to. In our population, there are also problems of corruption from a political standpoint, and a problem for women is that there is a strong and deeply embedded misogyny. There is also a lack of understanding of the struggles of women. There is a stigmatization of women who are different, who want to exercise their rights, who want to be free as women and as people within their own identity. Those are the most serious and profound problems.

There has been a deficit of quality education and content. Formally there can be a school, an establishment where children go to learn, but which does not provide quality content. I myself question the education I received, in which I did not learn the true history of my country. I also did not acquire the higher quality technical knowledge needed that would have allowed me to achieve much more. With respect to the discipline or science of law, we must remember that it is constructed in a way that insures the reproduction of the state. It has been very difficult for me to engage with the educational blueprint of the university, in which they force us to replicate and be custodians and guardians of this racist and oppressive state, and not to question these laws and this nation. I have had many disagreements with other lawyers since graduating, because I consider myself a rebellious lawyer- I question the laws, I do not replicate them. The laws should be formed by the people, by their necessities. If not, the laws will form the people. That is why I believe that with respect to laws and rights, there are enormous challenges in Guatemala and in other countries that have imposed these models, where there are native peoples with justice systems that have distinct logics in which our communities resolve problems through agreements and mediation, and not through punishment or punitive measures. This model which has legal [standing] is entirely different from the vision of the native peoples and of women. If we talk about how the laws do or do not protect Indigenous women from my experience in the *Defensoría de la Mujer Indígena* in the department of Totonicapán, the measures of protection for women that are written in law do not really apply, because they have no access to police, to phone service, or to a justice system. For that reason, women and their families turn to the Indigenous authorities.

They are opposite realities, distinct logics. Speaking of the social sciences, the current challenge is to deeply understand those forms of solving problems and to leave them be, to let the people have their own forms of organization and their own view of life. What has happened is that there has been an imposition on every level, not only from the perspective of languages and a political system, but also an entire way of thinking. I trained as a lawyer precisely because I had to know how the nation that oppresses us works, so I could transform it.

**What are the most promising solutions?**

**LH:** The people in general, and the Indigenous people, have their own responses to changes, but what is happening is that they do not have power, they are not in spaces where they can make decisions. Therefore, we can look for a solution in justice, but this justice must be adapted to the people to whom it is owed. Like in a nation, or in any other institution, there can be no changes if it does not reflect or represent the unrepresented population. Changes come in the form of a change of thinking, a change in the forms of education. I will not say in the schools, because that is not the only place where one receives information- it comes from different sources. But it is a change of thought, of knowledge, and of education, which can open us up to a better comprehension and understanding of our diversity and our equality as human beings, as women and men.

The most important thing that has happened in our history as women has been the organization of women’s goals. There are collectives of Indigenous women now working together. There are new forms of expression emerging. As long as there are distinct forms of representation coming from schools, from poetry, from politics, all of this will merge and coalesce, and include other women. All spaces are important, but they must have a common goal of change and transformation. They must assume a political position as Indigenous women, who within our society are considered third tier people without any influence or power. We must demonstrate that we can change the situation of a society, that we can contribute in many ways. I believe in the freedom of expression in every environment and in the exercising of rights, in the exercise of being subjects of our rights.

**What changes have occurred that make you optimistic about the situation in Guatemala?**

**LH:** Two years ago, in 2015, the seed of expressing ourselves more collectively was planted. People were very scared in the past and when we went out to protest (in my case I participated in *campesina* protests), there was a strong stigmatization- it was shameful to join a protest because it meant that you did not have anything better to do. When the middle class in the city takes to the streets and fights against corruption on Saturdays, that fear of the stigma begins to be broken through the social networks. However, I believe that form of protesting has always existed in the marginalized sectors of Guatemala, it is simply that before, they were not accepted. Now they are received in a new light, and recently there has been greater effort on the part of the population to reject the political class, which has been controlled by de facto powers, by economic power. They rejecta perverse system of political parties that creates a circle of corruption, a circle which ranges from illicit electoral financing to paying for said financing with political favors. It is a circle of corruption whose consequences are poverty and malnutrition.

Change is in our hands, but we still do not have the power to change the laws. A strong aspiration is to change our constitution, and the forms of carrying out our social organization, as much as the forms of participating and making decisions. It is an opportunity for the Indigenous people to reaffirm their self-determination. It is a moment for the Indigenous people to think about whether the path of political parties is the best option for solving the problems of exclusion and discrimination. They must evaluate if the political system we have is the best opportunity to reaffirm that self-determination, that form of solving problems, but also of participating, of organizing ourselves as a society. We have a lot of experience, and there are many opportunities for Guatemala. The youth is playing a part by mobilizing, but the Indigenous people and the organizations with track records and experience can provide insight, and also contribute principally in changing our system of political parties, of constructing this new political class. There must be a total change, which comes from the strength of mobilization, from not letting our guard down- we cannot rest or backpedal. We have taken the first step and we must continue as Guatemala.

**What does it mean to be an Indigenous Woman today?**

**LH:** Being an Indigenous woman is a commitment to leaving a legacy for other Indigenous women, of having the courage to break patterns of discrimination and misogyny. It is not easy to do, even from where I am. It is a path of undoing discrimination that has had personal and familial costs. As an Indigenous woman, I am dedicated to continue contributing to the full exercise of women’s rights, from what I do and from my testimony of struggle as a woman and as a professional. It is an enormous challenge, but I want to leave this legacy for my daughters, because I want my culture to stay alive. I love my culture. I am proud of my roots and I want them to continue in a dignified way. I do not want them to see us as a problem anymore, but as a marvelous culture, as our grandparents were, and as we are today. It is a responsibility and duty, but it is also a satisfaction of life both from my personal life and as a part of the Maya Quiché culture of which I form a part and of which I am very proud.

**Anything else?**

**LH:** I would like to thank the people that share our struggles. We have received a lot of support, mostly from outsiders. We still need to learn about other cultures in order to better understand ourselves. But at the same time, we don’t want to lose our roots, our essence. In this perverse capitalistic world, it is a constant struggle from what we eat, what we wear, and to the information that we receive. We should maintain our way of life without distancing ourselves from new ways of relating in society. I would like for discrimination to disappear one day and for all of us to have the same opportunities. I wish the women of my community were already free in thought, free in the possibility to be left to be themselves, and not what society, the nation or the church wants us women to be. I want them to be free.

**Lucia Xiloj (Quiché)** Guatemala City October 2017

**How do you self-identify with regard to ethnicity, gender, geo-politics and/or other aspects?**

**LX:** My name is Lucía Xiloj. I am a Maya Quiché woman. My whole family is of Quiché descent. I am from Chichicastenango. I am also a lawyer. In this field, I am currently helping several women, especially in gaining access to justice for severe sexual abuse that they suffered during the Guatemalan Civil War. Many women were objects of sexual violence and, unfortunately, throughout the peace process, the topic of women and the violence they suffered has been left invisibilized and erased. Approximately ten years ago it began to come to light that women were in fact victims of severe sexual violence, and important steps have been taken in the justice system in that regard. But it is still necessary to continue with this work, because in our racist and misogynistic society, these women are often not believed. It is important to continue with these processes to show that these were not isolated incidents, but rather part of what was practically a national policy which was seen almost everywhere in the country- where there were massacres, women were also raped. We want women to be able to continue becoming stronger, and to be considered subjects of law, because in our societies, oftentimes even in the Indigenous communities, women are only considered objects, even though there is a romantic perception that everything is going well.

I do not identify as a feminist. I work towards women’s rights, and the feminism that is practiced in Guatemala has still not managed to understand that Indigenous women have a distinct perception and merit freedom as they understand feminist causes. Feminism offers a form of strengthening women that clashes with the process we Indigenous women are involved in to vindicate ourselves and to overcome our historical subordination. Sometimes feminism arrives suddenly and forcefully, and for that reason Indigenous women do not connect with it.

I seek to reclaim my heritage. Several principles that our grandparents taught us, such as complementarity and duality (in which both men and women are important) need to be part of the process. But this Indigenous communitary [comunidad] perception was destroyed during the Civil War and also during the invasion. We are in a process of reconstructing this Indigenous communitary ideal in which both women and men are truly important, because currently women, especially Indigenous women, have little access to education and health. The only priority they have in life is to marry and have children, which is primarily due to the destruction of this Indigenous communitary conception. It is important to reconstruct the juridical processes and psychosocial support to continue constructing that Indigenous communitary form of living. These women have a position in society which allows them to be mothers or housewives, but they should also be subjects of law with other options in life. These are complex processes, because not only do they imply working directly with women to help them become stronger emotionally and psychosocially, but also working with their families and communities as a whole.

**What experiences have led to your heightened consciousness of the discrimination and violation of Indigenous peoples?**

**LX:** It is a complex situation. I came to study here in the capital city when I was fourteen years old, because my father was one of the few people who believed that women also had the right to receive an education. He wanted me to receive a quality education, which is why he sent me to study in Guatemala City when I was young. I started becoming involved in the educational world, and prior to that time, I had never realized how racist Guatemala was (and is), because I grew up in Chichicastenango, whose population is primarily Quiché, and was never aware of the racist relations that existed in the rest of the country. I became aware of this complicated situation when I arrived here in the capital, and what gave me the strength to continue studying, and even to vindicate myself as a woman (though I did not have the political consciousness to know what that meant) was my mother’s support. When I was in school, they wanted me to wear the school uniform, the justification being that I would feel bad or uncomfortable in my traditional clothing. I was debating with myself, “is it better if I put it on or not…” but then my mother told me, “don’t feel ashamed of your clothing.” It was a kind of shock when she told me that, because it is possible that at that moment I was under that impression that I *would* feel ashamed, but when she said that everything changed. I felt more empowered to say no. I would not wear the uniform. I continued wearing my traditional clothing, and when I was able to study at the university, the burden of racism continued. Now that I am a professional, it is even more present, because on the street and in other places nobody can imagine that I might have a profession in the university. I helped with a case of discrimination against a woman who worked in the courts. The representative of the Public Ministry looked at her instead of me, and said “oh, you’re a lawyer?” when in fact, I was the lawyer. This always happens when we don our traditional clothing. It is a form of stereotyping, and that is why it is important to me to have a symbol for this political recognition that I am an Indigenous woman, but that I can also have other options in life.

**How do you define activism, and how would you characterize it, if you accept the term?**

**LX:** I do not necessarily consider myself an activist, but I do work with defenders of human rights who are activists, such as the women and men who are engaged in the defense of land against projects, such as mining and the installation of hydroelectric plants, that have been imposed on our territory without prior consultation. Above all, I help communities in the legal realm to make visible the violation of their rights as Indigenous communities and as people. Moreover, what I already mentioned related to the sexual violence that women suffered during the Civil War. I have also worked with some communities who are fighting for the restitution of lands from which they have been historically displaced. They are lands that are administered communally, but which lack legal security because the nation has failed to give them title to their property.

**How would you respond to the colonizer’s oppressive trope that essentializes the Native People as an Indian Problem?**

**LX:** We have moved beyond talking about the “Indigenous Problem” to talking more about the rights of the Indigenous peoples, because “Indigenous Problem” is one of the many terms, which does not come from the Indigenous communities themselves. Right now, at least in Guatemala, there is an important understanding that the Indigenous people have stopped being a mere object of study. That is why I am very interested in what you were saying at the beginning about auto-ethnography, because I have always been critical of those that came to study the Indigenous population as if we were objects. Whereas now we are the ones identifying and discussing the situations that we believe threaten our rights, the fabric of our communities, and the conditions of the people. That is why it is more about the vindication of rights than the “Indigenous Problem.”

**Where do you see the need for change?**

**LX:** If the nation itself does not truly change, the situation of the people will remain the same. Whether the government is very conservative or whether it is supposedly more socialist or leftist, they will not understand the issues facing the Indigenous people. They always view it as a class struggle without understanding the ethnic situation, which is fundamental in our country, because the majority of us here are Indigenous, and the issue should be approached from that perspective. If we don’t have Indigenous representatives who are conscious of the situation that the people are facing, they won’t treat it as a priority either, and for that reason we need Indigenous people that really understand the situation and will be committed to our plight. As long as this remains unchanged, and as long as the laws do not take the cost of participation, which often is too high, into account, the situation will continue, because the Indigenous people lack the economic resources to participate in political parties. Ultimately it is through these laws and awareness that political participation takes place. As long as that system continues, we will never have true representation and nothing will change for the people.

**What is the role of the social sciences in this era?**

**LX:** Social sciences definitely have an important role to play. Apart from the legal issues, there is the matter of monitoring sociological matters, of identifying how these dynamics take place. For example, when discussing the relationship between the United States and Guatemala, the topic of immigration is important, of how that phenomenon takes place. It is important because it changes the situation of the Indigenous communities, because oftentimes, in spite of what they gain in the United States in the form of economic advances, there is really no change in the people’s living conditions, because they receive no help from consultants on how to invest their economic resources, or on what priorities they should focus on.

This is also strongly linked with the government’s social policies. In Guatemala, we have had social programs during all previous governments as well as the current one. However, primarily what they have done is reduce family cohesion, because obviously, there are many social challenges that should be dealt with in the Indigenous communities, such as alcoholism, misogyny, and the imposition of what we might call the ideology of the churches, which also have a profound effect on the community’s living conditions.

**What are the biggest challenges facing you and your people?**

**LX:** There are internal and external challenges. There is much talk now about recognizing legal pluralism, of recognizing Indigenous rights and the Indigenous system, which is a good thing. But, on an internal level, we have to discuss the fact that the majority of the Indigenous authority figures are men. There are very few women. In many cases those authorities resolve acts of violence against women, and when they resolve them they do it in a family setting in which they offer restitution. Restitution is given to the parents, and yet the woman, the victim, once again remains invisibilized. I always tell people that we have to discuss this internal problem, because I can defend the recognition of Indigenous rights on an external level, regarding the nation, the government or the official justice system, but internally we cannot stop debating and addressing this, because it continues to threaten women. Because of that, in this way, the violence and invisibilization remains. This neglect is an important obstacle for changing the living conditions of women, and it is very much related to the incorrect perception that those of the official justice system have had, where they defend people who have committed a rape in Indigenous communities, because they still have the erroneous idea that these people have followed rules or customs- they say that they asked for the parents’ permission and therefore they have followed a custom, and even if the girl is a minor, they do not consider that a crime was committed, even when that’s not necessarily the case. We must debate those old anthropological ideas which conceived of Indigenous societies as unchanging and static.

I always give the example of the women of my family. My grandmothers married at thirteen or fourteen without knowing the person they were going to marry. My aunts married young, but not as young as my grandmothers, and they were able to meet the people they were going to marry, and were even able to make a decision (though it was not exactly a decision, because they had no other option). Now we, of the younger generations, have the option of deciding to marry or not. This is because of opportunities, because women have other options in life. They have a different conscience and a distinct upbringing. In this regard, the challenge is to determine how our decisions can be culturally community-based, but not founded on a false custom that Indigenous women marry when they are thirteen or fourteen years old. That is not true. There is an anthropological perception that this is the case, but it is not necessarily grounded in the truth. Societies are constantly changing, and for women, having options is what makes the difference.

Another internal challenge facing organizations that help women is that apart from strengthening their rights and their communities, they must seek options of economic entrepreneurship for themselves, because that often makes the difference as well. Independence or autonomy can be granted to women in order for them to transform their living conditions. This actually changes the living conditions of all people, because if women can have other options, so can their children, and their communities.

I am optimistic, and sometimes idealistic, but we must act. We can’t just stay in the realm of ideas.

1. Patricio Guerrero Arias http://www.redalyc.org/pdf/2790/279021514007.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj Irma. “Pueblos indígenas, Estado y Lucha Por Tierra En Guatemala: Estrategias De Sobrevivencia y negociación Ante La Desigualdad Globalizada.” 2005. UT Austin, dissertation PhD. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. More than 200,000 people were killed over the course of the 36-year-long civil war that began in 1960 and ended with peace accords in 1996. About 83 percent of those killed were Mayan, according to a 1999 report written by the U.N.-backed Commission for Historical Clarification titled “[Guatemala: Memory of Silence](http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/toc.html).” The report also concluded that the vast majority, 93 percent, of human rights violations perpetrated during the conflict were carried out by state forces and military groups. PBS Newshour, Timeline: Guatemala’s Brutal Civil War**,** Mar 7, 2011

   https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/latin\_america-jan-june11-timeline\_03-07 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 2013 Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide trial against former Guatemalan dictator Efrain Rios Montt and his chief of military intelligence officer- Mauricio Rodriguez Sanchez before National Courts of Guatemala. International Justice Monitor of the Open Society, [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Nixtamalization typically refers to a process for the preparation of maize, or other grain, in which the corn is soaked and cooked in an alkaline solution, usually limewater washed, and then hulled. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ladino/Ladina: A westernized Spanish-speaking Latin American (Merriam-Webster). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Campesino/campesina: A native of a Latin American rural area; *especially*: a Latin American Indian farmer or farm laborer (Merriam-Webster) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Criollo/criolla: A person born in Spanish America but of European, usually Spanish, ancestry (dictionary.com) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC) describes the Kaibiles as an Elite Special Force Unit in Poptún, Petén (1975) as part of the counterinsurgency campaign against guerilla forces. They have been identified with connections to the Drug Cartel. (http://ghrc-usa.org/Publications/factsheet\_kaibiles.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A maquiladora in Mexico and Central America is a factory that operates under preferential tariff programs established and administered by the United States and Mexico. Materials, assembly components, and production equipment used in maquiladoras are allowed to enter Mexico duty-free [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the General Assembly on Thursday, 13 September 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)