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Please note before reading: The short article below was commissioned by a German art journal and published in summer 2019. In the tradition of *notes from the field* anthropological writing, this piece provides historical and cultural context, critical reflection, and a brief overview of Section 4 (*La frontière, le hip-hop et la résistance en Arizona / The Border, Hip Hop, and Resistance in Arizona*) of my doctoral dissertation (*Éducation et engagement dans le hip hop global / Education and Engagement in Global Hip Hop*).

Notes from the Field: Neoglyphix, Shining Soul & Indigenous Hip Hop in Arizona

In the spring of 2010 the US state of Arizona passed Senate Bill 1070: *The Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act* (SB 1070), which was the most draconian anti-immigration law in the nation at that time. Shortly thereafter, School Superintendent Tom Horne used Arizona House Bill 2281 (HB 2281) to permanently close Tucson High School's Mexican American Studies Program, despite its record of improving graduation rates and other outcomes of participating students. It also banned books like Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, claiming that they promoted "ethnic chauvinism" and "racial resentment toward whites." Instead of being outliers, SB 1070 and HB 2281 are characteristic of the white supremacy that undergirds the settler colonial history of the United States. This article describes my experience working with Indigenous artists and scholars in Arizona,¹ what they taught me about how these laws fit into the broader context of US history, and how we are resisting.

As a graduate student, educator, and activist, I have spent ten years living and working in the US-Mexico borderlands in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona. During this time, I learned from many talented, engaged Native artists who use their works to resist the institutional racism and settler colonialism upon which the United States was founded and has prospered. Purveyors of these symbiotic malignant Eurocentric systems have deployed physical and symbolic violence, cultural appropriation and erasure, environmental racism, police brutality, forced displacement and assimilation, and the strategy of divide and conquer to create a patriarchal, heteronormative political economy that victimizes the poor, degrades the environment, and favors corporations and white men. As a cis-gendered male and fourth generation European immigrant, I have benefited from these systems and strive to use my privilege to resist and dismantle them.

Before the advent of nation states, the land we call Arizona was home to Indigenous Peoples for more than ten millennia. Rather than being *terra nullius* prior to European colonialization, as it is portrayed in the settler colonial metanarrative of US American history, the original inhabitants of what is now Phoenix constructed the largest irrigation system in the Americas and participated in sophisticated

¹ Terms "Indigenous", "Native", "American Indian", and "Native American" are used interchangeably. "Latinx" and "Chicanx" provide cultural specificity, but are included by the author as Indigenous Peoples of the Americas.

economic networks that spanned the continent. Today Arizona is the 6th largest and 14th most populous US state and shares 622 km of international border with the Mexican states of Sonora and Baja California. However, from 1822 to 1854 Mexico occupied the southern region of present-day Arizona, and one-third of the state's seven million residents still speak Spanish as their first language. Arizona is also home to 22 federally recognized American Indian communities, and contains two of the largest land-based Indigenous nations – Navajo and Tohono O'odham respectively. Due to its rich multicultural history and proximity to the Mexican border, the region remains an active site of settler colonial contention, and many of Arizona's politicians and institutions continue to ardently seek the erasure of Indigenous Peoples and their cultures in pursuit of the colonial settler driven development known as Manifest Destiny.

Today, Eurocentric settler colonial politics manifest in contradictory forms. For example, despite the US economy's unequivocal need for immigrants and their labor, Latinx migrants from the south are publicly demonized as rapists and criminals by the country's highest political office, and the construction of a superfluous border wall is a cause célèbre enthusiastically supported by nearly half the US population. Another example is the representation of Indigenous People in public spaces such as the Arizona State Museum (ASM).² Founded in 1893, ASM houses the largest repository of Native American belongings and ancestral human remains in the US Southwest. Despite its resources and renown, ASM rarely offers exhibitions of contemporary Indigenous art and does not currently employ any Native curators. Instead, like other anthropology museums in the US and Canada, it adheres to what Arizona State University scholars Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty call the *Safety Zone*, which restricts representations of Indigenous Peoples and their cultures to those which do not threaten the current settler colonial order. This adherence to the *Safety Zone* perpetuates negative stereotypes about Indigenous Peoples (e.g. the stoic Indian, the noble savage, and the myth of the vanishing race) that are used to justify Euro-American settlers' genocide and violent dispossession of the Native Peoples of North America.

Rather than being isolated occurrences, the prevalence of racist immigration rhetoric and ASM's representations of Native Peoples draw on the same Eurocentric ideals. White supremacy, and concepts used to bolster it like social evolution theory and Manifest Destiny, are subtly and overtly ingrained in school curricula, popular media, and conventional wisdom throughout the country. Moreover, US American cultural institutions denigrate Indigenous Peoples by touting European roots to the Classical world and portraying Western knowledge as scientific, objective, and free of restrictions. Likewise, they elevate European people, cultures, and their descendants by constructing Indigenous knowledge and epistemologies as subjective, restrictive, and doomed to extinction. Although white supremacy is intrinsic to the cultural fabric of the United States and has enriched and emboldened its settlers, Native Peoples continue to resist.

² <https://statemuseum.arizona.edu/>

In fall 2014 I met Franco Habre/Bronze Candidate (Chicanx) and Alex Soto/MC Liaizon (Tohono O’odham) of the engaged hip-hop group Shining Soul³ after they performed at a fundraiser for Gaza in Tucson. Several weeks later I, along with 20 students from my anthropology class at the University of Arizona, volunteered at the first Neoglyphix All Indigenous Aerosol Art Exhibition,⁴ which was held on the lawn outside of ASM. Over the next year I developed friendships with Shining Soul and several Neoglyphix artists while observing their community engagement works, which combat settler colonial stereotypes of Indigenous Peoples by creating opportunities for folks to interact with contemporary Native artists (e.g. Neoglyphix’s live painting exhibitions) and via educational outreach (e.g. Shining Soul’s youth workshops at the Phoenix Public Libraries).

From 2015 to 2019 I conducted ethnographic research and collaborated with both groups to create new engagements while preparing my doctoral dissertation. For example, Shining Soul and I organized free Hip-Hop Based Education language workshops for low-income youth in Arizona, France, and Morocco using the model of the Parisian cultural association *One, Two, Three...Rap!*.⁵ Later I was invited to participate in making the music video for “*All Day*”, which was filmed in front of the border wall in Nogales, Sonora, and at a US Border Patrol checkpoint on the Tohono O’odham Nation.⁶ As Neoglyphix’s volunteer coordinator, we created intimate and unique service learning opportunities for my university students as volunteers at live painting exhibitions and supporting events. Additionally, in collaboration with Neoglyphix co-founder Dr. Martina Dawley (Hualapai/Navajo), we have presented Neoglyphix’s works and messages at academic conferences and colloquia in the United States, Finland, France, and Canada.

In this era marked by the (re)emergence of racialized nationalism and fascism, rapidly increasing climate instability, and environmental degradation – the importance of Indigenous voices and knowledge has never been more salient. In Arizona, established Native artists like Neoglyphix and Shining Soul, as well as newer collectives like Ojalá Systems,⁷ Flowers & Bullets,⁸ and OXDX,⁹ use hip-hop culture as a form of protest and a language of empowerment. Collaborating with them has been one of the great privileges of my life, and disseminating their messages is one of my roles in our collective work to resist settler colonialism and dismantle institutional racism.

³ <https://shiningsoulmusic.bandcamp.com/>; <http://shiningsoul-music.blogspot.com/>; <https://www.facebook.com/shiningsoulphx/>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bwemYxILYI>; <https://www.neoglyphix.net/>; <https://www.facebook.com/Neoglyphix-589105461610583/>; <https://www.instagram.com/neoglyphix/>

⁵ <https://www.onetwothreerap.com/>; <https://www.facebook.com/OneTwoThreeRap/>

⁶ <https://itsgoingdown.org/shining-soul-day-world-premiere/>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIaGII00Co>

⁷ <https://soundcloud.com/ojalamusic>; <https://www.ojala.systems/>

⁸ <https://www.flowersandbullets.com/>; <https://www.facebook.com/FlowersBullets/>

⁹ <https://www.oxdxclothing.com/>; www.facebook.com/oxdxclothing/; <https://www.instagram.com/oxdxclothing>

Author Bio:

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Photo: **Neoglyphix 2015**

Left-to-Right standing: Reznik – student participant (Tohono O’odham), Navem (Onk Akimel O’odham), UneK (Jemez Pueblo/Tewa), Eroder (Onk Akimel O’odham), Dytch66 (Apache), Nox (Tohono O’odham), Ingen (Tohono O’odham), Dwayno Insano (Onk Akimel O’odham), Strike (Tohono O’odham), Akers (Yaqui), Cyfi (Yaqui), Robr (Oah’u), Cozie (Navajo), Douglas Miles (Apache), Dues (Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota), Lokey (Akimel O’odham)

Left-to-Right kneeling: Yuku (Yaqui), Rezm0 (Navajo), Trie (Santa Clara Pueblo)

Center lying down: Dr. Dawley; Not in photo - Vyal (Yaqui)

Photo credit: Amy Davila (Akimel O’odham)