This article is available open access under a CC BY-ND 4.0 license as part of Berghahn Open Anthro, a subscribe-to-open model for APC-free open access made possible by the journal's subscribers.

Vigilance, Knowledge, and De/colonization

Protesting While Latin@ in the US-Mexico Borderlands

Catherine Whittaker and Eveline Dürr

ABSTRACT: This article shows how vigilance against racism and coloniality in the US-Mexico borderlands produces knowledge, highlighting the decolonizing potential of their dynamic entanglement. Before the Black Lives Matter protests against police violence across the United States in late May 2020, many Latin@s in San Diego, California, already anticipated racial discrimination and violence in light of growing anti-migration sentiment. Those Latin@s who took part in the protests often also protested border patrol violence. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, we argue that the vigilance of Latin@s, who were further racialized as "immigrants" through their protest participation, produced knowledge about ongoing racism and coloniality in San Diego. We propose theorizing vigilance as having both the potential to uphold colonialist structures and to undermine these.

KEYWORDS: Black Lives Matter, coloniality, Latino/a, protest, San Diego, violence

"San Diego is a police state," Berenice exclaimed as she drove away from clouds of tear gas, flashbangs, rubber bullets, and the ever-watching drones. It was 30 May 2020. Half an hour earlier, the 29-year-old Boricua[1] acupuncture student and community organizer had been one of hundreds of protesters gathered at the entrance of the La Mesa police department. Infuriated by the gruesome killing of a Black man, George Floyd, at the hands of law enforcement in Minneapolis some days before, a diverse set of people had come together to declare and demand that "Black lives matter," while being vigilant in doing so, as they had anticipated a violent response—which came, sure enough. As she ran from what felt like a dystopian nightmare, helicopters were circling overhead, booming out that this was an "unlawful assembly." Still reeling from the adrenaline shock, Berenice concluded, "This is becoming a full-on race war."

Between the COVID-19 pandemic, a crashing economy, a tense preelection period, mass deportations, and international Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, Berenice witnessed a particularly unsettling moment in US history. However, much like Black San Diegans, many Latin@s were uniquely prepared for this moment. Against the background of growing anti-migration sentiment in the US-Mexico borderlands, they were already watchful in everyday life, a condensed attention to oneself and others.

Broadly, to be vigilant describes individually directing condensed attention toward an externally set target either to navigate a situation of heightened uncertainty or to avert a specific perceived danger in the service of an assumed greater good, which may include social, moral, or religious goals (Brendecke 2018: 17). As it is commonly used by white Anglo-American politicians and many mainstream media commentators, vigilance denotes citizens being made

responsible for their own and their society's protection by participating in identifying and addressing potential threats. Citizens become active in protecting themselves, rather than just relying on state-provided protection such as via law enforcement (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Bilingual call to vigilance of the San Diego Metropolitan Transport System, 2020. Photo by Catherine Whittaker.

Depending on the context, such threats may be perceived to come from the outside, such as when citizen vigilantes patrol their surroundings in search of "illegal aliens," and from within, such as when Christians look out for sinful thoughts and behaviors in themselves and their families. Calls for vigilance also often articulate an awkward relationship between marginalized groups and institutions. Many nonwhite Latin@s know that police violence, like the violence of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, disproportionately targets racialized people. If watchful against this and other kinds of racism, nonwhite Latin@s are more likely to anticipate situations in which others may mistake them for immigrants because of their phenotype, and take precautions accordingly. As racialized people, they turn their alert gaze toward the state, rather than being vigilant in service of the state, as was already the case before, but even more so during the BLM protests against police violence and the #FreeThemAll protests against criminalizing undocumented migrants in the summer of 2020.

BLM protesters were a highly diverse group of people and placed a particular emphasis on fighting racism. The largely Latin@ #FreeThemAll / Detention Resistance movement went one step further by specifically highlighting the coloniality of structural violence against those racialized as "immigrants" in San Diego. They saw this violence as colonialist in the sense that it emerges from lingering structures of power that stem from the era of colonialism, which began with the conquest of the Americas (Quijano 1997). The protesters' explicitly "decolonial" strategies for challenging these structures included centering the voices of Indigenous San Diegans and enabling bilingual (Spanish-English) testimonies.

Accordingly, in this article, we argue that in the US-Mexico borderlands, vigilance has the potential both to uphold colonialist structures and to undermine these. For example, Latin@s who are watchful against racism are more likely to anticipate situations in which others may discriminate against them because of their phenotype, and take precautions accordingly. In certain situations, this anticipation may stem from an acutely felt anxiety or discomfort, rather than a clearly developed thought. Yet, by observing or collectively participating in the BLM and #FreeThemAll protests, some San Diegan Latin@s, many of whom had already been watchful against police violence, shared their personal, cognitive, and embodied experiences with each other, alongside communal oral histories and online research, thus transforming these disparate sources of evidence into a shared body of knowledge, with the aim of benefiting the long-term survival and thriving of their communities. For many protesters, self-knowledge and the sharing of knowledge, particularly decolonial knowledge, were essential to thwarting the threat of coloniality within their minds, as the latter can make Latin@s complicit in racist injustice, including police violence. Examining the ethnographic example of Latin@ protesters in San Diego in the summer of 2020 allowed us to expand previous understandings of vigilance by highlighting its

interdependent and dynamic relationship to knowledge, which has been neglected in previous theorizations. As what is regarded to be a known fact can be highly contentious in a context of coloniality, it follows that vigilance has both the potential to uphold colonialist structures and to undermine these. Our second theoretical contribution will therefore lie in drawing attention to the decolonial potential of vigilance.

This article draws on long-term fieldwork in San Diego, California, and is part of a broader collaborative, German Research Foundation–funded project (CRC 1369). Specifically, it looks at the ways in which Latin@s in San Diego guard themselves against, or prepare to react to, being racialized as "illegal immigrants" and "criminals" in a time of aggressive anti-immigrant policies during the final year of the Trump administration. Over a period of ten months, February to December 2020, Catherine Whittaker interviewed and had informal conversations with multiple Latin@ protesters in San Diego, including members of the Centro Cultural de la Raza and Unión del Barrio, as well as attending these organizations' events. Under COVID-19 lockdown conditions, many of those events moved to online platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Accordingly, this ethnographic fieldwork involved combining Chicano scholar and poet Renato Rosaldo's (cited in Clifford 1996: 5) classic in-person "deep hanging out" approach with digital ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methods. As the protests were, by definition, an exercise in civil disobedience, Whittaker attended these with friends, some of whom were Latin@s, and included these and other notes about small, socially distanced private gatherings in their auto-ethnography. Eveline Dürr originally designed the project and leads it as the principal investigator, and together, we analyzed the data and wrote collaboratively.

In the following, we discuss anthropological approaches to the study of vigilance alongside related concepts in Black studies and Chicano studies, particularly the "colonial gaze" and Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) concepts of *la facultad* (sensing) and *conocimientos* (knowledge). We argue that these concepts articulate an interwovenness of vigilance and knowledge, which can reproduce coloniality as well as unravel it. Having set up this theoretical frame, we show in what ways the watchfulness of Latin@ protesters produced decolonial knowledge. Beyond the heightened emotions of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Latin@s' desire to protest stemmed from already being watchful in their everyday lives, particularly in their confrontations with the police and other powerful state actors. Thus, their everyday alertness produced knowledge that police violence was a serious, widespread issue, and the protests therefore necessary. We show that participating in the protests provided Latin@s with further evidence of systemic violence and discrimination against nonwhites and immigrants. Continuing the ethnographic description of the La Mesa protest we began with, we show that the vigilance of largely white and male law enforcement collided with the watchfulness of racially diverse and mostly female protesters. They were witnessing police and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) violence not only firsthand but also through the stories of fellow protesters. Both at the BLM and the #FreeThemAll protests, organizers placed a particular emphasis on making the diverse group of attendees share their experiences and relate to each other. Yet, unlike many other BLM protesters, the Latin@s who also participated in the largely Latin@ #FreeThemAll / Detention Resistance movement specifically highlighted the coloniality of structural violence against nonwhite people in San Diego. Their strategies for accomplishing this included centering the voices of Indigenous San Diegans and enabling bilingual Spanish-English testimonies. Finally, we revisit the close relationship between knowledge and vigilance among Latin@ organizers and protesters, and its implications for the coloniality—or decolonial potential—of vigilance more broadly.

From the Colonial Gaze to la Facultad

Vigilance is a concept rife with racialized tension in the US. The presidency of Donald Trump—dubbed the "vigilante president" (Hurst 2019)—has been marred by controversies surrounding his defense of right-wing vigilante groups, as well as warnings against supposedly dangerous immigrants crossing the southern US border (Hee Lee 2015). Throughout his presidency, Trump directly pursued a politics of anti-immigrant vigilance by increasing numbers of border patrol agents, authorizing higher numbers of ICE raids, and upgrading technological border surveillance measures. Unsurprisingly then, many Latin@s living near the US-Mexico border in San Diego associated "vigilance" with racist vigilantes and hostility toward them and other groups that are—in the vast majority of cases, wrongly—perceived as dangerous immigrants. Essentially, many Latin@s associate vigilance with the "colonial gaze," a concept popularized by postcolonial authors such as Frantz Fanon (1970) and Edward Said (1978). As colonizers surveil the colonized to control them, vision can be a technique of power. Over time, the colonized then come to incorporate that sense of being watched by the colonizers. As surveillance conditions their everyday actions, the colonized become watchful in turn.

However, the video of Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, killing George Floyd forced white Anglo-Americans to confront the fact that they, too, are being watched and their racist actions do not go unnoticed. The colonized are therefore reclaiming vigilance. At the beginning of June 2020, the San Diego chapter of the political organization Unión del Barrio (UdB) urged their Facebook followers to "be '*gente solidaria*' [people who act in solidarity with others], do not surrender your class-based political principles, but also maintain a barrio-based vigilance" amid "intensified political crisis, health emergency, and economic collapse." As their self-description explains, UdB is dedicated "to overturn[ing] our oppression as Mexicans . . . within the current borders of the United States" through a "strong and sustainable social and political movement for self-determination and socialism." Thus, while they were highly alert, their approach did not map onto Trump's use of the vigilance concept, instead proposing to put the defense of Latin@ communities first. This included alerting families with undocumented members if they anticipated an ICE raid, both by contacting them directly and by posting warnings via social media. For example, UdB publicly posted on Facebook on 14 August 2020: "Ice raids in San Ysidro n Eastlake right now. Don't go to work. Stay at someone else's home for a few days. Details in comments." While UdB serves the whole extended Chican@ community, posts such as these show that they are particularly watchful of their community's most vulnerable members to police violence, including the undocumented, the young, and the incarcerated.

Unlike the related concept of surveillance, vigilance has generally not received much attention from anthropologists thus far. This is even the case in texts on vigilantism (Abrahams 1998; Goldstein 2003), "generally understood as taking the law into your own hands without any legal authority" (Mareš and Bjørgo 2019: 1). When used in other contexts, such as in relation to incarceration (Crane and Pascoe 2020), adoption procedures (Frekko et al. 2015), intermarriage avoidance (Regnier 2019), or methamphetamine use (McKenna 2013), vigilance often appears to be employed interchangeably with alertness, caution, anxiety, fear, and tension. As Matthew Wolf-Meyer (2013: 93) observed:

> the language of wakefulness, alertness, attention, vigilance, awareness, and consciousness is often vague itself; for example, is there a difference between wakefulness and vigilance? Common usage would indicate that this is so—that one is a base physiological state while the other is a particular skill or attunement of biological capacity.

In one of the few articles directly engaging the concept of vigilance, Henrik Vigh (2011: 99) argued that particular environments of uncertainty, where an enemy may not be easily identifiable, produce "a constant awareness and preparedness toward the negative potentialities of social figures and forces." This heightened, multisensory awareness can be oversensitive, meaning that in a context of ongoing conflict, any perceptible sign of difference, even as mundane as a haircut, can come to be perceived as a threat. Similarly, in describing how undocumented Maya migrants to the San Francisco Bay Area seek to fly under the radar of state surveillance and avoid being identified as deportable "illegal aliens," Deanna Baremboim (2016: 85–86) distinguishes four characteristics of their everyday vigilance:

> First, vigilance necessitates knowing one's path and maintaining a practiced route . . . Second, vigilance entails being observant and staying on the lookout for unusual things or activities . . . Moreover, vigilance requires knowing when something is up, or being able to correctly interpret the signs of impending trouble. Last, vigilant ways of navigating through space involve a readiness to modify one's trajectory of movement and find an alternate route.

Notably, two of these characteristics involve knowledge: knowing one's path and which patterns to expect in one's surroundings. Building on Baremboim and Vigh, we propose distinguishing the surveillance practices and professionalized forms of vigilance, such as that of the CBP, as well as the organized vigilance of citizen vigilante groups from the unorganized but skilled and multisensory, knowledge-based everyday vigilance of ordinary Latin@s who do not work for, or otherwise support, law enforcement. A significant minority of Latin@s emphatically support law enforcement and tough border policies, so many work as military personnel, police officers, and border patrol agents themselves (Cantú 2019). Instead of being vigilant in service of the state, marginalized and racialized Latin@s are forced to be watchful by their lived circumstances. Many do not follow an organized, externally set call for vigilance. For instance, while the community patrol of UdB may emulate some of the tactics of citizen vigilante patrols, they are following not the state's call for vigilance but their own.

Threats to their existence are similarly uncertain and unknown yet present, leading to a heightened alertness in dealing with authorities, who may act friendly or hostile in different situations. The iconic Chicana feminist scholar and poet Gloria Anzaldúa (1987: 38) refers to this fearful alertness as la facultad:

> the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant "sensing," a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols.

Having la facultad enables people to anticipate danger coming from both ordinary individuals and authorities: "We are forced to develop this faculty so that we'll know when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away . . . It's a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between worlds, unknowingly cultivate. It is latent in all of us" (39).

Anzaldúa goes on to explain that la facultad is a multisensory, embodied form of intuition. This awareness comes at the cost of "our innocence, our unknowing ways, our safe and easy ignorance," which is to say, it produces knowledge, or conocimientos, in Anzaldúa's terms. Note her use of the plural "we" and "our," which highlight that this embodied, multisensory knowledge production is a collective process. This finally leads Anzaldúa to a permanent, but fearless, state of "vigilance, my thousand sleepless serpent eyes blinking in the night, forever open. And I am not afraid" (51).

In a similar spirit, some Latin@s defiantly push back against oppressive dynamics by attentively identifying and spreading knowledge about them. They simultaneously work hard to raise and maintain awareness instead of blindly adopting the perspective of mainstream white Anglo-American society. Accordingly, Latin@ protesters' watchfulness in San Diego not only gestures toward future negative potentialities of the kind that Vigh was writing about but is also grounded in a knowledge of the past and ongoing suffering caused by colonization, and hopes for a better future. Thus, vigilance is more than mere awareness and preparedness. It is an existential necessity, as it allows Latin@s to recognize and resist the threat of being annihilated through violence or assimilation into Anglo-American society. Vigilance, or *estar trucha*, as some Chican@s call it, is a way of life (Kammler 2021).

Staying Brown in San Diego

Surprised at the size and fervor of the BLM protest in La Mesa, Berenice's friend Jade, a 23-year-old Filipina marketing professional, fellow protester, and member of the Chican@ activist community, expressed, "I didn't think I would see this so soon. San Diego is too chill. It's a sleepy surfer town. People aren't very politically active. I'm so glad people are awake." The protests did not fit the usual double image of San Diego as an apolitical, relaxed, "sleepy" surfer city and a highly vigilant, conservative city with its Navy harbor by the world's busiest, and highly militarized, border. The perceived overpolicing of Latin@ and Black neighborhoods led many nonwhite and white San Diegans alike to join the BLM movement. For instance, Leila, a spirited, middle-aged, Iraq-born human rights activist said in an interview, "If a Black or a Brown person happens to be in a privileged neighborhood, a policeman looks and says, 'Hmm . . . They don't look like they live here . . .' And they stop them. And of course they search the car."

While California is internationally known for progressive and diversity-friendly politics, the San Diegan record is more complicated. In the 1980s, most undocumented immigration took place in the San Diego area, so the city responded with different forms of border security and has been further militarizing its border over time. CBP may provide support to the San Diego Police Department (SDPD), such as providing ammunition, surveillance services, and vehicles at the La Mesa protest (Klippenstein 2020). Officially, the support relationship is one-sided, as San Diego is currently a "sanctuary city." The California Values Act prohibits local law enforcement agencies from sharing personal information with federal immigration officials, which would enable them to hunt down undocumented migrants. However, the SDPD has in fact shared license plate reader data with federal agencies, including Border Patrol, through the surveillance program Vigilant Solutions (Solis 2021). This indirect collaboration of San Diego police and ICE, as well as politicians' complicity, demonstrates the fragility of the "sanctuary city" status.

Casual racism and racial profiling are a part of everyday life in San Diego. The north, including Escondido and La Jolla, consists of wealthy, predominantly white areas where both police and locals treat nonwhites in general but men in particular with more suspicion. By contrast, neighborhoods south of downtown San Diego, near the Mexican border, including Barrio Logan and National City, are more ethnically and racially diverse, so nonwhite Latin@s do not have to anticipate being potentially perceived as dangerous intruders there, as several interlocutors explained. Accordingly, when they have the choice, many working-class Latin@s prefer to spend most of their time in Latin@ and mixed neighborhoods. However, Latin@s in the southernmost area of San Ysidro grow up under the watchful eye of border patrol officers and are often very critical of and vigilant against what they perceive as discriminatory and disruptive surveillance. "I often looked out of the window of my elementary school classroom and saw Border

Patrol agents on the playground, chasing people who looked like me" (Hernández 2018: 13). Note however, that wealthy Latin@s with light complexions often live in majority-white neighborhoods, where they often manage to blend in to some extent through prestigious jobs, and an expensive wardrobe and lifestyle. Such individuals, particularly women, often feel less vigilant for their safety when walking in their wealthy neighborhood than when they visit Latin@ neighborhoods. Thus, various identity features intersect in determining an individual's sense of safety in different parts of the city and whether they feel the need to be watchful.

Latin@ San Diegans make up about one-third of San Diego's population, and many have actually never migrated (Heidenreich 2007). Today's Southwestern United States once belonged to the Mexican Republic and was only integrated into the US in 1848. In addition, many people whose ancestors immigrated from Latin America have long since ceased to be migrants, having lived as citizens in the US for several generations. However, in everyday interactions, due to their phenotype and surname, it is not always possible to differentiate between undocumented immigrants and nonmigrated Latin@s, or even some Filipin@s and Guamanians with Spanish surnames. People who are deemed to "look Mexican" by Anglo-Americans, which even includes some Filipin@ and Arab residents of San Diego like Jade and Leila, are often automatically treated as if they were immigrants. Berenice said that, even though she is Puerto Rican and therefore a US citizen, she sometimes unthinkingly refers to herself as an "immigrant" to the US (cf. Grosfoguel 2003). When asked about it, she admitted that she must have internalized the constant othering she experiences. Many Anglos view Puerto Ricans as foreigners, rather than fellow citizens, while ignoring that they themselves are living on the unceded territory of the Kumeyaay Nation.

The "Latin@" category encompasses many kinds of racial identities and citizenship statuses, which in turn shapes to what extent vigilance becomes part of their sense of self. Even if Latin@s can claim legal citizen status, they often remain vigilant, as their belonging to San Diego's community remains contested (Chávez 2008). In a conversation with Whittaker, Mónica, a 24-year-old Chicana and single mother, expressed concern about her postelection reproductive rights: "They don't want people like me having babies."

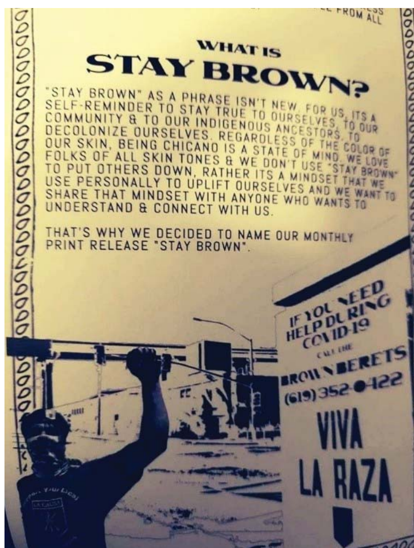

Figure 2. Page from *Stay Brown* zine: "What Is Stay Brown?" Brown Berets, San Diego, 2021. Photo by Catherine Whittaker.

"Chican@," following Chican@ studies scholar Roberto Hernández, refers not to "an ethnic identity but rather . . . to politically self-identified individuals or collectives, in keeping with the politics of self-naming that guided its usage in the Chican@ Movement period" (2018: 33). Accordingly, the Brown Berets de Aztlán of San Diego—the Chican@ equivalent of the Black Panther Party—named their monthly print release *Stay Brown* as a "self-reminder to stay true to ourselves, to our community [and] to our indigenous ancestors, to decolonize ourselves." In the process, they define Chicano as a nonracially determined "mindset that we use personally to uplift ourselves and we want to share that mindset with anyone who wants to understand [and] connect with us" (Figure 2). For the Brown Berets, and many others, Chican@ is a nonessentialist identity that is grounded in a history of struggle and obligation to one's community—in never forgetting where one came from.

Chican@s are typically critical of assimilated Mexicans because they think of the United States as a colonizing power settling on Indigenous land. They maintain that Mexican and Kumeyaay people are the true, Native Californians and therefore have a right to live there, regardless of their immigration status. Thus, anti-immigration policies, structural disadvantages, and being forced to speak English are seen as forms of colonialist violence by many Chican@s and a cause for watchfulness when dealing with Anglo-Americans. We now return to the La Mesa protest that we began with, where divergent notions of vigilance will become more apparent.

La Mesa Is Burning

From the beginning, Berenice had been watchful in planning her participation in the BLM protest, building on multiple sources of information. For one, she drew on her own experiences of having previously participated in ICE Detention Resistance protests and consulted with her white Anglo-American boyfriend, Dominic, an Occupy Wall Street veteran, and Jade, who had just come back from the Philippines, where she had risked being arrested under terrorism charges for mobilizing against the authoritarian government under President Rodrigo Duterte. Moreover, as a trained nurse, Berenice was all too aware of the risks of protesting in relation to potentially contracting COVID-19. Accordingly, she wore running shoes, surgical gloves, and a bandana over her mask to minimize the possibility of breathing in droplets of the virus, and, in her car, she had disinfectant to spray on her black clothes after the protest, as well as a change of clothes. Her backpack contained healthy snacks, water to fight dehydration under the powerful Southern California sun, and Maalox to treat the effects of tear gas, just in case. The night before, she had seen disturbing news images of clashes between protesters and police in Minneapolis ending in flames.

Berenice's watchfulness was not merely circumstantial, although certainly heightened because of the circumstances. She described herself as generally being hypervigilant because she was a trauma survivor. In addition, she was read as Latina in a way that had sometimes exposed her to microaggressions and blatant discrimination. The anger these experiences provoked in her provided Berenice with felt evidence of injustice, which meant that she was already on her guard by default and was more easily motivated to participate in protests (Ayata and Harder 2019). The latter provided her with further evidence of coloniality in San Diego, as she watched largely white and male law enforcement collide with racially diverse, largely female, protesters, both sides highly vigilant of each other.

At the intersection of El Cajón Boulevard and Baltimore Drive, police had blocked off the bridge that led onto the Interstate 8 (I-8), while cameras atop "smart" streetlights were surveilling the protesters. *The Voice of San Diego* reported later, "During the recent Black Lives Matter protests in late May and early June, [the SDPD] accessed the streetlight cameras at least 35 times in search of evidence to be used against protestors accused of vandalism, assault and other crimes" (Marx 2020). Notably, the I-8 broadly demarcates the border between the wealthier, predominantly white northern part of San Diego County and the predominantly Hispanic working-class south. Since 13 April 2020, it also marked the line between the southern counties with high COVID-19 growth rates and the northern counties whose case numbers were decreasing (Schroeder and Lopez-Villafaña 2020). As a border, the I-8 separates "places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them" (Anzaldúa 1987: 25).

Most cars going past honked in support of the protest. Yet, driving past a group of participants who were wearing Mexican flags as bandanas or had placards reading, "Vida Negra Importa

[Black Lives Matter]" and "Latinos for Black Lives Matter," two men in a pickup truck shouted, "Go back to your country!" Some protesters began taking down the California and US flags in front of the police department; others spray-painted the walls of the station with slogans such as "Respect existence or expect resistance." One young white man turned on a water faucet at the side of the building. Berenice complained about the waste of water, until her Chicana friend and fellow protester Mónica suggested that this may have been intended as a vigilant precautionary measure in case the police employed tear gas. The daughter of an undocumented immigrant, Mónica was a single mother and sociology graduate in her mid-twenties. She explained that the water would allow protesters to wash out their eyes faster.

Suddenly, a bearcat, a military-grade armored vehicle that had been provided to the San Diego County Sheriff by CBP, arrived on the other side of the parking lot in front of the police station, creating a momentary distraction. It soon took off again after protesters started spray-painting it as well. Incensed by the implied threat posed by the bearcat, some protesters attempted to push back against the line of police in riot gear. For the longest moment, nothing happened, as muscles tensed in anticipation. Then, all at once, the police fired tear gas and several rounds of "nonlethal" ammunition into the crowd, seemingly aiming randomly at people. Many, Berenice and Whittaker included, ran and took cover behind a fence, peering over it from a safe distance to watch the situation unfold. The toxic clouds, flashes, and bangs were shocking to behold.

As some protesters started going back toward the station, police officers standing on a balcony started firing rubber bullets at them from afar. A middle-aged white woman was being led past the fence where Berenice was standing, blood streaming down her face. A bullet had hit her eye while she was protecting an older woman. The warlike scenes, Berenice and Whittaker agreed, were surreal and terrifying to witness. "They literally shoot at people for saying, 'Fuck you,'" Berenice exclaimed, fuming.

After witnessing police and CBP violence firsthand at the protest, Berenice and her friends gathered further evidence for it through the stories of fellow protesters, shared at the physical protests and on social media. For example, Mónica called from close to the I-8 ramp to say that a pickup truck had just driven into the crowd, trying to hit protesters. Yet, once they arrived at their respective homes in the evening, they found that the newscast told a different story from what they had seen, presenting protesters as dangerous "looters" and "rioters." Berenice and Jade angrily concluded that the media had a colonialist bias that seeks to preserve the racialized status quo to the detriment of supposed immigrants such as themselves. Rather than watch TV, they then went on their social media to look for the protesters' perspective on what was happening.

Meanwhile in northern San Diego, a Republican Evangelical and self-identified "half-Mexican" health worker in her mid-fifties, Penelope, expressed that, while racial justice and prison reform deserve attention, she was worried for her friends working in law enforcement ("Blue Lives Matter") and for her shop-owning friends, feeling sad at the sight of boarded-up stores. Penelope thought that racism should be addressed peacefully through well-articulated demands and good leadership, which she thought the BLM movement lacked, and asserted that police officers deserve respect, rather than being demonized because of a few "rotten apples." She broke into song: "What the world needs now, is love, sweet love." Others were more concerned about virus transmission. Nacho, a 33-year-old laboratory technician and US-born son of Honduran immigrants, felt so angry at what he viewed as irresponsible behavior in the midst of a pandemic that he broke off contact with Whittaker for several weeks. While he spoke up when people made racist comments in his presence and loved Spike Lee movies, he was working in a largely conservative hospital environment, where the general opinion was that defeating the virus should have priority at that moment. Before going silent that evening,

he texted: “I am working with a virus that doesn’t care about your color. That’s the big picture I’m dealing with every day.” He expected that the protests would instead cause new spikes in case numbers, which would again hit the Latin@ and Black communities of San Diego the hardest.

At 10:30 p.m., Jade texted Berenice and Whittaker that they should be more vigilant and better equipped at the next protest. She shared a meme of Hong Kong protest gear from the summer of 2019, showing items such as construction helmets, goggles, elbow- and kneepads, and umbrellas. Then she shared a picture of a Walmart at Grossmont Center in San Diego: “They’re barricading stores down there now. Let the looting begin.” She added that there was a live stream of the protests there on Instagram, sharing the handle. At midnight, she summarized: “Chase bank is on fire, vons is on fire, Sally’s got looted, target too. La mesa is legit on fire.” Berenice responded: “Dude yea. Just watching something on Fb. Chase and union bank.” She was watching a live stream of the events, showing the two buildings burning.

Thus, the protests continued much as they had begun, with videos shot by smartphone cameras being live streamed on other people’s phones. Fueled by a distrust of mainstream media, the watchfulness of protesters like Berenice led them to look to fellow protesters for information. What they learned came to inform their vigilance at other protests. By contrast, Latin@s who trusted the media’s reporting of the events, such as Penelope, or those whose vigilance was focused on defeating COVID-19, such as Nacho, questioned whether the La Mesa protest was justified. Thus, the BLM protests were a source of inter-Latin@ conflict. They also provided an opportunity for highlighting the common ground among protesters of different backgrounds. Both at the BLM and the #FreeThemAll protests, attendees, whose vigilance was in the service of protecting the same values, were encouraged to share their experiences and thus create a shared pool of knowledge. While this knowledge was primarily anti-racist in the case of the BLM protests, the #FreeThemAll movement (Figure 3) went further and placed an emphasis on decolonial knowledge.

Figure 3. #FreeThemAll flyer, distributed at a protest in July 2020. Photo by Catherine Whittaker.

#FreeThemAll

When the white Anglo men in the pickup truck shouted, “Go back to your country,” at Mexican Americans who were participating in the La Mesa BLM protest, it was not merely a racist slur but also a colonialist one. Invested in white supremacy, they sought to disrupt and delegitimize the protest, reminding the protesters that they were being watched, not just by law enforcement but also by certain citizens—vigilantes. *Go back to your country* implies that anyone who is perceived to look Latin@ does not belong in the US. *Go back to your country* shows how the distinction between immigrants and protesters has been blurred. Racializing protesters through such phrases implies that those who criticize the state should not be considered citizens. Protesters are stripped of their white privilege (McIntosh 1988), if they had it to begin with. Various historians, legal scholars, and sociologists have argued that ever since the abolition of slavery,

powerful members of the white establishment have sought to control Black people by increasingly criminalizing Blackness through discriminatory laws and law enforcement, leading to the growth of the US prison-industrial complex (Alexander 2010; Davis 1999; Goffman 2014; Rothstein 2017). Similarly, since the 1990s, an increasing number of undocumented immigrants have been detained in prisonlike detention centers, effectively expanding the prison-industrial complex, while expressing a conceptual conflation of immigration and criminality—"crimmigration" (García Hernández 2013).

Concepts like crimmigration have also been circulating among San Diegan Latin@ organizers and underscored their need to be vigilant. The unfolding of the BLM and the #FreeThemAll protests then provided evidence for the existence of the prison-industrial complex and how it operates, such as when CBP drones and agents were deployed to BLM protests to support local law enforcement. Moreover, since 31 March, the highest concentration of COVID-19 infections at a single site in San Diego County was in the Otay Mesa Detention Center, where undocumented immigrants were held. Chican@ organizers argued it was no coincidence and that migrants were being deliberately left to die, which they interpreted as evidence for the deadly effects of ongoing coloniality.

They organized an event with art projections, speakers, and music in front of the detention center on 16 June 2020: "Art Against State Violence: En Solidaridad con las Vidas Negras [In solidarity with Black lives]." Organizers and protesters at the event drew an explicit connection between police violence against Black San Diegans and ICE agent terror against undocumented immigrants. As the event description said on the Otay Mesa Detention Resistance (OMDR) Facebook page, "No one should be in a cage during a pandemic. Our struggle is not just for migrants!! We want to abolish all repressive systems of oppression, including those that have stolen the lives of George Floyd and Carlos Ernesto Escobar Mejía!" According to another statement by OMDR, Mejía was "the first publicly known death from the [Corona]virus in 'detention.'" More broadly, OMDR mobilizes against "a racist and capitalist system that kills, criminalizes, and imprisons Black, Indigenous, Brown, and poor people within the U.S. and beyond, we must fight to abolish the carceral state in all its forms, which includes the immigration system and its fascist guardians."

Over the summer of 2020, protesters primarily marched past police departments, government buildings, downtown, symbolic spaces of coloniality, Columbus Park, symbolic spaces of decolonial resistance, Chicano Park, the white upper echelons of society (e.g. at La Jolla Shores), and rumored Ku Klux Klan strongholds, Santee. In the border city of San Diego, these locations highlighted zones of colonial power and decolonial resistance. Similarly, the Otay Mesa Detention Center evoked watchfulness in those gathered before it. When approaching the detention center, the landscape becomes sparser, with the arid hills of the Otay County Open Space Preserve in view. This close to the US-Mexico border, there were only some industrial complexes, such as the Calpine power station, as well as prisons: the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility and the Donovan Correctional Facility. Its location and the fact that it was run by the for-profit corporation CoreCivic suggested that Otay Mesa, too, was both a prison and an industrial building. Behind two layers of chain-link fence topped by razor wire, the two-story building was a visually intimidating block in the landscape.

The organizers of #FreeThemAll ensured that everyone attending the protest was watchful from the start by looking out for newcomers and handing them leaflets with detailed safety advice, including emergency numbers and advice for preventing the spread of COVID-19. It placed particular emphasis on not speaking to police, however well-intentioned: "Let's protect each other by not talking to cops. If necessary, please defer to our security liaison." And heard at a BLM protest: "If your privilege allows, use your body as a barrier between police and target."

Thus, the organizers warned attendees to keep the interest and safety of the whole group in mind. To this end, protesters were reminded to be vigilant and conscious in multiple respects. The BLM quote additionally highlights the close relationship between the BLM and the #FreeThemAll protests, showing that organizers were learning from each other and collaborating, despite having only partially overlapping aims.

Meanwhile, the sunset slowly turned the sky delicate hues of orange and pink, while a Kumeyaay artist-activist sang protest songs to the 40 or so people present. The mostly young adult Latin@ protesters were carrying signs in English and Spanish reading, "Hex white supremacy. La policía la migra la misma porquería [The police, border patrol, the same disgusting behavior]," "Defund the police. Seeking refuge is not a crime. A strong community makes police obsolete. Keep families together. Fuck ICE." A couple police officers observed the protest from a distance. This context of surveillance and apparent peacefulness was reminiscent of Vigh's notion that vigilance is a "struggle to gain clarity and knowledge of . . . invisible yet dangerously present" threats (2011: 110).

In between stirring bilingual speeches and telephonic testimonies from detainees, everyone present chanted, "Free them all!" and the detainees, hidden behind the walls of the detention center, chanted back. Protesters thus built a direct relationship with the detainees by listening to them and making their support heard. Hearing detainees' voices had an immediacy that was comparable to watching the La Mesa protest unfold in real time via social media. This witnessing produced a firsthand knowledge about the extended prison-industrial complex, which, paired with the testimonies of Indigenous San Diegans about their displacement through settler colonialism, painted a vivid picture of coloniality in San Diego.

Generally, the BLM and #FreeThemAll protest organizers often collaborated with and learned from each other by giving relationship-making practices a central role in their protests (Figure 4). In this way, attendees were exposed to firsthand knowledge about racism while also witnessing it directly in clashes with authorities. The state's militarized and therefore visually

Figure 4. Members of the #FreeThemAll movement at a Black Lives Matter protest, recognizable by their posters with slogans such as "Abolish ICE," "Nobody is illegal on stolen land," and "Ningún ser humano es illegal [No human is illegal]!!!" August 2020. Photo by Catherine Whittaker.

threatening, and occasionally outright violent, response provided evidence of the necessity of police defunding and decolonization in the eyes of protesters. Protesters had to be alert, as the leaflets reminded them, but the knowledge they gained also sensitized them to the reality of coloniality further, producing a decolonial vigilance that protesters carried into further protests.

Decolonizing Vigilance

Vigilance can forge new solidarities, as it can reveal important truths, which transcend individual experience and thus propel social movements (Marcus 2002)—but it can also deepen divisions. The locations in which one protests and whom one is watching or protesting, as opposed to whom one trusts or protests with, makes political, raced, and classed lines apparent. The militarized police officer and the well-prepared and equipped protester may both construct each other as dangerous Others in the context of confrontation, seeking to anticipate each other's next move to preempt potential attacks. Additional tension and watchfulness arise from the rumored, typically unproven, presence of further potentially dangerous Others within one's own group, such as the undercover police officer, the right-wing provocateur, and the antifa agitator.

Yet, rather than there having been a clear division of interests, the political subjectivities that emerged around the BLM and #FreeThemAll protests in the early summer of 2020 were often dynamic and multilayered. While there was significant overlap among Latin@ protesters who participated in both movements, not all anti-racist protesters who chanted "Black lives matter" were also in favor of abolishing prisons and detention centers, or even white supremacy. It is equally possible that not all those who demanded the closure of the Otay Mesa Detention Center were anti-racist (but we do not have evidence of this). The presence of CBP officials contributed to a sense that protesters' citizenship and belonging was being called into question. Conversely, many Latin@ #FreeThemAll protesters considered undocumented migrants in the Detention Center (future) members of their community and viewed white Anglo-Americans as illegitimate settlers on Indigenous and/or Mexican land, or Aztlán, as it is often referred to by Chican@s.

Note that we do not mean that all individual experiences of racism and discrimination become part of the collective experience shared among Latin@ protesters. Some individuals' experiences are given more space and visibility within social movements than others, much like some collectives (e.g., BLM) are more present in the media than others (e.g., #FreeThemAll). Of course, individual perceptions are not always representative or accurate, which can also be true of what protesters regard as their collective knowledge. Our purpose here is not to evaluate truth claims here but merely to illuminate the relationship between vigilance, knowledge production, and (de)colonization.

In summary, vigilance appears key to both colonization and decolonization efforts. It is associated both with the colonial gaze of anti-immigrant surveillance and vigilantism but also with "staying Brown," *trucha*, or cultivating la facultad, all of which point to developing a skilled decolonial awareness and body of knowledge. This awareness and knowledge are rooted in long-standing embodied, collective experiences of coloniality in the borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987) and acquire renewed urgency in light of global attention toward racist police violence following the killing of George Floyd. Through concrete, shared experiences of racialized inequality and violence and knowledge-sharing within their communities, many Latin@s and other racialized people in San Diego and other contexts of coloniality worldwide have come to question mainstream narratives about the social order and its policing. San Diegan Latin@s thus place their watchfulness in the service of resisting colonialist structures. This includes the main-

stream media, who described the La Mesa protesters as a violent mob but ignored the gruesome injuries that the police's rubber bullets had inflicted on some protesters such as an older white woman who had blood streaming down her face. In the way it centered the perspective of white Anglos, the portrayal of the protest was emblematic of the coloniality of knowledge (Lander 2000; cf. Quijano 1997). Similarly, some Latin@s alertly observed and criticized the BLM protests in the service of preserving colonialist structures. Therefore, when people speak of decolonial consciousness, they often mean a combination of alertness against, as well as an embodied, multisensory knowledge about coloniality and its deadly effects. As colonized populations in comparable militarized border contexts live vigilant lives, such as Palestine (Hackl 2018) and Northern Ireland (Vigh 2011), we hope that this research will inspire others to continue studying the so far underexamined colonizing, but also decolonizing potential of vigilance.

▪ **CATHERINE WHITTAKER** is Assistant Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Goethe University Frankfurt. While writing this article, she was also a visiting scholar at the University of California San Diego, where she continued the research she began as a postdoctoral scholar working with Eveline Dürr at the Collaborative Research Center "Cultures of Vigilance" at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (LMU). Her research focuses on structures of violence, with a particular focus on gender, racism, and coloniality, in Central Mexico and Southern California. Recent publications include "Felt Power: Can Mexican Indigenous Women Finally Be Powerful?" (*Feminist Anthropology*, 2020). Email: Whittaker@em.uni-frankfurt.de

▪ **EVELINE DÜRR** is Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (LMU). Previously, she was an associate professor at the Auckland University of Technology and received her doctoral degree and *venia legendi* from the University of Freiburg. Her research projects include urban anthropology, spatiality, human-environmental relations, tourism, mobilities, and globalization, and they consider the historical trajectories and power imbalances that have formed present conditions. Currently, she cochairs the Collaborative Research Center "Cultures of Vigilance" and chairs the Urban Environments Initiative at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society at LMU. Email: Eveline.Duerr@lmu.de

▪ NOTE

1. Many people identify as Boricua, rather than Puerto Rican, which expresses dissent against the colonization of their island, which the native Taíno people knew as Boriken (Acosta-Belen 2000).

▪ REFERENCES

Abrahams, Ray. 1998. *Vigilant Citizens: Vigilantism and the State*. Cambridge: Polity.

Acosta-Belén, Edna. 2000. *Adiós, Borinquen Querida: The Puerto Rican Diaspora, Its History, and Contributions*. Albany: CELAC-SUNY Albany.

Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: New Press.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands / La Frontera. The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
Ayata, Bilgin, and Cilja Harders. 2019. "Midān Moments." In *Affective Societies: Key Concepts*, ed. Jan Slaby and Christian von Scheve, 279–288. London: Routledge.
Baremboim, Deanna. 2016. "The Specter of Surveillance: Navigating 'Illegality' and Indigeneity among Maya Migrants in the San Francisco Bay Area." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 39 (1): 79–94. https://doi.org/10.1111/plar.12132.
Brendecke, Arndt. 2018. "Attention and Vigilance as Subjects of Historiography: An Introductory Essay." *Storia della Storiografia* 74 (2): 17–27. https://doi.org/10.19272/201811502002.
Cantú, Francisco. 2019. *The Line Becomes a River: Dispatches From the Border*. London: Vintage.
Clifford, James. 1996. "Anthropology and/as Travel." *Etnofoor* 9 (2): 5–15.
Davis, Angela. 1999. *The Prison Industrial Complex*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
Chávez, Leo. 2008. *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Crane, Johanna T., and Kelsey Pascoe. 2020. "Becoming Institutionalized: Incarceration as a Chronic Health Condition." *Medical Anthropological Quarterly* 35 (3): 307–326. https://doi.org/10.1111/maq.12621.
Fanon, Frantz. 1970. "Algeria Unveiled." In *A Dying Colonialism*, 21–52. London: Penguin.
Frekko, Susan E., Jessaca B. Leinaweaver, and Diana Marre. 2015. "How (Not) to Talk about Adoption: On Communicative Vigilance in Spain." *American Ethnologist* 42 (4): 703–719. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12165.
García Hernández, César Cuauhtémoc. 2013. "Creating Crimmigration." *Brigham Young University Law Review* 6: 1457–1516.
Goffman, Alice. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Goldstein, Daniel M. 2003. "'In Our Own Hands': Lynching, Justice, and the Law in Bolivia." *American Ethnologist* 30 (1): 22–43. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2003.30.1.22.
Grosfoguel, Ramón. 2003. *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective*. Berekley: University of California Press.
Hackl, Andreas. 2018. "Immersive invisibility in the settler colonial city: the conditional inclusion of Palestinians in Tel Aviv." *American Ethnologist* 45 (3): 341–353. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12669.
Hee Lee, Michele Ye. 2015. "Donald Trump's False Comments Connecting Mexican Immigrants and Crime." *Washington Post*, 8 July.
Heidenreich, Linda, 2007. *This Land Was Mexican Once: Histories of Resistance from Northern California*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Hernández, Roberto. 2018. *Coloniality of the US/Mexico Border: Power, Violence, and the Decolonial Imperative*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
Hurst, Alexander. 2019. "The Vigilante President." *New Republic*, 6 November.
Kammler, Henry. 2021. "Trucha: What's So 'Trout' about Being Vigilant?" *Vigilanz Kulturen*, 8 April. https://vigilanz.hypotheses.org/1381.
Klippenstein, Ken. 2020. "The Federal Response to Protests Extends Far beyond Portland." *The Nation*, 23 July.
Lander, Edgardo, ed. 2000. *La colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales* [The coloniality of knowledge: Eurocentrism and social sciences]. Buenos Aires: CLACSO.
Marcus, George E. 2002. *The Sentimental Citizen: Emotion in Democratic Politics*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
Mareš, Miroslav and Tore Bjørgo. 2019. "Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities: Concepts and Goals of Current Research." In *Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities*, ed. Tore Bjørgo and Miroslav Mareš, 1–30. London: Routledge.
Marx, Jesse. 2020. "Smart Streetlights Are Now Exclusively a Tool for Police." *Voice of San Diego*, 20 July.
McIntosh, Peggy. 1988. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies." Wellesley College Center for Research on Women Working Paper no. 189.

McKenna, Stacey A. 2013. "'We're Supposed to Be Asleep?' Vigilance, Paranoia, and the Alert Methamphetamine User." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 24 (2): 172–190. https://doi.org/10.1111/anoc.12012.
Quijano, Aníbal. 1997. "Colonialidad del poder, cultura y conocimiento in America Latina [Coloniality of power, culture and knowledge in Latin America]." *Anuario Mariateguiano* 9: 113–121.
Regnier, Denis. 2019. "Forever Slaves? Inequality, Uncleanliness and Vigilance about Origins in the Southern Highlands of Madagascar." *Anthropological Forum* 29 (3): 249–266. https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2019.1624501.
Rothstein, Richard. 2017. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York: Liveright Publishing.
Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge.
Schroeder, Lauryn and Andrea Lopez-Villafaña. 2020. "In one South San Diego ZIP Code, New COVID-19 Cases Grow Two Times Faster Than Rest of the County." *San Diego Union Tribune*, 7 June.
Solis, Gustavo. 2021. "Chula Vista Police Chief Says She Didn't Know Department Shared Data with Feds." *Voice of San Diego*, 20 January.
Vigh, Henrik. 2011. "Vigilance: On Conflict, Social Invisibility, and Negative Potentiality." *Social Analysis* 55 (3): 93–114. https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2011.550306.
Wolf-Meyer, Matthew. 2013. "Editorial Introduction: Alertness, or the Other Side of Sleep." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 24 (2): 93–95. https://doi.org/10.1111/anoc.12015.