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Mapping the Madness, Making a Method: A critical reflection on living, learning, and organizing amidst chaos

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Mapping the Madness, Making a Method

A critical reflection on living, learning, and organizing amidst chaos

A.R.S. Lee

Statement of Purpose

This is my first attempt at synthesizing my experience as a student of race and power during a time of total system failure, mass resistance to systems of racial capitalism and state violence, and settler desecration of the Earth. As a pre-service educator at a time when schools are a site of contestation over whether our children should be taught about power and oppression, whether or not all of our children should be allowed to learn freely, whether transgender children have the right to exist at all. As an organizer, human being, and young person who is coming into himself during a period of immense change and inescapably visible suffering. It is my attempt at testimony.

As my struggle to align my actions to my values continues, I hope I might return to this piece as a marker of my own development. At its core, I am taking this work as an opportunity to share what I have learned with all those who have aided me in the process of becoming more fully human; my mentors, educators, friends, and – most importantly – my family.

Keywords: Education for liberation, cycle of liberation, race, racial capitalism, identity development, critical consciousness, memory

I. Acknowledgments

Before we begin, gratitude¹. I would like to express gratitude to Professor Harris, Dave Collins, and Louanne Treaver for all their support and guidance in the creation of this journal. To our 2022 Tapestries cohort, Muriel Ambrus, Louise Bequeaith, Abby Green, Nick Howland, Ben Levy, Biibi Muse, AJ Papakee, Franny Redpath, Anna Schloerb, and Kae Spang for the multitude of ways we held each other through this process. To Mr. Hamilton and Professor Sailiata for fundamentally shaping my worldview through both your coursework and patience. To Hana Dinku, for being a constant source of guidance, support, and radical light throughout my time at Macalester. You all have provided me with the framings and political analysis that allowed for my consciousness to develop.

Most importantly, to Mom, Dad, and Eamon. You are the most important people to me in my life. The work and growth that is depicted in this project could, quite literally, not have happened without all you have given me and the person you have raised me to become. I carry all of your help and your unwavering love with me constantly, wherever I go. Thank you.

II. Introduction

I began this process... stuck². I was filled with a genuine desire to make meaning of my educational experience at Macalester and an itch to prove that, despite learning through nearly two years of Zoom school, and a carousel of “unprecedented events,” I still had something to show for all of my efforts. I was also overwhelmed by my newfound understanding that traditional academic production– the research paper or the analytical essay– are not places where my analysis goes to thrive. I love engaging theory– reading it, dialoguing about it, and applying it to life– but this love does not translate

¹ Hello! You will see footnotes used throughout this piece for sourcing, but also as a place for me to provide extra context and acknowledgments as the paper progresses.

² If you are reading this as a friend, but especially as family, you know that this is not an uncommon place for me to be in when it comes to large summative assignments. I hope that this paper provides a sense of comfort knowing that as I continue to learn myself, I will also, slowly– yet, inevitably– learn to get stuck less.

smoothly into organized writing. And, to be transparent, my muscle for formal writing has weakened since I began my time here.

This truth feels important for me to name explicitly. The topic of this work centers the relationship between learning and life. Anecdotally, I know that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on my focus and ability to accomplish tasks efficiently. I do not believe this is inherently negative. The change in my ability to work in traditional ways is simply an occurrence, and in navigating that change, I have been able to find other, more appropriate ways to process my understanding. The method I will be outlining in this paper is an example of me searching to find an alternative.

This paper is the product of a month's worth of dedicated reflection into my memories from the past three years. That reflection involved the collating of key life events, relationships, and political understandings from my first day at Macalester until the present, and drawing connections between³ them. I then meshed these memories with my analysis of the work of Paulo Freire and Bobbie Harro⁴, and their theorizations on how liberation occurs, on a personal, community, and systemic level.

a. *What's in a frame?*

The heart of this work is rooted in the liberatory framings given to us by Paulo Freire in his 1968 work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*⁵. Freire identifies the goal of liberation –and of being human– as being to fundamentally change how society works and how one perceives society around them. This is accomplished through Freire's concept of *conscientização*⁶, which is the process of developing an understanding of oppression and the role we are positioned to play in systems of power. A fundamental tool in this process is *praxis*, or the combined act of understanding the function and mechanics of world systems– and our place within them– and taking action to change those systems

³ I will go into more detail on the development of this process in my methods section.

⁴ I was introduced to the work of Bobbie Harro by Hana Dinku sometime in the middle of my capstone building process. This introduction fundamentally shifted the course of my analysis and I would not have been able to find the clarity I did without it. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018)

⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 35.

at their core⁷. The act of *praxis* is cyclical. It involves a constant state of learning, taking action, reflecting (often through critical dialogue), and re-shaping action.

b. Modeling Liberatory Process: Overview of Harro (2000)

Bobbie Harro utilizes Freire's theories of consciousness raising and process in the "Cycle of Liberation"⁸⁹. Through an analysis of theory and experience, Harro maps out the process by which we, or those in successful social movements, build coalitions that are robust and capable of creating lasting change. The Cycle of Liberation has seven phases: *waking up*, *getting ready*, *reaching out*, *building coalitions*, *coalescing*, *creating change*, and *maintaining*¹⁰. For the sake of our mutual understanding, I will briefly outline each phase in the process.

First comes *waking up*; a catalyzing experience which, either immediately or over time, fundamentally shifts our understanding of the world.

After waking up, it's time to *get ready*. This is a stage of constant– life long– learning, reevaluating, and reflecting. This involves deconstructing our own sense of self and reconstructing it based on new information about systems of oppression. The more often we enter this phase, the more practiced we become at problematizing the messages we receive as well as our own thoughts and biases.

Then, we begin *reaching out*– the stage in which we practice articulating our developing worldview. This "practice" often involves speaking out when we see acts of injustice or something that conflicts with our understanding of truth. Through this stage, we begin to identify and seek the company of individuals who are affirming of our views. We also engage with those who would prefer we not create uncomfortable environments by expressing them. This may lead to the clarifying of our relationships to others and reevaluating where we find community.

⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 87.

⁸ Bobbie Harro. "The Cycle of Liberation," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, ed. Maurianne Adams and Lee Anne Bell, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 618

⁹ This is where I must give so many thanks to Hana Dinku for introducing me to Harro's work and encouraging me to apply her framing to this project. It helped me connect the dots on a whole other level. I hope my engagement with this framing is adequate.

¹⁰ From here on in, I will use these terms in italics to refer to the specific stage of development by Harro (2000).

Next, in the *building coalitions* phase, the act of critical dialogue allows us to connect with like-minded individuals, for the purpose of understanding the meaning they have made of your experiences, and different individuals,¹¹ for the purpose of finding the things you share. This is a difficult phase which requires not only patience and active listening, but also a maintained commitment to the reflective processes we built in the *getting ready* stage.

Once the barriers to intentional dialogue are lessened enough, we may begin *coalescing*. This phase is marked by an increase in personal and collective confidence that grows out of trusting relationships. Our confidence gives us the power of refusal. Refusal to play our roles as either oppressed or oppressor, to accept privileges, or to collude in oppressive action. Instead, we begin organizing, planning actions, and educating other people who are not yet a part of our coalition.

Eventually, after persistent struggle, our coalescence leads to *creating change*. Harro carefully describes the nature of this change as the act of fundamentally shifting the priorities of the systems we wish to alter¹². We do this by collectively creating new culture and ways of being that are in accordance with a more just philosophy.

Finally, we must constantly *maintain* the change we have enacted by facilitating dialogue within our coalition, reflecting on the efficacy of our philosophy, and making changes when necessary. Maintenance also involves celebrating success and caring for members of our community so we may all continue to heal our spirits and give one another what we need to grow and survive.

c. *Engaging the Model, (re)Framing for Understanding*

In this capstone project, I have utilized Harro's model of liberatory process to synthesize my experiences over the past three years at Macalester. Through my engagement with this frame, I have identified three phases in my personal development that reflect the honing of three core realms of political thought and the speed and temporality with which I moved through, around, and amongst each phase of the cycle. These phases, along with the processing needs created by my ADHD, necessitated my adaptation of

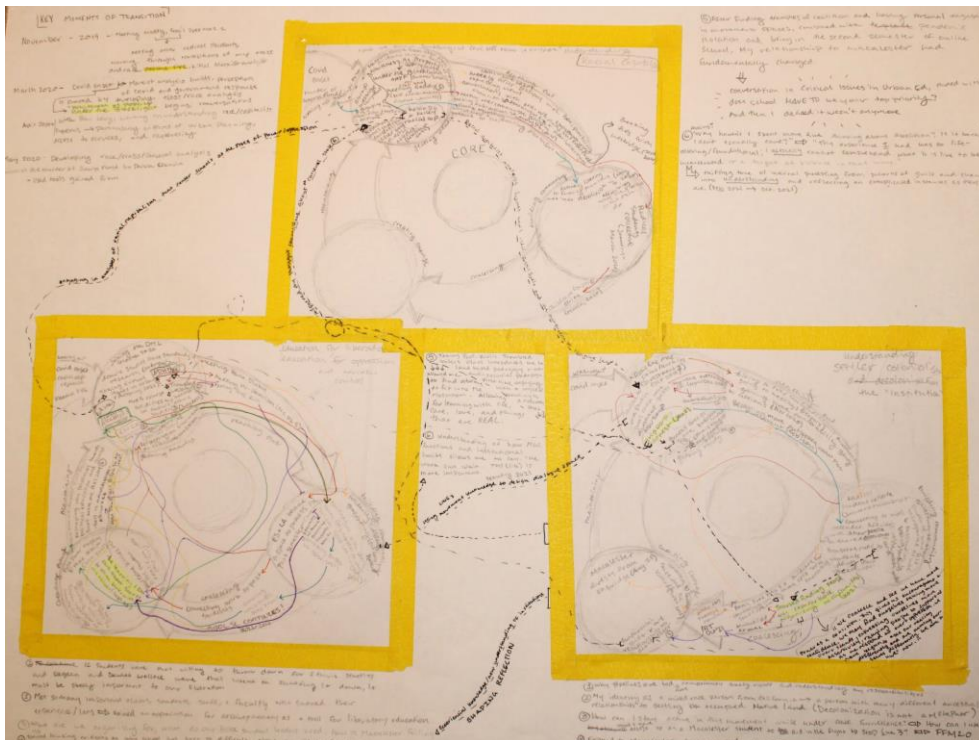
¹¹ Often referred to as "others".

¹² Harro refers here to altering these systems at their "essence".

Harro's model to adequately conceptualize the change I have endured and shaped throughout the course of my undergraduate experience. The following paper is a discussion of the process by which I constructed this method, the meaning I have found through a reflection on my experiences, and the meaning I have made of the method itself.

In preparing to craft a discussion of my findings, I realized that it is impossible to appropriately address three years of memories, catalysts, and relations in a paper of this size. It is also impossible to pull single threads to use as case studies, as their meanings are tangled in one another. What I will attempt to do instead, is reflect on the high-level themes¹³ that arise in each three stages of development I identified above. I will color the discussion with some key readings, engagements, and realizations that helped me connect the dots.

III. Constructing a methodology (500-700)



The final visualization of my personal Cycle of Liberation

¹³ Thanks to Ben Levy for this phrasing

When I began this project, I strove to connect my understandings of racial capitalism, settler colonialism and politicized education to the events of the past three years, with the understanding that every movement, crisis, and confusion that occurred was due to flaws created by one, if not more, of those systems. Though I begin by detailing what I had learned about each of those dynamics, I realized that my analysis wouldn't be complete unless I put in the work to recollect the whole host of my memories from the past three years; the personal and political, not merely the academic. That task in and of itself was more difficult than I had anticipated— I came to find that most of my memories from this period were fuzzy, and messily strewn amongst each other. To overcome this, I found myself going over old photos, listening to music, reading journal entries, old essays, and having conversations with the people that I connected to at some point or another during my time at Macalester. Every time I came up with a key event, I would write it down on a Post-It note and stick it on a paper. A paper which grew increasingly larger, until I had created a map of some of the most significant events which impacted me during my time here. What this allowed me to do was to see the big picture of my Macalester experience and literally, in pencil, draw connections between each event. What I found was that each academic concept fell within a period of my life where the conversations that I was having and the movements that were going on were deeply connected to that topic.

It was then time to apply this timeline to Harro's Cycle of Liberation. But I found in that process that I had to really take Harro's words to heart about not taking the cycle literally, and rather with the understanding that the process for each person's critical consciousness follows different patterns. On the goal of her model, Harro states,

"Its purpose is to organize and name a process that may otherwise be elusive, with the goal of helping people to find their pathway to liberation. It could be characterized as a map of changing terrain where not everyone goes in the same direction or to the same destination, or at the same speed, so it should be taken not as a "how to," but rather as a description of what has worked for some."¹⁴

¹⁴ Bobbie Harro. "The Cycle of Liberation," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, ed. Maurianne Adams and Lee Anne Bell, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 619

This changed the questions I was asking myself. I began to write out different versions of each cycle that fit within specific areas of understanding. I tried creating cycles for each year, each core concept, each movement, and then laid them back on top of one another to understand how each temporality and concept interrelated to one another. This forced me to go over old texts from class and think back to what questions they pushed me to consider. What answers did I come up with? Who else did I connect with who was asking those same questions? What did we do next?

As my visualization came to its most recent form, I had gained a much more coherent understanding as to why each moment I had remembered was of importance to my overall development. It allowed me to understand in a deeper way why certain organizing efforts fell through, by holding them up to the ones which had succeeded. I was able to see which readings had the biggest impact on my consciousness, by seeing how many times I applied that new consciousness to dialogues or actions.

Through the process of dancing between memory, connection drawing, framing, re-framing, reading, and analyzing, I stumbled into a deeper understanding of what it means to engage in the Freirian concept of liberatory praxis. By attempting to use these framings in a way that felt authentic to my learning style and lived experience, I incidentally developed a personal practice for reflection that I can continue to utilize, build upon, and tend, so I may continue in my *vocation*¹⁵ of becoming more fully human.

IV. Getting Set

Broadly, I understand the first phase in my process as the work it took to move from cycling through instances of internal growth and processing into a position where I could build critical, intentional relationships with those around me through dialogue.

Engagements with people around me— specifically my peers who were anti-capitalist or who came from different race and class positions— meshed with an introduction to

¹⁵ This is more language borrowed from Paulo Freire. He uses the term *vocation* to outline our life's work as human beings. In this case, that work refers to engaging in *praxis* to free ourselves from despair and move into a position where we are understanding and responding to oppression.

scholarship surrounding systems of *racial capitalism*.¹⁶¹⁷¹⁸ My analysis of these engagements, through interrogating feelings of discomfort and hesitancy, reading more about state power¹⁹, and the understandings I had gained from my experiences attempting social justice education organizing in high school, led me to slowly build up a *toolkit*²⁰ to respond more readily to moments of upheaval.

These instances of *waking up*, such as the onset of the pandemic or the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in Minneapolis, were understood through the new worldview I had begun to construct as a result of *getting ready*. This influenced my movement into the *reaching out* stage. Being home, isolated with my family, and trying to put words to how the suffering we were experiencing was due to systemic failures. The learning didn't stop²¹, but now it was being strengthened by a struggle to articulate my understanding.

Comfortability grew. This back and forth went on throughout the summer and into the fall and as we moved into the first full semester of online learning. My practice *reaching out* was strengthened through my experience at local actions protesting the financial stakeholders of the Line 3 pipeline²² and in my work to articulate systems of racial

¹⁶ Much of this coursework occurred in Professor Harris's courses, specifically, "The Obama Presidency" and "Race and the Law". Thank you for being one of the earliest catalysts in this intellectual journey.

¹⁷ Robin D.G. Kelley, "What is Racial Capitalism, and Why Does It Matter?" (lecture, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, November 2017.)

¹⁸ Racial capitalism is the concept that the constructions of race and gender are necessary to maintain the capitalist order. Theorists like Robin D.G. Kelley argue that race should be understood as a means of structuring power by creating difference rather than an identity. Under capitalism, the role of race is to control the actions of white people by shaping a narrative that gives lower class whites a sense of superiority over members of the global majority. The fiction of race provides low class whites with a scapegoat for their own struggles and prevents solidarity between class oppressed whites and other oppressed people.

¹⁹ Key texts include: *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* by Eric Foner, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* by Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton, and *Whiteness as Property* by Cheryl Harris.

²⁰ I gain this language from my mother, Eileen Lee, who uses it to refer to the people who care for you and the methods you have at your disposal internally that you can turn to when working through tough shit. I understand using your *toolkit* and striving to expand it as a form of personal praxis. She has raised me with this practice since childhood, and without it, this level of processing would not have been possible. Thank you, mama.

²¹ One key instance in particular was watching the African American Policy Forum's weekly "Under the Blacklight" sessions and reflecting on them with my classmate and thought partner, Ben Levy.

²² For more information, read: "Chronicles to Stop Line 3", [stopline3.org](https://www.stopline3.org), Honor the Earth, updated August 29, 2022, <https://www.stopline3.org/chronicles>

capitalism in the American Studies Methods Course²³. The start of my position as a programmer for the Department of Multicultural Life allowed me to start practicing dialogue, which began to guide me into the *building community* phase.

These critical dialogues grew to include people from outside of Macalester as the fight to stop Line 3 continued. I was brought into spaces with people who had not only begun to develop their critical consciousness but had also participated in movement spaces and coalition building before. Now, as I cycled through the stages of *getting ready*, *reaching out*, and *building community*, I was prompted to reflect on how my experiences at Macalester fit into the broader political context of Minnesota, our role as a settler institution, a landlord in the Mac Groveland, and a producer of often unprincipled, uncommitted, *activists*²⁴. Through struggle and dialogue, I was finding other committed people, other people who were experiencing alienation, and who were driven by love and commitment for the struggle. We were ready.

V. Getting Going

Our trust in one another built to a tipping point, where I had found other people who were alienated by the college, and who were truly feeling the dissonance of engaging in real world struggle while also being asked to live and succeed as students at a liberal arts college... from their bedrooms.²⁵ It felt silly to show up to classes, go into breakout rooms, turn discussion posts in on Moodle, as we also grappled with multitudinous forms of violence from the state, inflicted on the land, the water, our loved ones, and our bodies. From policing to policy, those who chose to perceive the world around us through its systems were forced to engage in what was an unrelenting cycle of pain, only to return to class and be confronted with the hard truth that many of our classmates, and sometimes our friends, saw themselves as living in a completely different world. It is one thing to take on the pain of understanding and dealing with

²³A. R. S. Lee, "Critical Race Economics: a brief introduction to the free market and racial capitalism". (GoogleSlides presentation, American Studies Methods Course, Macalester College, St. Paul, MN, December 15, 2020).

²⁴ I use this term in the Freirian sense to mean one who acts in the face of injustice and oppression but who does so without reflection, consideration of their positionalities, or development of their worldview.

²⁵ In reflection, this feeling was

injustice, but it is a whole other thing to realize that many of your peers do not care enough about you, or people like you, to actively struggle with you in that pain.

Experiencing that dissonance allowed me to once again reexamine my worldview, this time in terms of my priorities²⁶. The way I understood my relationship to Macalester and my role as a student began to fundamentally shift as I gained a deeper understanding of my values.

It took about a year and a half of ideological development to ease the process of *getting ready* → *reaching out* → *building community* to actually begin engaging in coalition building. Through movements spaces, I was able to build trusting and loving relationships in a different way than the mobilizing spaces I had been in previously²⁷. There was more room to express fear, less room for ego, fewer spaces made available to folks who weren't quite ready to throw down.

At this point too, when it came to critical dialogue at Macalester, more critical conversations began to happen around our relationship to the institution. In particular, I began to move into more critical dialogue with peers who had also spent the past year and a half building their consciousness and reflective skills. Most of us had engaged in some organizing effort, and had been struggling, whether we processed it as such or not, in some form of reflective action. We bore the weight of the loss, the death, the violence of the past year, and in our *reaching out*, we were able to identify who on our campus was carrying that weight as well, and who amongst us had let it go.

Independently, we had begun to develop a critique of Mac.

In my struggle, I experienced a major shift in my role as a student on campus, which led me to deprioritize school. Dialogue began to occur more often as student organizers expanded their comfortability with Zoom. Suddenly, rather than experiencing our alienation alone, we were deepening our relationships and creating more meaning as

²⁶ The turning point of this shift occurred in February, 2021 in my Critical Issues in Urban Education class with Mr. Hamilton. In a conversation about navigating movement work while under the pressure of school, he asked the class, "Does Macalester have to be your top priority?". Having this question asked to me by a professor was earth-shattering. For the first time, it clicked for me that I have agency over my priorities. Life at Macalester was never the same after this moment.

²⁷ The difference between organizing and mobilizing is another framework provided to me by Hana Dinku. *Mobilizing* refers to action, getting people to a protest, or signatories on a petition. But *organizing* involves the process I'm outlining here; the act of building relationships, reflecting inward and outward, and trying to create long term, sustainable change through community.

they were becoming rooted in shared experiences that we could synthesize together. Our journeys were becoming more intertwined. I want to call in here language directly from Harro's work on what it means to *coalesce*,

“We coalesce and see we have more power as a coalition. This gives us confidence. We may find ourselves taking more overt stands, expressing ourselves more assertively, rallying people to support us as we respond to our oppression. We have begun to see our reality differently. We are a “we” now.”²⁸

These layered realizations—of institutional power and operation and of de-prioritizing school—were complemented by theory and material histories about student organizing, ethnic studies, and institutional function²⁹. We were collectively growing a deeper and more precise understanding of the circumstances we were under, the ways in which we had power, and what the institution simply would not give to us.

VI. Getting Stable

This understanding has brought me into what I am conceptualizing as the third phase in the cycle, which I would describe as the honing of coalitions in response to new understandings about the mechanisms that uphold institutional power. At the beginning of the cycle, the practice of learning, reflecting, and speaking out came slowly— attempts to dialogue with others, *especially* across difference, were often stilted or overly self-conscious. And although it would be a misrepresentation to say that these practices come easily to me now, I will say that these days, experiences are able to flow smoothly between each phase of Harro's cycle.

To give an example, after learning about the importance of maintaining and returning to an archive with my fellow Ethnic Studies and Campus Activism students, my peers and I were able to design curriculum and facilitate dialogue spaces that shared what we had

²⁸ Bobbie Harro. “The Cycle of Liberation,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, ed. Maurianne Adams and Lee Anne Bell, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 618

²⁹ In particular the summer 2021 course on Ethnic Studies and Campus Activism taught by Professor Harris and Hana Dinku. Other core people in this course were Donna Maeda and Jennings Mergenthal.

learned about the history of protest and power struggles from our archival work³⁰. We had built enough relationships to know who on campus would benefit from and engage with our findings. We had begun to think about the legacies we were leaving behind and how to protect the longevity of the work.

On a personal level, much of this cycle for me in the past year has involved reflecting inward on my relationship to the classroom and what it means to learn. My disconnect from Macalester led me to, amongst other things, seek out an ADHD diagnosis, which once again fundamentally changed my perspective to schoolwork. At the same time, I was taking classes that featured ethnic studies, as well as anti-colonial³¹ and critical pedagogies³². They helped me find methods of learning that actually worked with my style of thinking while helping me continue to connect theory to life³³. The more smoothly I was able to move in between and around phases of the cycle, the more I was able to find my place in education. Learning about liberatory education has given me a way to fight through the fatigue. I now have language to describe how I want to navigate teaching under U.S. systems of racial capitalism and settler colonialism³⁴. It has helped me shift my mindset from being in a constant state of activation and anger, into one that is motivated by understanding, care, love, and process.

³⁰ A. R. S. Lee and Ben Levy, "Power Mapping @ Mac". (GoogleSlides presentation, Department of Multicultural Life, Macalester College, St. Paul, MN, November 7, 2022).

³¹ I use *anti-colonial* here rather than *decolonial* following the frameworks of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's *Decolonization is not a metaphor* and Max Liboiron's *Pollution as Colonialism*. Tuck and Yang provide us with the analysis that the term *decolonization* refers to the literal process of repatriating occupied land and systems of life to Indigenous people, abolishing the carceral state, and ending the military industrial complex. *Anti-colonial* on the other hand refers to practices and systems of thought that challenge settler narratives and colonial systems.

³² Here, I am particularly referring to Professor Saliata's "Troubled Waters" and "Introduction to Environmental Justice" courses and Mr. Hamilton's "Race, Culture, Ethnicity, and Education, and Critical Issues in Urban Education". Thank you for not only providing engaging and frame-shifting materials in their classes, but for providing me with a level of flexibility and patience that allowed me to really learn as a student.

³³ Another work I would like to highlight here is Leanne B. Simpson's 2014 work, *Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation*. Her work has fundamentally altered my approach to writing; shaping it in a way that is more connected to life. It has also had a profound impact on how I intend to shape my teaching practices in the fields of History and Ethnic Studies. Biggest thanks to Professor Kiri for putting me on to her work.

³⁴ For more on this, I would recommend reading *Gangstas, Wankstas and Ridas* by Jeff Duncan-Andrade. He outlines what it means to be a "ride or die" educator and the importance of constantly reflecting on how we teach, how the world has changed, what biases we hold, so that we might to shine a light on that which we currently do not see.

VII. Conclusion

This practice took a little over a month, and I still feel as though I have only scratched the surface. It has made me realize that I can apply this method of understanding to my time organizing in high school, or even to the consciousness I developed as a child through the prompting of my parents and my personal reflections on my identity. The act of synthesis was empowering in the sense that, by processing in the way that worked best with my ADHD, I was engaging in an intellectual project freely and without the usual pain³⁵ that goes into projects like these. And the realization that by developing my own practices for understanding, I can gain a deeper, more personal, more nuanced conceptualization of the theories I hold close. More than anything else though, it was truly liberating to realize that just because the past three years have left me feeling exhausted and disconnected from the place I have chosen to learn, does not mean that the experiences I have had here are meaningless. In fact, it is genuinely the opposite. Through this practice, I have come to the realization of just how many times my comrades and I have struggled to care for ourselves and for each other in ways that actually worked. We have cared this whole time. We have truly, deeply, learned about the world we live in and what we must do to shape it into one that is built for *us*. And in remembering just how much of our time was spent struggling to *quite literally* stay alive... I am left speechless at how much else we managed to accomplish.

Harro ends her essay by discussing the *core* of the Cycle of Liberation. She describes it as, “the set of qualities or states of being that hold the cycle together”³⁶. Through developing this practice, I have gained more clarity on the true strength of our core as a collective, and how much it has grown since the Fall of 2019. These are the qualities of *love*, to understand your community enough to know how best to love them and to engage in the process of self-reflection and self-criticism long enough to truly know and love yourself. It is understanding when to put down the work and the knowledge that your community will keep it going with you in their hearts until you’re ready to pick it back up again.

³⁵ Quite literally, physical and emotional pain.

³⁶ Bobbie Harro. “The Cycle of Liberation,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, ed. Maurianne Adams and Lee Anne Bell, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 624

I will close by encouraging all who read this to take part in their own version of this practice. Critical self-reflection, memory making, and archive are crucial parts to how we maintain the change. It serves the interests of the state, the cops, the oil executives, that we let our brain fog overtake us and forget how hard we've fought to keep them from destroying the beautiful and sacred. I know that for me personally, if I want to survive in the world we live in, I have to be able to sit with the hard truth that the institutions that are supposed to protect us are at best apathetic to our existence and at worst will quite literally kill us. And that I will only be able to respond to this truth by engaging with those around me who have been forced to come to terms with that same understanding. That which we cannot change, we must, at the very least understand. The first step is to remember. We are not broken, we are just experiencing a natural response to all the horror we have witnessed. We are human, we are whole; and when we care for ourselves, for one another, and for the history of the struggle, we win.

I'll leave you with some writing that moves me. Be well.

The fountain's not flowing now, they turn it off in the winter, ice in the pipes. But in the summer it's a sight to see. I want to be around to see it. I plan to be. I hope to be.

This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all, and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the living, and we are not going away. We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come.

Bye now.

You are fabulous creatures, each and every one.

And I bless you: More Life.

The Great Work Begins.

– Tony Kushner, *Angels in America II: Perestroika*,
1995

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