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Perspectives

Ecocide in the Americas: Continuities and Connections

Liza Grandia*
University of California, Davis

Introduction

“Let's wake up! Let us wake up, humanity!... We must answer the call [of the threatened rivers]. Our Mother Earth – militarized, enclosed, poisoned, where basic rights are systematically violated – demands of us to act.”

-Berta Cáceres, 2015 Goldman Prize, acceptance speech [translation is mine]

For the planet's grassroots defenders, 2015 was the deadliest year on record. Like inexorably rising climate data, the 2015 tally (185 murders) topped 2014 by 70 martyrs, and 2017 will likely surpass 2015. Two-thirds of these

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assassinations occurred in Latin America. Although they constitute less than 5 percent of the world’s population, almost 40 percent of environmental martyrs in 2015 were indigenous (Global Witness *On Dangerous Ground*). Among the environmental activists murdered in 2015 was a friend of friends, Rigoberto Lima Choc, a Q’eqchi’ Mayan-speaking schoolteacher from northern Guatemala where I have worked the last 23 years. Two masked assailants on motorcycles gunned him down September 18 on the steps of his county courthouse. Three months earlier, a palm oil company known by its acronym REPSA had dumped an illegal pesticide, malathion, off the banks of its plantation, killing fish and wildlife for more than a hundred kilometers, leaving 65 villages without safe water (Abbott, “Palm Oil Industry”). Just 28 years old, Mr. Choc had been the first to travel to Guatemala’s capital to denounce the “ecocide” (*ecocidio*) of the Rio Pasión watershed – a carefully chosen word that harkens the history of the genocide of Mayas during Guatemala’s 36-year civil war (1960-1996).

A half year later, about three hundred miles to the east in Intibucá, Honduras, mercenaries murdered indigenous activist Berta Cáceres in her home on March 3, 2016. Winner of the prestigious 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize for her work against construction of the Agua Zarco hydroelectric dam on the Gualcarque River in Lenca territory, her death stunned the global human rights community, trended on social media, and appeared throughout even mainstream commercial news sources. While the depth of the complicity of the dam company, Desarrollos Energéticos S.A., or DESA, remains an outstanding

question, international pressure led Honduras to arrest four men for Ms. Cáceres's murder – including a retired army major, a retired captain and two men associated with the dam company (Malkin). Honduran authorities have not, however, pursued investigations into the murders of other comrades (Tomás García in 2013 and Lesbia Yaneth Urquía later in 2016).¹

The assassination of indigenous leaders is only the tip of the iceberg. Beyond the alarming numbers of irreplaceable indigenous leaders who sacrifice their lives in resistance to pollution and territorial dispossession, many others have their lives and trajectories ruined. These charismatic leaders, their families, and/or their extended communities must contend daily with the mundane but nonetheless draining health impacts of the disputed source of pollution, fear of death threats, the stress of dislocation, or sense of spiritual loss.² In addition, state authorities – in open or covert collusion with corporations – often criminalize activists with police raids, wrongful arrests, trumped up charges, fines, and other tools to obstruct, intimidate, frighten and tire grassroots leaders (Global Witness, *How Many More?*). Of this state-sponsored harassment, Berta Cáceres often remarked, “They fear us because we’re fearless” (Bell). After she

¹ As I wrote this, the weekend email brought alerts about attempts on the lives of another Goldman Prize winner (2016), Máxima Acuña of Peru, along with shots fired into the house of Angélica Choc whose lawsuit against HudBay Minerals is described later.

² In a rare environmental impact report, Physicians for Human Rights emphasized that the spiritual loss of access to the river, distrust of nature, and other deeper impacts on the cultural fabric of life could be as consequential for the health morbidities they witnessed as the mercury contamination itself leaching from the Marlin gold mine in western Guatemala. This laudable report also went beyond basic cultural sensitivity to truly take into account how local knowledge and indigenous epistemologies help explain symptoms at lower than expected mercury levels (Basu and Hu).

was killed, the post that went viral was that “Berta no murió; se multiplicó” (Berta didn’t die; she multiplied); and grassroots environmentalists from around the world posted images of themselves holding notebook-paper hashtags “#Iambertacáceres.”

However, most other environmental defenders sacrifice their lives in obscurity. Of 908 documented killings of environmental activists between 2002-13, only 294 perpetrators were identified; just 34 faced charges; and a mere 10 were convicted (Global Witness, *Deadly Environment*). A culture of impunity pervades Latin America, which accounts for an astounding two-thirds of the global total, led by Brazil, then Colombia, Peru, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala (the latter three Central American countries, however, top the list per capita). Rigoberto Choc’s killers remain at large despite strong circumstantial implication of the company’s involvement: his assassination, as well as a 12-hour kidnapping of three of his comrades, occurred just one day after a Guatemalan court ordered a six-month suspension of REPSA’s operations during an investigation of the pesticide spill. Other Q’eqchi’ comrades have faced subsequent attempts on their lives (Author fieldnotes).

Beyond the Río Pasión ecocide, Rigoberto Choc’s people, the lowland Q’eqchi’ Maya of northern Guatemala and Belize – among whom I lived for seven years – face an inordinate number of extractive threats from palm oil and sugar cane plantations, nickel mining, oil drilling, petroleum refineries, hydropower, and more. Grounded in examples from the Q’eqchi’ region, in this

short article I discuss how and why they and other indigenous peoples find themselves at the frontlines of so many environmental conflicts today. While much of the literature on environmental injustice in the Americas is qualitative, crisis or case-study oriented, as scholars engaged with indigenous movements, we must be cognizant of broader historical continuities from Cold War-era repression, as well new threats and opportunities for resistance such as the unprecedented alliance against the Dakota Access Pipeline.

In Corporate Crosshairs

Living in hinterland regions with poor communication, insecure land tenure, and usually without state recognition (Global Witness, *How Many More?*), indigenous peoples are disproportionately impacted by extractive industries. In fact, an estimated 90% of gold, 80% of nickel, 60% of copper, and half of coal production now come from indigenous lands (Johansen xxviii). In the mining sector, new technologies like improved explosives, earth moving equipment, and computer modeling for "remote teleming" have made profitable the extraction of minerals previously not worth corporate investment (Ibid.). In tracking extractive industries, the nonprofit Global Witness has concluded that opposition to mining appears the most dangerous for indigenous leaders, followed by movements against hydroelectric dams, agribusiness, logging, and oil drilling (*On Dangerous Ground*).

Notwithstanding obvious limitations to the data, mapping tools now

permit advocates and researchers to monitor the spread of dispossession in ways not possible in pre-Internet days. With the hope of developing “a statistical political ecology” (Martinez-Alier et al. 735), researchers associated with the Autonomous University of Barcelona have organized another remarkable new online tool, the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJatlas.org), with an inventory of 1,600 cases and counting. Drawing upon what Martinez-Alier et al. validate as “activist knowledge,” the case entries with which I am familiar do, indeed, present a high degree of accuracy. Navigable by Google-Earth illuminated geography or through well-designed categories and filters (including, for example, expressions about “rights of mother nature”), researchers can harness this data to address pattern questions such as:

- Gender – what proportion of resistance movements are led by women?
- Temporal conditions of success – are projects more likely to be halted when resistance begins earlier or later in the planning?
- Sectoral differences – are mining conflicts, in fact, more deadly for activists than water issues?
- Location – are environmental justice struggles increasingly rural?
- Transnational alliances – do these serve as a protective human rights layer for frontline activists?

- Mobilization – how does the environmental issue itself shape mobilization? (e.g., why does mining resistance tend towards blockade whereas dam resistance seems more often to follow investor chains for shareholder activism?) (Martinez-Alier et al. 735)
- Trade – how do trade agreements shape corporate investments?
- Infrastructure – what relationship, if any, do these conflicts have with development bank loans for regional infrastructure upgrades?
- Media attention – how does the reporting of issues and incidents compare across corporate-owned, public, non-profit, or citizen-driven media?
- Historical continuities – how many are recurring conflicts (i.e., the revival of projects once defeated) or conflicts with other human rights antecedents?

From Continued State Crosshairs

To the last question, a surprising number of “contemporary” environmental justice conflicts are actually recurrent threats to indigenous peoples and their territories from decades past. Hydropower projects, in particular, connect to a much longer history of state-sponsored ethnocide in the name of economic development (Johansen **page number**). At the same time, the deep historical indigenous resistance to dams helped create the networks,

alliances, and legal structures that make possible resistance to other contemporary environmental threats. Notable examples include Cree mobilization in the 1970s and 1980s against the James Bay project that spread to college campuses by the 1990s and helped introduce indigenous issues to impressionable environmental activists like me (Blaser, Feit and McRae [page number](#)). Mazatec and Chinantec resistance to the Cerro del Oro dam built in Oaxaca between 1973 and 1982 helped politicize a generation of Mexican anthropologists and contributed to early discussions of how to decolonize our discipline (Barabas [page number](#)). As I will discuss more later on, Achi resistance to the Chixoy dam in northern Guatemala drew important international attention to U.S. backing of Guatemala's genocidal military regime during that country's civil war (Johnston, "Chixoy Dam").

Indigenous resistance to dams also forced the World Bank to develop social and environmental safeguards in its project approval process. Before the 1990s, the World Bank was the key international promoter and financier of hydropower projects. However, trenchant grassroots resistance to these (e.g., the Narmada dam in India) and other large, controversial infrastructure projects (e.g., the Trans-Amazon highway) compelled the World Bank to establish a new Operational Directive 4.20 in 1991. This requires the Bank to conduct an Indigenous Peoples Development Plan and secure informed consent for any projects affecting indigenous peoples. Consequently, by 1999 only a few million dollars for dams remained in the World Bank's lending portfolio. However,

concern about climate change in the 2000s gave the Bank a new justification for hydropower projects. To be sure, even though they are touted as “green” electricity projects, hydropower generate tremendous amounts of methane, a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Nonetheless, the World Bank now has \$1.8 billion invested in hydropower, accompanied by even greater private sector financing for this energy sector (Gies [page number](#)).

The resurgence of big dams converges with other regional structural transformations to facilitate transnational corporate operations in the Americas. As Latin America’s military regimes toppled and its civil wars drew to a close in the 1990s, international and regional development banks began coordinating loan programs throughout the hemisphere for aggressive infrastructure upgrades to open rural areas to foreign corporations. In Mesoamerica in 2001, the Inter-American Development Bank launched the “Puebla to Panama Plan” (PPP), a sprawling \$50-60 billion plan for highways, ports, inter-oceanic canals, electrical grids, gas pipelines, and other linear infrastructure (Grandia [page number](#)). A year later, it launched a similar plan called “IIRSA” for South America (Bebbington [page number](#)). Alongside these regional infrastructure initiatives, the U.S. negotiated regional free trade agreements (the DR-CAFTA in Central America) and bilateral trade agreements (in Panama and South America) to encourage privatization and generally lower the risks and costs of overseas corporate business development.

For all these reasons – technological innovation, debt-driven infrastructure

development, and trade agreements – the scope and pace of territorial acquisition and natural resource extraction is clearly accelerating. Yet, even while recognizing how corporate-led globalization has intensified the pace of environmental conflicts, we must not lose sight of continuities with previous patterns of state repression. Here is where I think the scholarly community can do more to complement the crucial work of investigative journalism. To give some examples from the Q’eqchi’ Maya region that I know best, as I was reviewing environmental conflicts in their territory that appear in the Environmental Justice Atlas, I was struck by how many places in corporate crosshairs today were previous targets of state repression during the Guatemalan civil war. To give two examples:

Case 1 - Santa Rita dam, Verapaz, Guatemala. The Santa Rita dam lies directly to the north of the Río Negro villages where the Guatemalan military massacred nearly five thousand Achí people between 1980 and 1982 who resisted eviction for the World Bank-funded Chixoy dam. A comparable number of Q’eqchi’ communities have opposed the construction of the private-sector Santa Rita dam on the Icbolay River for energy exports to Mexico. In August 2013 in the community of Monte Olivo, a drunken worker for the hydroelectric company randomly killed two boys ages 11 and 13 when he could not find the leader he meant to confront (Neslen **page number**). The next August, 1500 police and power company operatives killed several more people while evicting 160 families

to make way for the dam. This violence has drawn international attention because the Santa Rita dam had received partial funding from the European Union’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) carbon offsets. Even whilst other World Bank representatives were simultaneously negotiating a historical reparations agreement for survivors of the Chixoy massacres (Johnston, "Climate Change, Migration", page number), its private sector lending arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), decided to contribute \$10 million to the Santa Rita dam. Since then, a citizen committee calling themselves the “Consejo de Pueblos de Tezulutlán” (Peoples Council of the Land of War)³, along with the Guatemalan nonprofit “Madre Selva,” filed a complaint with the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO) office at the World Bank’s IFC. This triggered an official investigation as to whether its investment officers had exercised due diligence in understanding the regional and historical context of the Icbolay River basin. In an advocacy call to an IFC investigator, I noted that in regional lore, the highly venomous fer-de-lance snakes for which the river is named (*ikbolay* in the Q’eqchi’ Mayan language, *Bothrops asper* in western taxonomy) are so fearless they are said to turn around to return to bite a transgressor that crosses its path. While

³ The name of this citizen committee strikingly harkens Q’eqchi’ resistance to the original Spanish invasion itself. Unable to conquer militarily the northern Maya lowlands, the Spanish referred to this region as the Land of War or Tezulutlán. In 1537 the Crown entrusted Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas to pacify this region through “spiritual” conquest, in other words, conversion to Christianity.

results of the IFC investigation are pending, the evidence suggests that the World Bank may be bitten twice here.

Case 2 - Choc v. HudBay. Another uncannily repetitive conflict zone is a nickel mine located between the Q’eqchi’ towns of El Estor and Panzos to the west of Lake Izabal. In 1978, Guatemalan soldiers opened fire on a crowd attending a meeting in the town square of Panzos with land-rights organizer Adelina Caal (better known as “Mamá Maquín”). Killing an estimated 140 people, this massacre marked a turn in military strategy in Guatemala’s civil war from skirmishes with leftist rebels towards concerted genocide of Maya civilians (Grandin [page number](#)). Twenty-nine years later, about twenty-five miles away, uniformed security personnel for the Fenix Mine (then owned by the Canadian corporation HudBay Minerals) gang raped eleven Q’eqchi’ women. In times of supposed “peace,” two years later in another incident, they shot two other Q’eqchi’ community leaders, paralyzing one and killing another. In a precedent-setting lawsuit, the latter’s widow, Angélica Choc, won standing to bring Hudbay Minerals to trial in Toronto for both actual and punitive damages. Drawing widespread international attention and even a front page *New York Times* story, it is the first time a multinational corporation will be sued at its headquarters for human

rights abuses committed abroad (Daly).⁴

Indigenous legal frontiers

As the examples above illustrate, Q'eqchi' people have realized that transnational threats require transnational organizing beyond the state structures that have historically repressed them. Many other indigenous people throughout the Americas are likewise forging innovative international legal precedents in defense of their homelands. According to the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (that expanded upon a prior 1989 treaty, International Labor Organization Convention #169), indigenous peoples hold the right of *Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC)* about the long-term consequences of development projects on their ancestral lands and associated impacts on their livelihoods. While many development banks have watered down the concept in practice to performative consultations rather than the higher standard of genuine, culturally-appropriate consent, the concept nonetheless remains an essential legal tool for indigenous peoples. In cases before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and other international fora, indigenous claimants have successfully invoked this principle to win injunctions against infrastructure threats (dams, roads, and the like) and other forms of land grabbing.

⁴ Specifically, the suit alleges that Hudbay Minerals CEO Ian Austin and other high level managers were aware of the violent January 2007 eviction of Lote Ocho and did nothing to pre-empt further violence (Reichard).

In other instances, indigenous people are invoking high-level rights as protectors of Mother Earth. In South America, in response to the Ecuadorian class action suit against Chevron/Texaco and other resistance movements, native peoples have forged a new discourse about the integral relationship between “the rights of nature” and the rights of indigenous peoples. By 2008, both Bolivia and Ecuador had incorporated this principle into their respective constitutions as an alternative to mainstream, neoliberal development (Martinez-Alier et al. [page number](#)). As part of this policy shift, Ecuador’s president Rafael Correa proposed in 2007 that the international donor community compensate Ecuador with \$3.6 billion for leaving untapped the significant oil reserves under Yasuní National Park into which Huaorani people have moved in voluntary isolation.

This idea to “yasunize” oil – that is, to leave it in the ground – has inspired climate activists elsewhere to focus organizing tactics on keeping carbon in the ground. Instead of quixotic opposition to petroleum operations already underway, they have instead targeted new infrastructure needed to move second-grade petroleum like bitumen crude and shale oil to refineries at a lower cost than the existing transport network. The idea is to “short-circuit” the petroleum’s future transportation pathways by “raising the political and economic price of new infrastructure to the point where politicians begin to balk.” Having been central to the defeat of the Keystone Pipeline (LaDuke), Native American leaders developed a more explicitly indigenous variation of

this strategy to slow Bakken oil extraction by attempting to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), an unfolding struggle to which I now turn.

Dakota Access

In the most culturally-diverse resistance movement ever united on the planet, people from more than five hundred tribes and representatives of indigenous peoples from around the world traveled over the fall of 2016 to Standing Rock Reservation to join in the resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline. It began as a local protest against a classic case of environmental racism, but quickly morphed and evolved into a much broader movement. A venture of Energy Transfer Partners, this \$3.8 billion pipeline was designed to move shale oil from North Dakota more cheaply than by railroad to refineries in Illinois. In the original plan, it would have crossed the Missouri River just north of the mostly white city of Bismarck. At the early planning stages, the Army Corps of Engineers rejected this “high consequence” design and rerouted the pipeline’s river crossing northeast of the Standing Rock Reservation. At legal issue is whether or not the Army Corps should have conducted a prior environmental impact assessment and acquired informed consent from the tribal government. An inevitable pipeline spill at the river crossing would, within six minutes, contaminate the entire reservation’s drinking water which depends on a single antiquated treatment system now more than fifty years old.

A lesser known aspect of the conflict is that Standing Rock is home to both Dakota and Lakota peoples who were resettled to this river area after Custer discovered gold in their hunting territory. Soon thereafter the U.S. government reneged upon the 1868 Fort Laramie treaty by opening the sacred Black Hills to white prospectors. Meanwhile, the Army was forcibly relocating all the Great Plains tribes into sedentary communities. In 1879, the U.S. government dismembered the Great Sioux Reservation into smaller reservations, including Standing Rock.

To add injury to insult, the reason why the Army Corps of Engineers controls the land around the river crossing is that in the mid-twentieth century, it further reduced Standing Rock reservation land to build the Oahe Dam to provide hydropower and irrigation to non-native farmers along the Missouri. Conceived in 1944 as part of the Pick-Sloan flood control project, the Oahe was one of four dams that would destroy more Indian land than any other public works project in U.S. history. The 55,000 acres that the Army Corps flooded were among Standing Rock Reservation's most fertile orchards, rangelands, gardens, and timberlands. They were also home to thriving businesses and well-constructed homes from which the Army evicted Lakota/Dakota people on an arbitrary date in the dead of winter 1958 (Ojibwa) into the trailers and substandard housing found today on the reservation.

Given this long and sordid history with the U.S. Army, Standing Rock leadership complemented its appeal to a U.S. district court with international

advocacy. This drew the attention of Reuters and other commercial news sources that reported about tribal chairman David Archambault II traveling to Geneva on September 21, 2016, to seek support from the United Nations Human Rights Council. Higher appeal to the U.N. is a common strategy for indigenous peoples across Latin America against repeated violence and broken promises from their national governments. Similarly, I have also noted over the past half year that U. S. Native American leaders are increasingly describing themselves as “indigenous” and speaking about the commonalities of their resistance with other indigenous peoples in the hemisphere who confront transnational corporate power.

Here is where the Dakota/Lakota story came full circle with the experiences of Q’eqchi’ Maya people. The person receiving the Standing Rock appeal within the U.N. was none other than Mr. Álvaro Pop Ac, a self-taught international Q’eqchi’ leader who currently happens to serve as the Chair of the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. On September 1, 2016, he issued a statement calling on the U.S. to carry out a “fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent process to resolve this serious issue and to avoid escalation into violence and further human rights abuses.” His statement also noted that “thousands of indigenous peoples from different nations have gathered in the Sacred Stone Spirit Camp, in North Dakota, to block construction of the pipeline. Actions such as these tend to occur in different parts of the world and are often misunderstood and described as rebellious, backward thinking and unilateral

opposition to development” (Thorbecke).

As a Q’eqchi’ leader, Mr. Pop knows well the disturbing trend across the Americas in which states have justified abuses against social and environmental movements through counter-terrorism legislation and rhetoric that portrays activists and community leaders as “internal enemies” or “economic terrorists” (Global Witness, *How Many More?* 4). Especially during the Reagan era, military regimes throughout Latin America began characterizing indigenous and grassroots movements as communist sympathizers, a theme on which subsequent neoliberal governments elaborated in a post 9/11 world obsessed with terrorism. The Chilean government was the first to condemn indigenous (Mapuche) activism against corporate logging as “terrorism,”⁵ but other right-wing Latin American leaders have followed suit. To return to the prior example of Berta Cáceres, for her opposition to a dam that would have flooded Lenca land, Honduras had charged *her* in 2013 with sedition, allegations of property damage, illegal weapon possession, and “continual danger” to the nation’s security. In Guatemala, throughout his presidency (2011-15), ex-General Otto Pérez Molina repeatedly imposed states of emergency and martial law in places of social mobilization. As an example of his inflammatory language against grassroots environmental movements, he described Q’eqchi’ peoples’ resistance to the Santa Rita dam, profiled above, as “a social cancer that is expanding and

⁵ Although the Inter-American Court of Human Rights condemned Chile in 2014 for imprisoning Mapuche activists under its antiterrorist act, the repression continues.

impacts the economic interests of the country” (Abbott, “Mayan Q'eqchi' Communities”).

Coda

Against this formidable fusion of state-corporate power, how do inclusive, horizontal movements protect themselves? Beyond the more obvious repression of tanks and torture, how do they contend with turnkeys? The latter was a serious problem for the American Indian Movement once it became one of J. Edgar Hoover’s primary targets. Through COINTELPRO (1959-1971), Hoover’s covert and illegal “counter-intelligence program,” the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) infiltrated, planted provocateurs, and developed other tools of internal sabotage against the nascent Native American rights movement, many of whose key leaders came from the greater Lakota/Dakota territory that includes Standing Rock.⁶ Although supposedly shut down in 1971 after Vietnam war protestors exposed this secret program by leaking burgled documents to the press, the FBI continues to spend more on surveillance of environmental and peace groups (including Quaker chapters) than tracking

⁶ While adaptive strategies to surveillance, criminalization, and harassment must be context specific, nonprofits, allies and philanthropists can do much more to facilitate south-south and north-south horizontal exchanges to allow activists an opportunity to form transnational networks. I know of one valiant foundation program officer who uses his discretionary funds to allow grassroots Central American leaders to hold closed multi-day meetings (without his presence) to talk about anything of concern. Such horizontal meetings can also give often lonely heroes/ines a sense of energized validation of being part of broader movement.

white supremacist and other right-wing hate groups that have formed actual armed militias against the U.S. government (Federman).

Albeit initially at odds with tribal elders who remember the fractured history of AIM,⁷ women’s and youth leadership at Standing Rock has demonstrated truly remarkable discipline in keeping paranoia under control, the various camps relatively unified, and frontline action peaceful (Elbein). Even while Edward Snowden’s sobering revelations warned that cell phones and computers can also double as new tools of FBI, corporate, and other kinds of illicit state surveillance of social movements, social media technology⁸ has also been a blessing for grassroots activists to tell their own stories. By building a new online identity as “protectors” of water, Standing Rock organizers undermined the usual stereotypical depictions of “protestors” found in the mainstream media. Through what has become the movement’s rallying call – Mni wiconi! (“Water is life!”) – they have compellingly reoriented the debate toward seventh generation responsibilities to uphold the rights of nature. They have also made vivid the historical connections and continuities of the struggle against DAPL with a longer history of genocide.

⁷ Some of the FBI “counter intelligence” tactics used against Native American organizing were: phone taps and break-ins to create paranoia; “bajacking” or dropping innuendo an important leader might be an informant; fake publications and bogus mail; disinformation to the public; legal harassment of leaders; fabrication of evidence; robbery of papers; even the commissioning of Mafia bosses to intimidate activists; but above all, the hiring of infiltrators and provocateurs (Churchill and Vander Wall).

⁸ See the work of Beth Conklin on how in the 1990s Amazonian indigenous activists embraced then new video camera technology to document negotiations with outsiders.

To give but one example, Amy Goodman, public radio anchor of *Democracy Now*, happened to catch on video a confrontation on September 3, 2016 between private DAPL security guards and a small group of protectors. The water protectors crossed a barbed wire fence to peacefully approach the bulldozers that, in direct violation of a pending court order, were rapidly destroying Native American gravesites. In a scene reminiscent of one of the woodcuts in Bartolomé de las Casas's (1552) "*Short Account*" of Spanish atrocities in the Caribbean, the pipeline guards unleashed attack dogs on the water protectors. This memorable day was also the anniversary of the 1863 Whitestone Massacre that occurred a few hours to the east of Standing Rock. On that day, General Alfred Sully had slaughtered 300-400 peaceful Dakota men, women, and children. One of the child survivors of that massacre was none other than the great-great grandmother of Standing Rock's tribal historian, Ladonna Brave Bull Allard, on whose allotment land the first pipeline resistance camp, Sacred Stone, was founded (Brave Bull Allard). Social media of the dog attacks went viral and allies by the thousands began to travel to Standing Rock over the fall.

Another legendary social hero at Standing Rock is Myron Dewey, a former hotshot firefighter turned journalist and founder of "Digital Smoke Signals Media." His humorous camp updates and live drone feeds have been essential in exposing infiltration of DAPL security guards and abuses from the heavily militarized Morton County police. As he argues, "Drones level the playing field. They get us out of jail, they have saved us from having to get close

to police to document what they're doing and to document that, while these atrocities and abuses of power are happening, work as usual on the pipeline has [continued]" (Koebler). For example, the drone video he captured on November 20, 2016, of the police firing percussion grenades at protectors in prayer and then blasting them with water cannons in subzero temperatures broke the commercial media black-out about Standing Rock during the critical fortnight before the December 5th deadline the Army Corps of Engineers had set to evict the camp.

Although on December 4, 2016 President Obama essentially halted the pipeline by denying the needed easement to complete the final stretch across the Missouri River, Donald Trump, on his second weekday in office, issued an executive order replayed on almost every network that he would re-open pipeline construction "subject to terms and conditions to be negotiated by us." It is public knowledge that Energy Transfer Partners' CEO Kelcy Warren contributed at least \$100,000 to the Trump campaign and perhaps more through political action committees or PACs. Although Trump claims to have sold last June (2016) his own undisclosed stock (estimated between half and one million dollars) in the company responsible for building the pipeline, Energy Transfer Partners, he has provided no proof of having done so. In yet another instance of emolument, he would essentially be negotiating with his own financial interests in mind.

Indigenous environmental activists from Latin America have long contended with the challenges of organizing against such state/corporate/police

collusion (Bebbington **page number**). Their movements have been unfairly criminalized and many of their leaders martyred with little to no attention from the press. As U.S. citizens are realizing, and as Berta Cáceres stated so eloquently in her Goldman Prize acceptance speech quoted in the epigraph, it is time to act. Environmental justice for indigenous people and for everyone on the planet is inseparable from the current struggle to defend democracy.

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