BEYOND BORDERS: ENVISIONING STUDENTS' MIGRANT JUSTICE ORGANIZING AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN NORTHERN ARIZONA

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ABSTRACT

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When paired with strategic leadership development and movement building practices, political education is crucial in working towards goals of social justice within an increasingly censored, neoliberal education system. This thesis project explores how the Northern Arizona University chapter of the No More Deaths/No Más Muertes organization can develop and sustain its work in Northern Arizona. Framed by critical theory and critical pedagogy methodology, this project ultimately envisions and establishes a foundation for continued organizing efforts. The anticipated outcomes of this project were to create a political education and organizing framework for the NMD/NMM NAU chapter for future leaders of the group and envision a stronger sense of identity and purpose of the group. Ultimately, the project evolved into a reflective process learning from the previous practices of NMM at NAU while putting into analysis relevant theory and personal experiences.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"There's no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom." - Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970, p. 34)

The Problem

In pondering what I would like to explore in my thesis, I reflected on the current political climate of the United States to see which public domains are in danger of collapse at the hands of the expanding fascist state. The issue of the far-right's monopolizing of education has been one, among many, that is impossible for me to ignore. Through my research, I sought to learn how community models of education have attempted to challenge hegemonic powers and divest from the fascist states from which they are entrapped. I've learned from liberatory educational models such as Freedom Schools in the Southern United States, Black Panther Party's literacy programs, the popular education movement in South America, and revolutionary ethnic studies programs to inform my empirical knowledge of what has been done and what is possible. Attempts to create liberatory education spaces have not been easy and there is much to be learned from the organizers and educators who face surmounting barriers to make change happen. Learning from those who came before me helped me to think through my own practice of liberatory education and community organizing. Thinking conceptually, I drew from critical theories such as feminism, abolitionist thought, and decolonial theory to better situate my work within interdisciplinary and intersectional social justice work.

With the rise of neoliberalism, fascism, and white nationalism in the United States, the attacks on education have grown ever more present (McLaren, 2007). From the attempts to ban ethnic studies in Arizona to the debate over Critical Race Theory's place in the classroom, education has continually been under attack in recent decades (Cammarota, 2017). However, this

is not a new phenomenon for the U.S. In understanding the settler colonial beginnings of this country, it becomes apparent that schools have frequently served as places of forced cultural assimilation, racial discrimination, and segregation. While it is true that schools have also provided a safe space for students to escape the troubles of their personal lives, seldom are they actively transformative and liberatory. Black youth, youth of color and immigrant youth have been disproportionately punished rather than empowered in their schools. These marginalized youth, for example, are funneled into the school-to-prison-pipeline through punitive and militarized measures seeking to criminalize difference (Freeman, 2006., Seroczynski & Jobst, 2016). For those Black, Indigenous, Latine, and immigrant youth with the means to go to college, it is through student clubs or organizations they may find safe spaces to have their voices heard.

Educators have also faced challenges to implementing empowering pedagogy with neoliberal education reforms turning the classroom into privatized corporate-models whereby educators have less autonomy in designing curriculum or teaching practices. Some neoliberal reforms to education include the fast-tracking of teacher preparation and funding contingent on enrollment (McLaren, 2007). Schools throughout the country, for instance, have adopted the banking model of education, which is the concept of depositing information into the minds of students through repetition and standardized testing with little to no engagement in lived experiences or critical thinking (Freire, 1970; Yosso, 2013). This form of teaching turns students into passive objects, ready for the capitalist workforce, rather than active participants in their own learning. One response to the state of the current educational system has been the creation of community forms of education that practice ethnic studies alongside a critical pedagogy of liberation and democracy. Liberatory education can be defined as community-based education

that empowers students to see themselves as makers of change and address the issues facing their communities.

Generally speaking, through US K-12 public schooling to the university level many students experience an education grounded in social control not so much social change. Efforts to bring ethnic studies to the classroom have been met with the racist, settler colonial logic of everyday people and politicians or have had to undergo the lengthy bureaucratic process that impedes the ability to organize through state institutions. This does not end at the university with student resistance, historically, squashed by campus police and a lack of adequate resources to ensure the retention and graduation of marginalized students, students are left to create their own networks of support. At Northern Arizona University, I have witnessed and participated in the efforts to organize students fighting for a range of social justice issues. During my time in college involved with various student clubs, organizations, and coalitions, including the No Más Muertes chapter at NAU, I have faced the difficulties of organizing and putting theory into action for social change.

Through my project, I planned to analyze and reflect on the recent organizing efforts of the Northern Arizona University's No Más Muertes student-run chapter of the organization, in order to write about the possibilities for the future of the group. I approached this project from my perspective as a student, organizer, and learning educator, directly involved with the work I center in my analysis. The central problem, so to speak, I work through is in the challenges students may face in their ability to educate and organize for liberatory change. By writing about my own experiences as a student trying to organize for social justice causes, while balancing life in academia, and documenting the collective experiences of the NAU No Más Muertes group throughout the past years, I put out there a guide, an example, to be learned from.

Contextualizing the Fight for Migrant Justice

As this project takes place from so-called Flagstaff, Arizona, navigating the experiences that have mostly taken place there, I use this space to contextualize what I refer to as migrant justice throughout this paper. I use the term migrant justice to refer to a multilayered fight for liberation and freedom of movement without the violence of border institutions. The US-Mexico border and its infrastructure can be referred to as a border industrial complex, similar to the prison industrial complex, whereby militarization, surveillance, and financial interests of the border are interconnected (Kumanyika & Gilmore, 2020). The border and its deadly technologies of deterrence has become a lucrative business for many. To maintain the militarization of border agents and the surveillance technologies such as drones, cameras, GPS systems and helicopters comes with a growing multi-billion dollar budget. In the last couple of decades, the US has exponentially expanded the budget spent on addressing immigration as an issue of national security along with the tactics used to solidify the US as an imperial regime both domestically and globally.

'Prevention through deterrence' or PTD is a tactic employed by US border and immigration officials whereby the rough terrain of the desert combined with increased surveillance at the border are used as tools to deter migrants from entering the country. It is a violent strategy to push migrants attempting to cross the US-Mexico border into more dangerous terrain, subjecting them to harsher conditions, and thus making them more susceptible to death. One example of this prevention through deterrence is founded through Operation Blockade in El Paso, Texas. Operation Blockade was put into place to prevent undocumented migrants from disturbing the local US populations by building a more militarized border force that would force migrants to take longer, alternative routes into the country. The logic being the more migrants

that die crossing the border, the more effective US immigration officials' tactics are. (Edwards, 2019). Not only are border and immigration officials well aware of the dangers migrants face in the desert but they exacerbate them through their hunting techniques and detached forms of surveillance, such as drones or radar technologies that spot migrants from a distance, as they push them closer to death. This state-sanctioned violence is pardoned in the name of nationalism and national security.

Throughout history and continuing today, the US-Mexico borderlands have been turned into a warzone. During Ronald Reagan's 'War on Drugs,' the US government essentially waged a war on undocumented migrants as immigration officials, police, and military worked together to surveil, physically harm, and detain them. Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents continue to quite literally share tactics with the US military to boast their notions of national security. Many of these militarized tactics have grown out of the 'War on Terror' following 9/11 in which immigration policy aligns with military operations abroad to surveil those who are not white and considered 'foreign aliens.' (Walia, 2021). The rise of militarization efforts at the border following 9/11, including the creation of highly surveilled security fences, goes to show the ways in which the US government views Black people and people of color from other countries as threats to a long history of white supremacy.

A settler colonial history of white supremacy and nationalism in this country make up the construction of the US-Mexico border in the first place. Increased militarization of the border further legitimizes notions of white supremacy and xenophobic, racist ideologies. Colonialism can be understood as one of the pillars of white supremacy through which displacement and genocidal practices are made possible (Smith 2006). The militarization of the border is yet another extension of settler colonialism taking place on stolen land. Stolen Indigenous lands are

physically degraded and separated by the border as a means of exerting colonial control over Indigenous peoples. The people of the Tohono O'Odham Nation in so-called Arizona, for instance, have continually experienced firsthand the negative impacts of the border wall being built through their land and sacred spring. This violence continues in so-called Flagstaff, Arizona, whereby Indigenous peoples are surveilled by the police and ICE corroborates with the police. Numerous Indigenous and migrant justice activists have fought to stop the construction of the border wall, recognizing how it is an issue that affects many aspects of life in the borderlands. The increasing surveillance of their daily lives as well as others living in the US-Mexico borderlands brings to question whose interests the border is serving. Justified as a means of protecting American lives, the border exists to preserve white supremacy as well as the capital interests of the most powerful and wealthy.

Current immigration reform seldom prevents the deaths of migrants, allowing for the powerful elite to continue to profit off their suffering. Reform fails to get to the root causes of the suffering of Black people, people of color, undocumented migrants, and Indigenous peoples at the hands of the militarized border regime. More radical means of social transformation, from abolition to decolonization, are arguably required to liberate people from the racialized colonial violence of the border. Groups participating in humanitarian aid and direct action in the US-Mexico borderlands, such as No Más Muertes, are participating in an entangled fight for justice and liberation whether they name it or not. And in Northern Arizona, so many miles from the border, the fight for migrant justice looks a little different and just as interconnected.

Personal Motivation

Tracing my own personal story that brought me here, I was born to a mixed-race family in Mesa, Arizona wherein my father is a brown Mexican-American and my mother a white

person from Indiana. My father grew up speaking Spanish at home but due to being segregated in the classroom and discouraged to speak it in public he never taught us kids Spanish growing up. I have thus taken it upon myself to learn Spanish and reconnect to my cultural heritage in whatever ways I can, meanwhile my older brother denies he has any Mexican roots at all. Throughout my childhood, I have been faced with many contradictions. I have often found myself in a position as the moderator, straddling the histories, identities, and ideologies of my family in attempts to make peace with their differences. Political debates at the dinner table were squashed, unless they concerned a defense of increased policing and anti-immigrant sentiment from my mother's white family. When the election of 2016 came along, it grew increasingly difficult for me to stay quiet when white family members would ask me to respect a man who stood for the antithesis of everything I am and believe in. It was both at home and in the classroom where I have had to decide which part of me I needed to defend and represent.

From my own experience, it has been alternative learning spaces that have offered me the greatest opportunities for social change such as political education reading groups and grass-roots organizations. Throughout 2020, in the height of the pandemic, I sought out intentional online communities to engage in political education, reading the likes of Frantz Fanon and Angela Davis. In the public high school I attended, a quarter of the student body was Latinx, yet there were no Latinx teachers and the mention of critical race theory or ethnic studies would have resulted in outrage from the Parent-Teacher-Association. I grew up attending schools where I was surrounded by people who did everything in their power to disempower students of color, Latinx, and/or Black students. In the traditional K-12 classroom I have witnessed the efforts to depoliticize history, literature, and science by which consciousness raising is discouraged and political truths denied.

It is my knowledge of the history of the educational systems and political climate of the United States that has made me interested in community-based education, critical pedagogy, and ethnic studies as paths towards social transformation. My work with the Community University Public Inquiry program in the Immigrant Youth Equity pod at NAU has more recently influenced my desire to explore community-based alternatives to education as I have witnessed the impact working directly with a community partner can have on Latinx students. Bringing together my interests in community organizing and revolutionary politics, I see education as a tool through which revolution is built. Not only is education inseparable from the political but it has the power to bring about political transformation in the empowering of students as agents of social change (Freire 1970; Tarlau 2014). Drawing from ideas of Brazilian educator and philosopher of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire, I became motivated to find ways education can be restructured in an anti-oppressive way that reshapes the relationship between educator-student and seeks to dismantle structures of domination (1970). In addition to my engagement with the work of Paulo Freire, I have gained a deeper motivation for addressing the larger structures of colonialism and imperialism through my readings of Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, Aime Cesaire, and other notable theorists of the Global South. With that background in decolonial theory in mind, I believe it necessary to reflexively locate myself as a non-Indigenous, non-Black Latinx person born and raised in the United States.

Research Question

When I first sought to focus my thesis project on my own involvement in the NMM/NMD chapter at NAU, I wanted to answer the following questions: How can the No More Deaths/No Más Muertes NAU chapter develop an identity and sustain the work in Northern Arizona? What can the movement building, leadership development, and political education of

the NMD/NMM NAU chapter look like? The original idea behind this thesis project was to create a political education curriculum for the NMM chapter that could be used and adapted by current or future members of the group. To answer the original aforementioned research questions would require a different method than what was carried out in this project and poses a project for another day, to be built off of the one written here. What resulted, instead, was a theoretical analysis alongside a reflective process of the recent events of No Más Muertes at NAU to learn from and make suggestions for the future. What this project seeks to answer is the question of what can I, and the NAU NMM chapter, learn from its practices in order to create a stronger purpose and identity? The process that took me here is revealed through the reflective and analytical writing that follows.

The initial goal of my project was to vision the possibilities and growth areas of the NMM NAU chapter to sustain its organizing in the years to come. Part of that visioning practice involved critically reflecting on the past in order to think about the future. To answer my research question I will be using personal experiences from the conversations and actions taken in the past year in No Más Muertes at NAU and putting those into conversation with relevant theory to envision how the group could educate and organize differently. Alongside, analyzing the practices of NMM NAU I have conducted a literature review of historical liberatory education movements and drawn on several critical theories to better understand the varied ways that movement building and organizing, leadership development, and political education can look like.

Significance

It has been clear through my own experiences with public schools that making ethnic studies programs and involving the community in the curriculum design and pedagogical

practices is a daunting process. Today numerous grassroots organizations have participated in the opportunity to build community-based education centered on empowering Latinx communities. The stories of the organizers, educators, community members, and students attempting to create spaces of liberatory education are worthy of being listened to and learned from. One of the reasons programs such as the Mexican-American Studies program in Tucson, Arizona are met with such vitriol is because of their effectiveness in challenging the state. The revolutionary potential of ethnic studies programs threatens the foundation of this country and loosens the grip the state has on the social control of young students. Youth are quite literally the future, if there is to be revolutionary change made in this country then it is to begin with empowering young people, especially those who are more often disempowered by the system. My research work will, hopefully, be able to support other community organizers and educators in the path towards liberatory education.

Sustainable Communities

It has been four years since the world changed and many peoples' worlds ended, and it keeps spinning. At the end of 2019, a global pandemic permanently altered the world. COVID-19 has since resulted in far too many preventable deaths, blood on the hands of the government, and opened eyes to the chasm between capitalism and life. In the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic was a gateway to a collective consciousness grasping the realities of American individualism, settler colonialism, and a racialized capitalist system. Mutual aid networks sprung up throughout the country, the people mobilized to care for one another, and when George Floyd was murdered by police in May of 2020, the people grew angrier. Millions took to the streets to demand justice for Black lives and flooded social media with information about abolition. The summer of 2020 demanded peoples' fight to survive, resist, dream, and hope

for a better world. I, and many others, felt for the first time a bit of revolutionary optimism. What we were all tasked with next was to keep the momentum going, to continue imagining a more sustainable, just, and liberated community for all.

For many, “sustainable communities” connotes a focus on environmental sustainability and building of communities to mitigate the effects of climate change. However, what it takes to make a sustainable community goes beyond the science. Communities cannot be sustained without the collective care for one another and the sharing of knowledge. The making of a sustainable community is a communal project without borders to divide us. As I vision how to grow the work of migrant justice in Flagstaff, Arizona I think about the many ways constructed and imaginary borders try to prevent that from happening. Here in Flagstaff, it's hard to ignore the damage borders inflict on indigenous communities so many miles away from the physical wall down South. While I imagine a world without borders and the return of stolen land to Indigenous peoples, I recognize the steps needed to take in that direction. Educating and empowering one another to create networks of care for our migrant neighbors is part of the work of sustaining our communities so that visions of abolition and decolonization become closer to reality.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

"We make the revolutionary history, telling the past as we have learned it mouth-to-mouth, telling the present as we see, know, and feel it in our heats and with our words." bell hooks, Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black (1989, p. 3)

As I define liberatory education as an education rooted in self-determination, democracy, community-based learning towards social justice, I have gathered literature written on various forms of liberatory education and ethnographic research completed within such examples. The pre-existing literature discussed here consists of historical or first-hand accounts of the challenges, political landscapes, and the ideological and theoretical formations of different educational practices. From Black education in the United States to the Popular Education movement in Latin America and the emergence of revolutionary ethnic and Chicanx studies, an integrative understanding of what has been done to challenge traditional schooling can inform the future of education towards greater social change. In this section of my paper, I will provide a brief history of these different education and social justice movements as well as how they formed and the core values they revolved. To better understand how to create education curriculum rooted in critical pedagogy and see how liberatory forms of education are being practiced today I look towards historical examples and how they were developed.

Black Education in the United States

The decision made in the case of Brown vs. The Board of Education resulted in desegregation policies that would lead to the rise of neoliberal "diversity" efforts over "equity and racial justice," (Todd-Breland, 2018). The history of Freedom Schools in the United States illuminates some of the ways in which Black liberation was centered in response to US education's systemic exclusion of Black students. In the 1960s and 70s Freedom Schools were alternative schools created for Black youth by activists and members of the Student Nonviolent

Coordinating Committee, also known as SNCC, following the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964. This first Freedom Summer was started by SNCC with the idea of developing a progressive, liberatory pedagogy that could be applied to more alternative schools or Freedom Schools throughout the country (Perlstein, 2002). One of their initial goals was to foster a student-centered education by which Black students were to see themselves as people capable of controlling their own lives and participating in American democratic society (Perlstein, 2002., Chilcoat et al. 1998.) As more Freedom Schools were developed throughout the United States, primarily in the South, the pedagogical approaches also evolved.

Many of the Black organizers running the Freedom Schools grew more disillusioned with integrationism as it was made clear the white community was increasingly pushing them out of mainstream society. Thus the educational praxis of the Freedom Schools became more engaged with the Black Power movement and other structurally transformative projects. Stokely Carmicheal, along with other notable members of SNCC, helped to introduce more radical pedagogy to Black youth that would directly challenge white supremacy and state power (Perlstein, 2002).

The BPP saw it necessary for Black Americans to educate themselves if they were to be truly free. Shifting away from a dependence on white teachers, a crucial component of the "liberatory power of education" for the BPP was the power of Black activists to teach each other in community while meeting each other's basic needs. Such liberatory programs included the Free Breakfast Program which explicitly practiced the idea of "survival pending revolution," with the understanding that in order to learn they needed to first sustain themselves (Peoples & Fosters, 2020). The focus on literacy by the BPP also goes back to the fundamental need for building a critical consciousness.

Popular Education in Latin America

Looking beyond the borders of the US to the birthplace of critical pedagogy theorist and educator, Paulo Freire, the practices of the popular education movement in Latin America are relevant in understanding how liberatory forms of education might continue to implement such praxis today. "Popular" meaning "of the people" in Spanish and Portuguese connotes the idea that popular education is for and by the common people (Kane, 2010). The 1970s and 80s in Latin America saw a growing movement towards popular education by which alternative forms of schooling were focused on developing a class consciousness amongst the "peasant" and "poor" people. Paulo Freire (1970) specifically describes the "peasant" population as coming into new understandings of themselves as agents of social change through their participation in popular education. Through the process of *conscientização,* the colonized/oppressed come to understand their own power.

Following the forced implementation of neoliberal governments at the hands of US-backed coup d'etats, educators and organizers throughout Latin America incorporated a greater analysis of gender and ethnicity into the consciousness raising role of critical pedagogy as tied to larger movements of social change. The popular education movement in Latin America is thus understood to be intertwined with social movements responding to specific political issues at a given time from the dictatorship in Chile to the defeat of the Sandinista party in Nicaragua (Kane, 2010). The emergence of critical and radical pedagogy in Brazil, for instance, was in response to state implemented neoliberal reforms (Fishman & Gandin, 2007). Increasingly neoliberalism has restricted the autonomy and decision making of educators in state-run schools, pushing them to develop alternative schools divested from the state. The Citizens School in Porto Alegre, Brazil is one notable example of this movement away from

state-run education. In contrast to the market-based schooling that was growing in popularity at the time, the Citizens School was organized around participatory structures that encouraged the community to be involved in the decision making of the schools' role in society (Fishman & Gandin, 2007). As the state and hegemonic forces endanger a peoples' democracy, the democratization of schooling remains central to pedagogical approaches of the Citizens Schools and other forms of popular education.

The key concepts of the popular education movements in Latin America, including the centering of the most marginalized voices, collective production of knowledge and the recognition of the relationship between knowledge and power, remain relevant in the education of colonized peoples around the world (Freire, 1970., McLaren, 2007). In researching how alternative forms of schooling bring into question the colonial relationships, capitalism, and neoliberal values that permeate traditional schooling in the US it is necessary to look at how it has been done in countries directly impacted by US imperialist interventions. Within the political education and organizing efforts of NAU No Más Muertes, the popular education movement in Latin America can help to inform us what it can look like organize in the face of imperialist and colonialist institutions and educate about the root causes of suffering for colonized peoples.

Revolutionary Ethnic Studies

The fight for ethnic studies in K-12 classrooms has been a contentious issue in the United States for decades and to contextualize the ongoing battle it is necessary to go back to the roots of ethnic studies. It was in the 1960s when ethnic studies emerged from social movements at the time, including the Civil Rights and Black Liberation movements and those in the Global South or "Third World". A turning point in the fight for ethnic studies, more specifically, comes from the work of the Third World Liberation Front, a coalition of students based in the California bay

area (Castillo & Staul, 2022; Tintiangco-Cubales, et al., 2014). The Third World Liberation Front and Black Student Union organized what is the longest student strike in US history at San Francisco State College, demanding the university establish an autonomous ethnic studies program, Black studies degree program, and hire more diverse faculty. Students at University of California, Berkeley, similarly organized a strike, an effort by Mexican-American Student Confederation, African-American Studies Union, Native American Student Association and the Asian-American Political Alliances which resulted in the establishment of the Department of Ethnic Studies at Berkeley. Throughout these strikes, the Third World Liberation Front framed the movement as one of "educational self-determination," and of solidarity with those impacted by colonialism and imperialism globally (Castillo & Staul, 2022)

Much of the inspiration for the Third World Liberation Front derives from Frantz Fanon's approach to decolonization in his book "Wretched of the Earth" and the need for an anti-racist, decolonial education (Fanon, 1963; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Since the strikes of 1968, the revolutionary roots of ethnic studies have been watered down with multiculturalism and liberal co-optation. Currently, the fight to get back to the roots of ethnic studies continues in California in regards to Arab-American Studies programs, where the inclusion of Palestinian voices has been contested by the state and schools. One common thread that unites the fights for Mexican-American Studies and Arab-American Studies is the settler colonial logic they are going against. An evolving component of ethnic studies is founded an decolonizing approach to education whereby colonial systems and the trauma they cause are challenged through a critical consciousness developed amongst the students. The implementation of praxis: "guided action aimed at transforming individuals and their world that is reflected on and leads to further action," is key to a decolonizing pedagogy within ethnic studies (Buttaro, 2010).

Another development in the field of ethnic studies is the practice of "Youth Participatory Action Research," (YPAR) whereby students identify issues in their communities and conduct research collaboratively with educators, community leaders, and fellow students (Cammarota, 2008). This form of community research challenges the dynamics of the teacher/student relationship while providing students the opportunity to experience their own revolutionary power. Julio Cammarota (2008), a professor of education and organizer of youth participatory action research, discusses in his research with Mexican students the concept the concept of valid knowledge in schools being related to the students' social and cultural location. Meaning, the knowledge of dominant groups is prioritized over others, evident in the ways cultural knowledge of immigrant youth has been systematically invalidated. Rather than educators working with marginalized students' knowledge and experience, there has been a pattern of punishing difference. In the book "Education as Cultural Imperialism" this hierarchy of knowledge is argued to be "sustained in order to perpetuate the economic and political control of colonized peoples by training them to fit into the roles that suited the colonizer," (Carnoy, pp. 31, 1974) which fits into Freire's understanding of the colonial hegemony. Models of YPAR grew out of the battle for Mexican-American studies in Tucson, Arizona to empower Latinx and Chicanx students in their education.

In 2012, the Mexican-American studies (MAS) program in the Tucson Unified School District was voted 4-1 to be eliminated by the governing board. This follows the 2010 ban of ethnic studies, including MAS, in the state of Arizona by the bill HB2281 which states that public school districts are prohibited from "advocating ethnic solidarity," or teaching any curriculum that is designed for a "particular ethnic group." The mobilization of educators, students, community organizers, and community members following these bans have further

revealed the necessity for revolutionary ethnic studies within community-based education. Many MAS educators, for instance, have implemented Chicano-Indigenous concepts, such as community healing and self-determination in building towards the "healing potential of the classroom as a decolonial space with the ability to recuperate integrated, reconciled selves and communities," (Villanueva, 2013). The importance of healing grows from the recognition of colonialism induced trauma and shared struggle under hegemonic powers. Within the MAS program was the implementation of a "comprehensive K-12 daily pedagogical practice of: Tezcatlipoca (memory, self-reflection), Quetzalcoatl (precious and beautiful knowledge), Huitzilopochtli (la voluntad – the will to act), and Xipe Totec (transformation)" (Arce & Fernandez, 2014).

Inspired by the MAS program, the Tucson Social Justice Education Semester was designed to be a place-based learning experience for undergraduate students that explicitly drew on *barrio* pedagogy (Arce & Fernandez). Rooted in the idea of tri-dimensionalization, barrio pedagogy connotes a third space created in the classroom through the convergence of the barrio and the institution as the students engage critically with the core concepts of ethnic studies and indigenous epistemology in and outside of the school (Arce, Cammarota, & Romero, 2009). Thus, what the Tucson Social Justice Education Semester attempted to do was have students involved in community organizing and activism around issues they identified and understood through decolonial theory.

All the while, Stovall (2018) asks the question of the possibility of revolutionary change, "given the constraints and foundations of state-sanctioned violence as 'schooling,' can education happen in the institution commonly known as 'school'?" (p. 53) to which he proposes a move away from traditional schooling altogether given the history of the US school as an oppressive

and colonial institution. The traditional classroom of the US public school often does not grant educators much autonomy nor the option to openly discuss politically or culturally relevant issues. These limitations make up the case for alternative forms of education, or at the very least an education beginning with conversations with the community, towards revolutionary change divested from the state apparatus.

Rainbow Coalition

The Rainbow Coalition was an antiracist, anticlass political movement formed in Chicago, Illinois during the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this time, Chicago was a highly segregated and politically contentious city where it was highly difficult to retain a job. It was also the time of the "white flight," whereby middle to upper class white people were fleeing the city to live in new suburban developments and the city of Chicago made racist efforts to keep white people from fleeing (Williams, 2013). Different marginalized communities in the city recognized they faced similar issues and discrimination from the same oppressive systems. As a newly formed chapter, Chicago's Black Panther Party with Fred Hampton as chairman, viewed it as a mutually beneficial partnership to join forces with established groups, including the Young Patriots Organization and the Young Lords, to fight against the system (Middlebrook, 2019; Williams, 2013.). In May of 1969, the Black Panther Party would declare this new organizational partnership the "Rainbow Coalition of Revolutionary Solidarity."

The shared organizing model, also referred to as autonomous affiliate organizing, of the Rainbow Coalition meant that the different racialized groups organized independently in their respective communities while remaining in alliance with one another. Through this intentional multiracial strategy, the Black Panther Party articulated the notion of "people power," and what it could look like to organize alongside non-Black people with different privileges to leverage.

Thus non-Black people were incorporated into the BPP's vision for liberation. One of the allied groups included the Young Patriots Organization made up of young, white Southerners who suffered from poverty and class-based discrimination. Another group was the Young Lords, a human rights organization, that began as a street gang, fighting for the self-determination of Puerto Rico and other Latinos. The Chicano Brown Berets and Asian Red Guard were also amongst the groups allied with the Black Panther Party as part of the Rainbow Coalition. These groups were allied because they shared the common goals of internationalism and the end of racism and capitalism.

Literature Review: Contextualizing Change

While researching literature for this thesis, one of the themes for gathering information came out of a K-12 context with the aspiration to do a project on community education outside of the traditional public or charter school. However, as this project evolved the focus turned towards the university level. As I turned my attention into myself and my experiences in the organizing efforts of the No Más Muertes student chapter at NAU, literature based in higher education, such as the section on ethnic studies, grew more relevant. Now reflecting back on the sections here that discuss experiences within K-12 schools, I can find relevance within the information despite my own project's shift away from that context. or instance, the literature on Mexican-American studies in Arizona public schools exemplifies one way liberatory forms of education are systematically attacked. While within the K-12 context, the fight for Mexican-American studies becomes relevant to this project in that the same systems of oppression and similar institutional powers challenge student organizing within the university.

The histories of the educational movements, from Freedom Schools to ethnic studies, discussed throughout the literature review inform the shared drive for systemic change rooted in

interrogating how we educate and organize. Revisiting the literature review through all the changes and revisions of the thesis project itself, has been a critical point of the reflective process. It has challenged me to look for connections between the literature and the end product of my project while thinking earnestly about the decisions made to get there. The choice to keep the literature on K-12 schooling comes out of a desire to show the process of conducting this research and to be honest about the changes made throughout it.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Considerations

"Our histories never unfold in isolation. We cannot truly tell what we consider to be our own histories without knowing the other stories. And often we discover that those other stories are actually our own stories." - Angela Y. Davis, Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement (2015, p. 135)

The broad theoretical considerations of my project include decolonial theory, feminism, and abolitionist thought as they emerge, more broadly, from critical theory. Critical theory itself is a school of thought, with roots in sociology, that is concerned with understanding, critiquing, and challenging social structures and systems of power. These theories will make up the lens through which I think about No Mas Muertes NAU's critical approach to political education and organizing. The ideas and concepts put forth by decolonial and transnational feminists are to be central to how the political education programming of NMD is put into place as well as readings of the borderlands. I put decolonial theory and feminism into conversation with one another in order to center anti-colonial praxis that I argue as important to practicing political education focused on border and migrant justice.

The theorists I draw from are primarily those from the Global South and have experienced the effects of colonialism firsthand as they are the experts I call upon as a Chicanx person who grew up in the United States. Additionally, many of the theorists included here are people whose work has shaped my own political education. I recognize how decolonial theory emerges from a long history; postcolonial thought emerged from the liberation struggles of (former) British colonies and the colonization of Palestine by Israel understood through the theory put forth in Edward Said's "Orientalism," to decolonial projects in Latin America understood through dependency theory and politics of liberation. Because I draw upon several Latin American theorists and center border communities in my research, I will be employing the language of decoloniality that largely grows out of Latin American scholarship. I used the term

decolonial to pinpoint the work of deconstructing and delinking along the path towards decolonization. The term decolonial is not to be confused with decolonization as my work is not decolonizing but rather situated within the practice of deconstructing the ways knowledge is produced under settler colonialism within the context of the United States (Fanon, 1965., Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Decolonial Theory

Tuck and Yang's (2012) "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" lays out the groundwork for the contemporary application of anti-colonial praxis on occupied Indigenous land. As I discuss throughout the paper the history of settler colonialism and settler colonial logic make up the institutions of schools in the United States, thus to explain the problems faced in education, a decolonial lens can be applied. Through this lens, settler colonialism can be understood as the process of people building settlements on land that is already home to indigenous peoples, thus displacing them, with the settlers gaining control over the land, water, and air as sources of capital (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Within what is now the United States of America, the institutions, such as schools, that are produced through settler colonialism are in turn centering the futurity of the white settler. Decolonization must be concerned with dismantling the settler colonial institutions in order to recenter indigenous, non-white immigrant, and Black peoples' futures. Decoloniality and anti-colonial praxis make up the path to the end goal of decolonization.

To understand calls for decolonization of today it may be helpful to trace the history of decolonial theory that has shaped current discourse of colonialism. WEB Du Bois's decolonial thought can be situated within what is referred to as the first wave of decoloniality that also consists of the work of Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, CLR James, and Kwame Nkumrah (Weiner, 2018). This first wave of decolonial theory "articulated the empirical and epistemic roots of

decoloniality in the Black, Latin American, and Caribbean diasporic traditions underpinned by centuries of enslavement, colonialism, and neocolonialism," that would go on to shape sociologists and critical race scholars understandings of historical and contemporary forms of resistance against injustice (Weiner, 2018, p. 3).

The second wave of decolonial theorists, including Edward Said, Paulo Freire, Eduardo Galeano, and Anibel Quijano, carried on this work with a particular focus on the positioning of Western knowledge to colonial power and the rejection of "histories" written by colonizers. They also criticized the neoliberal programs, such as the IMF and education reforms, and notions of "development" at the time (Galeano 1997; Weiner 2018). Finally, the third wave of decolonial theorists consists of a more interdisciplinary group of scholars than the previous waves including African Historian Walter Rodney. From here the epistemic violence of the various colonial institutions is understood as being inflicted through the suppression of "subaltern narratives," which are the stories of the colonial populations excluded from the hierarchy of state power (Fanon, 1965; Gramsci; Weiner, 2018). A significant portion of this violence is experienced through the global heteropatriarchy requiring that gender is analyzed as yet another colonial construction (Lugones, 2010).

Upon this linear description of how decolonial theory has developed over time, I continue here to delve deeper into some of the concepts and scholarship of thought most relevant to my own research. Frantz Fanon describes colonialism as a "project that does not leave any part of the human person and its reality untouched," something that impacts every aspect, psychologically and physically, of the colonized person. In "The Wretched of the Earth," Fanon details the relationship between the colonized and colonizer as a dehumanizing one that can only be answered with revolutionary decolonization. Settler colonialism can thus be understood as the

ongoing settlement, exploitation, and dehumanization by the colonizer on occupied land. It is in itself a genocidal process that does not end until met with resistance from the colonized and anti-colonial organizing. According to Paulo Freire, the colonized are no longer denied "their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human," as they develop critical consciousness through learning in order to confront reality through action, known as "praxis," (1970, pp. 84).

Anibel Quijano (2000) defines coloniality as, "constitutive and specific elements of the global pattern of capitalist power," and best understood as, "relational," to be situated politically (p. 666). Quijano's colonial matrix of power further explicates how power is exerted via mechanisms of colonialism through the following domains: "control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources); control of authority (institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education) and control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity), (Mignolo, 2007, p. 156)." For the relevancy of my project, I focus on deconstructing how this colonial power manifests in the control of subjectivity, knowledge, gender, and sexuality. Walter Mignolo thus defines decoloniality through the process of delinking as the process of "emancipatory rupture," through which decolonial scholars are practicing as they "confront the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism," and Western modernity (2017). Decoloniality necessitates the power to delink from hegemonic Western knowledge in order to "relink and reaffirm the modes of existence," desired by the colonized populace (Mignolo, 2017). Upon delinking from Western knowledge and modernity, re-existence and resistance are made more possible. Re-existence involves the process of knowledge making, reclaiming space, and not trying to fit within the cultural norms of

Western modernity. While the concept of re-existence could arguably be a form of resistance, resistance more often involves direct action of anti-coloniality.

With the awareness that schools are yet another place where women and gender non-conforming peoples are subjugated under the colonial patriarchy, there is room for decolonial feminist theories to further explain and seek change beyond these institutions. Dominant narratives ahistoricize and depoliticize the experiences of colonized peoples such as in education when students of color are not taught their own histories. In the book "Education as Cultural Imperialism" this hierarchy of knowledge is argued to be "sustained in order to perpetuate the economic and political control of colonized peoples by training them to fit into the roles that suited the colonizer," (Carnoy, 1974) which fits into Freire's theories explaining colonial hegemony. The imposition of hegemonic Western education and knowledge can be interpreted as a form of cultural imperialism as indigenous cultures and knowledge are systematically devalued and erased.

Decolonial Feminism

In order to further counter the colonial relationships within the US schooling system and higher education, decolonial feminism offers a framework through which identity, gender, and race are understood in the context of decolonial theory which deconstructs knowledge produced by and in the West (Manning, 2021; Mignolo, 2007). In "The Coloniality of Gender," Lugones, Argentine Feminist and Philosopher, describes decolonial feminism as having emerged from the work of women of color and indigenous activists' social movements in Latin America during the 1960s (Lugones, 2008). It has since grown to incorporate critical border theories and other analyses of colonial power throughout the Global South. In the context of the United States, wherein my research is positioned, decolonial feminist theory informs the struggle of exclusion

from state institutions such as public schools and how this issue can be resolved via revolutionary praxis by and for the people beyond the traditional classroom.

In "Sex work abolitionism and hegemonic feminisms: Implications for gender-diverse sex workers and migrants from Brazil," Lua De Mota Stabile writes about Anibal Quijano's coloniality of power to explain how European colonialization of Latin America implemented hierarchical structures leading to unjust living conditions and eventually migration to Europe. Maria Lugones, Argentine theorist and feminist, uses Quijano's coloniality of power as a framework of analysis to understand how "colonization brought a racist, patriarchal, hetero-sexual and binary mode of organization to social relations," (pg. 859) that permeate state institutions.

Hegemonic liberal feminism in the United States seeks inclusion for marginalized women and non-binary peoples into state institutions rather than building new life-affirming institutions that offer an alternative to the neoliberalism and capitalism that make up US society today (Gilmore, 2020; Lugones, 2010). On the contrary, decolonial feminism breaks down the faults of the former and calls for a critical analysis of oppression as it has been "subalternized through the combined processes of racialization, colonization, capitalist exploitation, and heterosexualism," (Lugones, 2008, p. 747). The strict gender binary that permeates much of the colonized world today is one example of colonialism's long lasting effects on societal structures. For the purpose of this research project, I employ decolonial feminism in the deconstructing of gendered and racialized institutions made possible through community-based, liberatory forms of education. Decolonial feminism can serve as a means of explaining the necessity for centering marginalized Latinx women's stories within educational practices.

Although decolonial feminism has often been thought of in terms of the desire to "decolonize gender," the same basic tenements can be applied to decolonizing education. With the awareness that schools are yet another place where women and gender non-conforming peoples are subjugated under the colonial patriarchy, there is room for decolonial feminist theories to explain and seek change. When reflecting upon historic Chicanx and Black education movements, discourses surrounding them tend to focus on men as leaders and the exclusion of women which posits the application of decolonial feminism in my research looking at community-based education today and whether they replicate patriarchal norms.

On Borderlands

As my project navigates organizing against the violent structures of the US-Mexico border and immigration politics, I want to include here some of the applicable teachings and readings on borderlands. I start with defining borderlands more broadly as occurring when two or more governing bodies claim jurisdiction over resources in a relative geographic area intersecting a defined border as different cultures and ways of life intermingle, and the ecological landscape challenges ways of life (cite here). Borderlands extend beyond the physical walls and definitions of citizenship. I refer to Gloria Anzaldua's seminal text, "Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza," in unpacking the lived experiences of those who have crossed and are crossed by the border through issues of colonialism, race, and gender.

Gloria Anzaldua refers to the US-Mexico border as "Una herida abierta, where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds," a reminder of the colonial relationship between the two nations, both sharing a history of state-sponsored patriarchal and racial violence that continues to bleed into one another. The metaphor continues as the Southwestern borderlands are molded by the clashing of different cultures, from the settler influences of Spain to the

indigenous practices of those who have long lived with the lands of Central Mexico. Anzaldua writes of the way in which wealthy landowners in Mexico have worked with colonial enterprises in the United States to displace millions indigenous peoples from the lands and leave the rest dependent on the US market. This economic dependency is a product of colonialism, the extractionism and exploitation that shape the divisive livelihoods of those inhabiting the borderlands to this day.

The chapter, "Entering into the Serpent," introduces the concept of *la facultad*, the ability to capture the depth of the world and the self as a "survival tactic," for those who experience oppression and are "caught between worlds," (1987, 39). *La facultad i*s the embodied development of an acute awareness of underlying threat and danger in the environment in which the person resides. In particular, those who are forcibly estranged from their community or do not feel psychologically or physically safe are more sensitive to developing this faculty in order to survive. Similar to Frantz Fanons' analysis of the colonized psyche under colonialism that, "the native is always on the alert, for since he can only make out with difficulty the many symbols of the colonial world, he is never sure whether or not he has crossed the frontier," those straddling the borderlands exist in a space where their existence is constantly questioned and delegitimized (1963, 53).

Anzaldua describes l*a facultad* as a necessary but heavy burden for the already oppressed and colonized individual who loses both their innocence and ignorance in the process of developing a deeper consciousness of reality. As a way of coping with this reality, many conform to the hegemonic culture and bury the identities in question. Many deal with physical and mental turmoil as a result of the burden. Within the work of border aid and organizing for migrant justice, there is a responsibility of the organizer to take into account the psychological impacts of

colonialism and the grief ones carry through their experiences. By understanding the ways colonial and imperial violence is internalized by migrants crossing through the desert, there is a greater depth of solidarity.

Abolitionist Thought

In connecting the work of No Más Muertes NAU to abolitionist thought, I call attention to the institutions and systemic practices of violence at the core of all fights for social justice in the United States. By institutions, I am referring to the prisons, policing, criminal justice system, and other systematic forms of surveillance. Abolition is more than a means of dismantling the institutions and taking down the system, it is a praxis of understanding why they need to be dismantled in order to build anew. The reality is these current institutions are corrupt at their foundation, serving to protect a small percentage of the population, notably the white and the wealthy population. Abolitionist politics are concerned with tearing down the old in order to build new 'life affirming' institutions. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, a geographer and abolition organizer, makes the case for life affirming institutions to replace prisons which she refers to as part of the carceral state's system of abandonment. She describes abandonment as the ways in which the state is organized to neglect the needs of the most marginalized people, with little to no funding to support them, as police and prisons become solutions to the injustice they face (Kumanyika & Gilmore, 2020).

To build institutions that affirm life is to vision a more just society. Societal transformation and alternative forms of justice are key tenets of abolition in going beyond reform. Meaning, the 'official' solutions offered by the state are not enough as they typically have an ulterior agenda in upholding the current system of white supremacy (Basichis, Lee, & Spade, 2011). This is done through policy reform such as passing hate crime bills that increase

prison sentences or advocating for culturally competent police training. In reality, such reforms fail to address the root causes of inequity as they legitimize systemic racism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism in the United States. Under an abolitionist framework, more transformative approaches, as opposed to the 'official' reformist approach, intend to center social justice. Through abolition grows opportunities for creative solutions to radically transform our society. While the dominant discourse around abolition is negative in its claims of infeasibility and a false sense of scarcity is created to legitimize these concerns, abolition allows for the recentering of abundance and life.

Community care and abundance is greater than any attempts to manufacture conflict over scarcity. Abundance can be created through the mending of community as the money funneled into preserving institutions of white supremacy is shifted to supporting one another. Rather than working to reduce racialized notions of 'crime,' abolition seeks to reduce harm and build new systems of support (Kumanyika & Gilmore, 2020). The carceral state can be defined as the operations and institutions through policing, surveillance, and mass incarceration are made possible. Dismantling these institutions involves the community organizing work of all those harmed by the carceral state. Abolition organizers have historically antagonized the carceral state as it is made up of institutions that continue to justify forms of slavery and racial capitalist exploitation. Abolishing prisons and police, for instance, have been central goals of abolition work throughout its history that continues to expand to abolishing border infrastructure (Perolini, 2023).

In order to follow through with the mission of ending death and suffering in the Mexico–US borderlands, the causes of death and suffering need to be targeted at their root. Therefore when applying an abolitionist framework to the border, NAU's No Más Muertes club

must seek to understand the underlying ideologies and how institutions work together to contribute to the suffering. When one can piece together the relationship between border patrol, surveillance methods, police, and prisons, the call for abolition must also call for the abolition of border infrastructure. Abolition organizing can thus be understood as openly anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and decolonial. Without decolonizing efforts, abolition would fail to fully address the root causes of oppression, marginalization, and displacement as all of this is situated within a settler colonial state.

Use of Theory

While it is certainly possible, and would be doable with any of these theories discussed in this chapter, it felt impossible to me to limit myself to one theoretical framework for this thesis project. Before I had decided what to focus my thesis on I knew I wanted to incorporate decolonial theory and abolitionist thinking as fields of study I felt most familiar with at time. As my ideas for the thesis continued to evolve so did the theories I wanted to include. The inclusion of critical pedagogy, feminist theories, and discussion on borderlands developed out of what I saw as matters relevant to the No Más Muertes NAU chapter. My efforts in the leadership and facilitation of NMM NAU have largely been shaped by my desire to approach issues critically and intersectionally. It was in my efforts to recognize the relevance and inseparability of the different critical theories to the organizing efforts of the student chapter that I chose to write about them all. What I learned that there is much more depth and breadth to these theories than I could fit into this paper but that I hoped I could continue to put them into praxis beyond writing this. The concepts and ideas presented through out chapter became the basis of which I began to think about, criticize, and theorize my own work with No Más Muertes at NAU.

Chapter 4: Methodology & Methods

"For me, writing is a gesture of the body, a gesture of creativity, a working from the inside out. My feminism is grounded not on incorporeal abstraction but on corporeal realities. The material body is center, and central. The body is the ground of thought," - Gloria Anzaldua, Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality (2015, p. 5)

In the process of determining how to approach my research questions and interests, I wanted to ensure that my project was one of passion and the personal. The decision to use personal lived experiences to answer my research questions therefore is informed by my experience as both an academic and social activist. I refer to the type of project I am doing as social justice engaged research based in critical pedagogy. Broadly, activism and social justice research "embraces a critical and moral imperative to act; to do something about sustained inequalities; to make a difference in the lives of those who are disadvantaged in social, political, and economic systems" (Dempsey, et al., 2011). Thus community involvement and participatory processes in the promotion of transformative change are central to the production of knowledge. While much of social justice engaged research is collectively conducted, the methods I carry out here are individual as a response to experiences within the group of NAU No Más Muertes. I recognize the contradictions of going down this more individualistic path in light of my discussions of community and collective knowledge building. I had intended to approach the research question using collaborative methods such as group discussions and collective storytelling, however, with a few setbacks I adjusted my plans to more efficiently finish this project. One of these setbacks was in my lack of confidence in my abilities to organize and document group discussions in the timeline I wanted. As I moved out of town and was not longer attending classes at NAU, I felt I was no longer in the position to facilitate such methods requiring the time and labor of the NMM NAU members.

The social justice engaged work I practice here emerges from several schools of thought based in critical theory and can also be understood as a theoretical analysis and reflective form of research. Scholar-Activists across the disciplines have adopted forms of activism and social justice engaged research when bridging the gap between academia and community. In studying the different education movements, as discussed in my literature review, I note the use of critical pedagogy as pertinent to the building of political education curriculum. Research underlined by social justice goals makes the building of collective knowledge possible. Under the umbrella of activism and social justice research, I locate critical pedagogy as a methodology in cultivating and practicing socially transformative work. Within the methodological framework of critical pedagogy, I make use of authoethnographic methods to put the theory into practice. The methodology underpinning this project help to make sense of the intersecting theoretical considerations and the lived experiences described.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is a methodology and philosophy of education that emphasizes the questioning and challenging of existing power structures, oppressive systems and social inequalities through teaching and learning. It is rooted in the belief that education is a transformative process that empowers learners to critically think about the world around them. As a methodological framework, it offers educators a way to structure teaching and learning activities to promote social change. As a framework for carrying out socially engaged research, researchers can use critical pedagogy to uncover oppressive practices in education, examine the role of knowledge production and dissemination, and explore new methods for teaching strategies. By integrating critical thinking and participatory learning, critical pedagogy seeks to foster a more liberatory and inclusive educational environment that prepares students to actively

contribute to a more just and democratic society. Tarlau (2014) speaks to the restraints of critical pedagogy remaining a theoretical approach, arguing it is to be used as a "method of analyzing the oppressive and emancipatory potential of education in all of its forms," (p. 371) to be rooted in radical organizing efforts and active participation in society.

Drawing largely from critical pedagogue Paulo Freire, ethnic studies educators, and decolonial theorists, I use several of the critical pedagogy concepts including, but not limited to, humanization, critical consciousness, problem-posing education, social justice, and student agency to frame my project. In this section I discuss what critical pedagogy is, including its core tenets, how it can be used as a methodological framework and specifically how I use it. I outline the different practices of critical pedagogy I use in my own work as a way to understand its uses as a methodological framework rooted in social justice and change.

Paulo Freire (1970) in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," uses the language of "empowerment," and "humanizing," to discuss what teaching and learning should look like if revolutionary change is to be made. Humanization refers to the process of becoming "more fully human" to be free to make choices, create, learn, and transform (Freire, 1970). It is a process that involves counteracting the dehumanizing conditions and the oppressive structures that limit people's freedom, agency, and general well-being. These dehumanizing conditions can include barriers of access to clean air, water, and land that impede on people's ability to live day to day, let alone fully realize their human potential as change makers. Part of the work of humanizing people involves ensuring their access to the basic sources of survival and that they are involved in making that happen rather than being viewed as a charity case. Through humanization, people are empowered to recognize their own agency to participate in decision making processes, engage in open dialogue, and advocate for change for themselves and others.

Certain liberatory elements are central to critical pedagogy and necessary for empowerment, beginning with the critical consciousness of the educator. Through an iterative process of action and reflection, critical consciousness involves the development of an in-depth understanding of reality in order to change it. Critical consciousness is defined by Paulo Freire (1970) as the ability to recognize and take action towards changing systems of oppression in society. The practice of reflection is one way in which educators work towards a critical consciousness as they "realize themselves as racial beings and begin to substantively challenge themselves and the role of educational structures in perpetuating oppression," (Salazar, 2013). The critical consciousness of the educators' racial and social identities is only one element pertinent in empowering Black students, students of color, and immigrant students. To further facilitate a more equitable relationship between educator-students that is not reflective of that as colonizer-colonized, social justice must be the goal of education by which the students are directly involved in the process of their own liberation.

Problem-posing education makes use of dialogue in identifying and addressing real issues to collectively and creatively act on them (Impedovo & Ferreira-Meyers, 2021;., Freire, 1970). Students have the power to decide which societal and personal problems they want to work through to better understand and change. The practices of problem-posing education as a tenet of critical pedagogy goes beyond solely knowledge transmission. It creates a more dynamic learning environment where students can challenge each other's assumptions and collectively construct knowledge. Another key concept of critical pedagogy that is important to my work includes the idea that education is not neutral but is inherently political. Whether or not it is practiced, the emancipatory potential of education can be harnessed by the educator and student alike in disrupting structures of oppression and domination. As exemplified by ethnic studies

educators and those teaching in Black freedom schools in the Southern United States, the classroom can be a place of radical change capable of generating action focused conversation amongst the students (Chilcoat & Ligon, 1998).

Critical Autoethnographic Methods

Although this thesis did not use autoethnography, it drew from several key autoethnographic values and practices. First, I am situated within the research as both a participant and researcher. I consciously embed myself within the theory and practice discussed throughout my project. Second, I use autoethnography to help assert that lived experiences are legitimate sources of knowledge that can be used in the process of socially theorizing. The process of moving from lived experience to social theorization involves dialogue and iterative reflection to gain a critical understanding of reality. I locate autoethnography within this process as I participate in the development of a political education curriculum that is focused on problem solving, community building, identity, and action.

Autoethnography draws upon arts-based research, autobiography, ethnography, and narrative inquiry as a method of sociocultural analysis (Cooper & Livyea, 2022). Data collection is carried out through the use of personal memory, descriptive ethnographic writing, field notes of observations, and tracing major life events as connected to cultural self or collaborative exploration. Reflexivity can play ana crucial role in critical pedagogy as a practice of embodied reflection and a meaning-making process (Door, 2014., Warren, 2011). In Door's (2014) article, "Critical Pedagogy and Reflexivity: the Issue of Ethical consistency," they classify critical reflexivity as the ability to see, "the embodiment of our ethical view; the self is revealed by action, visible to others, and revealed back to self through a kind of immediate recognition of our own behavior," (pp. 92). In other words, it's an analytical practice concerning the interrelatedness

of one's self, perceived identity, and the world around them. Within critical autoethnography, thinking reflexively helps to ask the important questions of why certain choices are made and answer to questions such as why education is political, tracing the steps to such a conclusion. I use autoethnography as a practice of engaging in critical pedagogy by which I engage in "iterative cycles of self-reflexive praxis," (Freire, 2011) as I incorporate personal experiences into the process of data collection.

My own and my co-leaders' experiences in No More Deaths NAU in turn become the data I analyze and build knowledge from. I include specific campaigns from the past year as foci for reflexivity. By documenting my personal experiences as part of the No Más Muertes club at Northern Arizona University, I hope to make space for future leaders of the groups and to have mapped out the groups' recent history of organizing. The documentation of the campaigns, as I refer to the different actions and practices of political action, perform the task of what it can NMM NAU has looked like in order to learn from the past and imagine for the future. These campaigns or topics, and the experiences, lessons, and stories within, function as an entry point for critical analysis.

What I Actually Did

The path I took towards figuring out what sort of methods I would use to answer my evolving research question felt like a research project in itself. What I learned was that trying to fit my methodology and methods into a box was not going to work for the purposes of this project. I could call my methodology by different names out of different theories and disciplines or try to use a pre-existing research method to explore my research questions but what makes the most sense for this project is to walk through what I actually did.

As previously stated, and as shown through my writing on social justice engaged research, critical pedagogy, and autoethnographic methods in the previous section, this project tried on several different methodological frameworks before finding out that none of them were a perfect fit. I think it is necessary to recognize that this project was influenced by some of the ideas, such as the practice of journaling and self-reflection, of critical autoethnography despite not being one itself. I also recognize that critical pedagogy performs the purpose of a theoretical framework more than that of a methodology in addressing my research question. With the intention of creating a political education curriculum, critical pedagogy was intended to be the way I carried through with that process. Instead, many of the core tenets of critical pedagogy, such as dialogical learning and consciousness, make up the language I use to analyze and discuss my experiences. The readings I engaged with on critical pedagogy and autoethnography helped to inform the actual process of doing this thesis project.

Following my research into methodologies that could address my questions and learning I would figure it out best by doing, I began to pick out significant events or practices of No Más Muertes at NAU over the course of my involvement in the group that could serve as points of analysis. The winter supply drive and the discussion of abolitionist praxis and Sodexo were the first two events that came to mind. With these two in mind, as well as general experiences as a leader of NMM at NAU, I began to free write about what took place, my feelings during the time, and my thoughts after. I then put this journaling into analysis with the theory discussed in my theoretical considerations chapter that became the writing included in my findings chapter of the thesis paper. By applying the theoretical frames of decolonial theory and abolitionist thought, I learned how they could be practiced differently in praxis.

Chapter 5: Findings

"*If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together,"* - Lilla Watson, an Aboriginal activist and artist

Sustaining the work of No Más Muertes NAU

Below is a brief timeline of my participation in No Más Muertes (NMM) and the events I will be discussing throughout this section:

Spring 2019

- I joined and started participating in NMM meetings

Fall 2019

- I continue participation in meetings and events

Spring 2020

-
- NMM gained membership, more students and community members join from coalition building efforts
- COVID-19 pandemic moves all future meetings virtually
- I graduate from my undergraduate studies at NAU

Fall 2020 - Spring 2021

- All meetings remain virtual and focused on building awareness around the issues migrants face due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- I continue participating despite graduation
- I am asked to co-chair the club for the following year

Fall 2021 - Spring 2022

- I begin graduate school and assume leadership position as a co-chair of the club
- Biweekly meetings are held hybrid and focused on political education

Fall 2022 - Spring 2023

- Winter supply drive is kicked off at the end of the Fall semester
- Sodexo and the prison industrial complex become a point of discussion around the next steps of action to take
- At the end of the Spring semester I move out of so-called Flagstaff and step down from leadership and membership in the club

In the spring semester of 2019 I started regularly participating in weekly meetings with No Más Muertes at NAU where I began to learn more about how I could get involved with humanitarian aid at the Southern border and with Flagstaff's migrant community. During the past several years of my undergraduate and graduate studies, in my involvement with the No Más Muertes chapter at NAU I have seen through the transition of leadership, the adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic, and taken on a variety of different projects in my different roles in the group. Upon taking an anthropology course in global migration during my undergraduate studies where the class traveled to the Yuma-Mexico border to learn about the issues facing migrants directly I grew more interested in what my role in supporting the migrant community would be. I learned about No Más Muertes through the community engagement requirement of the course and I have since been engaged in the work in some way or another for the past few years. In introducing the reflections and visions for what No Más Muertes migrant justice organizing can look like in Flagstaff, and more specifically at Northern Arizona University, I hope the context provided here can illuminate the reality at stake.

If you have ever engaged with migrant justice organizations who drop off water and other supplies along known migrant paths near the US-Mexico border then you have probably heard the term “humanitarian aid” get thrown around. Humanitarian aid is what many volunteers use to refer to their aforementioned work. Humanitarian connotes a concern for the general humanity of people, regardless of immigration status or where they come from. Aid suggests that help is being offered without asking for anything in return. It is not the only language used to describe what is being done to support and in solidarity with migrants at the US-Mexico border, however, it opens up deeper discussion of the purpose of migrant justice and border aid organizations. Thinking about the context of Northern Arizona, how is there room for a deeper praxis of political education within migrant justice organizing here to support the work done nearer the border?

Flagstaff, Arizona is located approximately 320 miles, about a 5 hour drive, from the US-Mexico border. When issues around immigration come up, Northern Arizona is not the first place people think about. Much of the work of migrant justice and humanitarian aid takes place in Southern Arizona, in places near the border itself where more aid is needed. However, there is a migrant community in Flagstaff and with the end of Title 42, the emergency order to expel or deport people coming from countries with communicable diseases, on the horizon the people of Flagstaff are to be prepared to support an influx of undocumented people. Title 42 was enacted at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic as a public health law to deny asylum seekers and other migrants the right to enter the United States under the guise of preventing the spread of communicable diseases. The law has since been used over 1.7 million times to expel undocumented migrants from the country.

The eventual suspension of Title 42 will undoubtedly lead to a rise in arrivals at the border seeking asylum in the United States. At the border this means migrant shelters and desert aid groups may have to prepare for a higher volume of people traveling through the desert, both legally and "illegally." For places like Flagstaff that are hundreds of miles from the border, there is going to need to be widespread education and resources to support the growing immigrant communities. Having spent the past 5 years or so in Flagstaff I have gotten a glimpse into the organizing scene, specifically concerning the immigrant community here, and I've seen the struggles to sustain movements and grow leadership here.

In early 2020, a coalition of student organizers from groups such as No Más Muertes and community members, including myself, organized a teach-in on the root causes of forced migration in order to educate the Flagstaff community and raise money to go down to the border. Soon after organizing a successful event, the country went on lockdown due to the spread of COVID-19. For the next year and a half, our NAU No Más Muertes meetings continued virtually and desert aid trips were put to a halt. Rather than the meetings focusing on planning trips to the border and other direct actions, we shifted our focus to political education. The biweekly Zoom meetings became a space to learn about the different issues facing migrant communities and making connections to borders globally with the hopes of building solidarity. In a time when in-person action was increasingly difficult due to the community safety and well-being and legal action put in place by the US government, being able to see beyond borders became ever-important to the grasping sense of community.

In the following section I outline the steps needed to take towards the sustainability and identity of No Más Muertes organizing in Northern Arizona. Through conversations with co-leaders of the groups, personal experiences in the community, and my own political education

journey, I envision what No Más Muertes NAU could be and ways it can define its identity. Using the School of Unity and Liberation's Youth Organizing for Community Power manual (2018) as a framework for the findings chapter I focus on three main subsections: movement building, leadership development, and political education. Within these subsections I discuss what they mean in the context of the organizing efforts of No Más Muertes at Northern Arizona University with analysis of real-life examples and thinking through how they can offer valuable lessons for the future of the organization.

Movement Building

To build a movement the goal must be to organize for the long term not just for a specific win or campaign. A movement can be defined as a "large scale sustained mobilization of masses of individuals and organizations united in common action by a common issue or vision," that draws upon a variety of strategies and methods (School of Unity and Liberation, 2018). Within a movement there are different campaigns and wins and losses, however, those cannot sustain themselves without the organizing behind them. No single leader or organization's efforts define a movement but rather it is a collective effort of organizations and individuals across different political ideologies or backgrounds working together to develop a movement towards justice. When thinking about how No Más Muertes NAU fits into the larger social movement of migrant justice, it is also important to strategically think about different organizations' roles in sustaining the movement.

In the past year with NMM NAU we have made the conscious effort to work with other student organizations and clubs in our campaigns. The practice of coalition building opens up the possibilities for our growth as an organization, drawing in people that may not have otherwise been involved and expanding our network of support. When an organization or group has limited

resources and is trying to grow it can be incredibly useful to make use of the organizations that have been around. Working with local, grounded organizations that have been doing work in the community for a long time can be a springboard for making collaborative change happen.

It is not productive to solely analyze social movements based on their failures, as doing so is a derision from the meaning of social movements themselves. Social movements are to be built over years and sustained for the long term in pursuit of social justice and systemic transformation. When people hone in on the losses of a movement, the struggles and organizing work put in to get there are undermined. Rather it is necessary to understand why a certain goal was not met while looking towards what did work for the movement in order to learn and grow from the whole of the experience.

Campaigns with targeted goals are part of the movement building process and the more strategizing and planning that goes into them the more successful the movement can be in the long run. I will be discussing the different campaigns organized by No Más Muertes NAU over the past year to understand how better planning could be involved. One way in which a movement can be strengthened is through a collective understanding of the goals and visions to be revisited throughout the organizing and political education process. Below is the most updated mission statement of No Más Muertes NAU, found in the group's constitution:

> NAU No More Deaths has a mission of ending death and suffering in the Mexico–US borderlands through civil initiative: working openly and in the community to uphold fundamental human rights. We accomplish this through:
>
> - Direct aid that extends the right to provide humanitarian assistance
> - Witnessing and responding
> - Consciousness-raising

- Global movement building
- Encouraging humane immigration policy

Looking at this statement it is important to then understand what the "mission" means in practice and what ways No Más Muertes NAU has or has not met these accomplishments in the past to understand what is needed for the future.

The following are the stated objectives of NMM NAU's constitution:

> To promote the education of NAU NMD members on issues related to global migration, especially as a result of imperialism.
>
> To promote the education of the NAU community on issues related to global migration, especially as a result of imperialism.
>
> To encourage humane immigration policy.
>
> To engage in direct action in an attempt to decrease suffering in the U.S.-Mexico occupied borderlands.
>
> To cooperate with other groups on campus that share similar goals and create open and strong communication networks with said groups.
>
> To encourage organization members as well as those a part of the greater NAU community to engage and advocate for change.

Over the years I have been involved with No Más Muertes at NAU, the group has found itself in the midst of an identity crisis. Back in 2018 when I first got involved with NMM at NAU, the group was primarily focused on educating people on campus about different pressing issues related to immigration and planning trips down to the border as a club. While bringing in guest speakers and holding public forums on campus, the NMM club tabled at these events to share tangible ways people could get involved and show support for migrants. Meanwhile, the trips to southern Arizona and the US-Mexico border consisted of showing up to court proceedings, participating in rallies, and completing water drops in the desert. Many of the club's

weekly meetings were centered around planning for the aforementioned actions and activities. At the end of each meeting the club leadership would meet to plan for the following meeting. It seemed at this time the purpose of NAU No Más Muertes was to educate and to do direct action.

I cannot say I recall all the details of what the group used to look like or how exactly the members saw themselves fitting into the organization, community, and university, however, looking back it becomes clear the ways the club has undergone a few changes. This identity crisis of which I refer to is the result of change in membership and leadership as well as the times we live in. It has been a crisis in the making, one that did not suddenly occur as the COVID-19 pandemic hit and radically changed life as we all know it, but rather a continuing question of the groups place in the university, community, and the greater populus of those organizing for social justice issues. This crisis of identity is not unique to the No Más Muertes NAU chapter as it is part of organizing to have these types of conversations, to reevaluate the purpose and revisit previous campaigns or goals in hopes of growing as a team and making a greater difference in the world.

The members of our No Más Muertes chapter are no strangers to thinking about the bigger picture and having dreams of a more liberated world. Some people join NMM NAU when they hear the purpose of our group is to aid in ending the suffering and deaths of migrants in US-Mexico borderlands. Others may join if their professor or advisors told them it's an opportunity to volunteer, meet like-minded people, or get involved in the community. To learn why it is people join or stay with the NMM NAU would be helpful to understanding ways to build participation and sustain the group into the future. Ideally, those who stay are committed to upholding the mission of No Más Muertes and building towards "the movement" in whatever means possible. With an ever-changing membership and fluctuating attendance to the weekly or

biweekly meetings, it becomes the lived experiences and identities of everyone involved to shape the group's identity and define and redefine its purpose.

Organizing and Movement Building in Practice

A movement cannot be built without a critical mass of people prepared to learn and act on a shared issue. In order for there to be a critical mass as part of NMM NAU, it'll be important to organize strategically in the recruitment and increasing engagement in the organization. To not depend on the urgency of something bad having to happen before people get involved. Pulling on my experiences, I have found myself more likely to join organizations and driven to participate in actions when there is stronger community ties, when I feel connected to those I am organizing with. In the struggles to grow and sustain the membership of NMM NAU, I look towards my theoretical knowledge and personal experiences in social movements to envision how to improve these efforts. I have discussed feminism as a guiding theoretical framework for the organizing efforts of NMM NAU and now envision what that can look like in practice. According to feminist theory, the personal is political. Applying this idea to NMM NAU, the members could share personal stories in a collective space and find the political aspects of those stories. Through politicization of the personal, NMM NAU members may find new motivations, passions, and shared interests in organizing for change. These collective spaces can act as launching point for consciousness raising and community building that can build towards a larger movement.

Leadership Development

In order to sustain social power and continue building the movement, a strong leadership base must be a focus of any organization. Over the course of my time with the No Más Muertes NAU chapter, I have witnessed the difficulties to prepare students for leadership positions to step up when the current leaders graduate and move on. It may be true that campus organizations

have a great amount of turnover as many students graduate and leave within four years, not able to stick around to build something that will withstand their departure from the university. While it is not entirely the students' fault, with such turnover being part of the nature of college life, there are steps to take to maintain an organization beyond the faith in a leader or two to hold it all together. As I prepare to leave NAU myself, I have been thinking more about what the future holds for No Más Muertes at NAU and hope that by working on this project I can help to facilitate the leadership development of the group.

According to SOUL (2007) Leadership can simply be defined as a, "process of social influence in which a person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task," (p. 156) Civil rights leader and organizer Ella Baker demonstrated in her work the power of collective leadership and the danger of depending on one charismatic leader. When an organization or social movement depends too much on one leader it endangers its futurity and possibility for growth. Focusing on the development of a non-hierarchical, collective leadership expands the possibilities for a just and democratic organizing space.

In the past the NMM NAU chapter has chosen to carry on with the common process for electing leaders for student clubs. This process involves letting the club members know in advance which officer positions are opening up and to prepare a short speech for the positions they are planning to run for. Upon giving the speeches, members of the club will vote anonymously for who they think is best fit for the positions. The elected officer positions that have existed in the past include president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Newly elected club officers will then meet with the existing officers to understand their roles and responsibilities and receive any necessary paperwork for the transition.

In moving away from this leadership structure to adapt to membership and to better fit the needs of the organization, the Fall 2021 transition looked a bit different. Coming out of nearly two years of virtual meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have had to largely rebuild our membership and leadership. This has involved a process of trial and error, visioning, rethinking what we want the No Más Muertes NAU chapter to look like. To start off, the previous presidents of the club asked if the current co-chair and I would be willing to take on the primary leadership roles upon their departure from the university. There was not the typical election process as there were only 4 or 5 regular members showing up to the meetings, half of which were graduating, and there was no other known interest in assuming the roles if the NMM NAU chapter was to stay alive.

As a graduate student stepping into the leadership position as co-chair for the club, I felt I was in an unique position having not known many other graduate students as involved in the student clubs and organizations. Often, graduate students have too much on their plate to add another, from working multiple jobs to trying to complete an entire research project and writing the equivalent of a short book within two short years. In retrospect, I, too, had a lot on my plate when I agreed to help run NAU's No Más Muertes. However, the primary reason I went to graduate school was to make connections and gain experience doing the things I was most passionate about, so I made myself busy. Going into the fall semester of 2021, assuming this leadership position as co-chair also meant figuring out my place as a graduate student working with almost entirely undergraduate students. I was afraid that me being in graduate school came with some weird power dynamics that challenged the space I was allowed to take up in what was presumably a space designated for undergraduate students. Under these presumptions shaped by my understanding of the hierarchical organization of academia and society, I thought it would be

best to hold back and let the undergraduate student members shape the trajectory of No Más Muertes NAU.

I saw my primary role in NMM NAU's leadership to act as a facilitator, to facilitate the discussions about what NMM is and what it can be, while offering my support and resources as needed. Reflecting on the choices I made early on, I wish I had been more intentional in sharing the stories, previous experiences, challenges, and thought processes I share here now. Similarly, I regret not setting up more leadership planning meetings to make space for relevant discussions on how the club has functioned, organized, struggled, and preserved in the past. These regrets are not to be harped on but are lessons in learning. They reveal the challenges faced when getting thrown into a leadership role without the planned mentorship and organization. Having not assumed many leadership roles previously, I felt lost and perpetually challenged. At the same time, I felt I should have been more knowledgeable and skilled than I was, responsible to uphold the future of a No Más Muertes club at Northern Arizona University.

With two confirmed leaders for the club and an unknown number of members to be joining in Fall 2021, another challenge was to recruit. Recruiting members is in itself an planned organizing action that takes time and energy invested in the growth of the organization. The process of recruitment in the past has been a combination of classroom presentations and tabling at related campus events. Following conversations with the club's faculty advisor, targeting and presenting to specific classes that have students who may be interested in participating in No Más Muertes has been among the most successful recruitment practices. Classes to recruit from may include ones focused on Latin American studies, Spanish language, community engagement, immigration, border politics, and ethnic studies. It is the members and leaders of

NMM NAU's responsibility to research classes and professors that align with the organization's membership needs.

Building rapport with professors at the university who are doing related work can forge necessary connections for the future of the organization. While NMM NAU is a student-led group, there is value in building relationships with staff and faculty members at the university who can be vital connections to resources and knowledge. Faculty members, for instance, can connect No Más Muertes NAU to potential guest speakers to invite to the meetings. Throughout the years NMM NAU has been closely tied to the Latin American Studies department and its professors that has been a helpful link to bringing in relevant speakers such as No Más Muertes volunteer Scott Warren and journalist Todd Miller. Guest speakers can be another link in the chain of connections and relationships essential to the group's development as part of the different communities we straddle.

Getting students to show up to a meeting is one thing, but maintaining their participation in the club is a challenge in itself. To foster a space members are excited to come back to and to help improve and grow, is an essential task of the group's leadership. In the following paragraph, I discuss how 1:1 relational meetings can be used as a tool to foster such connections amongst the group and contribute to the growth as leaders.

A valuable tool that can contribute to the comfortability and trust of the members of the No Más Muertes and its comrades is the relational meeting, otherwise known as a one-on-one. The relational meeting is structured to be a 30-45 minute meeting between two people with the purpose of understanding the self-interest of the individual doing the majority of the talking (Chambers, 2003).Another parameter for the relational meeting includes the 80-20 rule whereby the leader who set up the meeting spends 80% of the time listening and 20% of the time talking

and asking questions. This does not mean that only one person is being vulnerable as it is expected that as the leader facilitating the meeting you share who you are and what your motivations are in order to build trust between the two of you through the meeting. However, your primary role as facilitator is to ask probing questions about the other individual's that get to the why and the hows of their interest in being part of No Más Muertes, to dig deeper into what lead them there and their capacities for organizing with the group. Some example questions are listed below:

- Why do you want to get involved in this work specifically?
- What drives or motivates you? (Encourage them to share personal stories and experiences)
- How do you want to grow as part of No Más Muertes? What skills or areas of their personal life would you want to work on through your involvement in the organization?
- What is your vision for your community/organization/personal development?

Before getting into these deeper questions, it will be important to establish rapport by beginning with general questions about the individual such as where they come from and what work or programs they are a part of. In terms of leadership development, relational meetings can be used to foster individual growth, build strong interpersonal relationships, and emphasize collaboration amongst leaders. These meetings can provide a dedicated space for leaders to connect on a deeper level by sharing their aspirations, challenges, ideas, and personal stories. They can be used in order to spot potential leaders who want to become more involved in the organization and identify the potential issues they would like to act upon.

About Leadership: Stickers & Photoshoots

In my second semester, fall of 2019, with NAU No Más Muertes, the club had newly elected leadership in charge of running the meetings. Elections for new leadership took place at

the end of the spring 2019 semester to prepare for the fall and new academic year. To say they were democratically elected to presidency and vice presidency would assume there was anybody else who ran for said positions. Most of the other members of the club had only been involved with the group for a semester or two and may have felt too underqualified or inexperienced to take on a leadership position at the time. I know I personally did not feel comfortable leading anyone else when I had just joined the very semester club elections took place. Alas, the club ended up being run by the only person seemingly brave enough to take it on and with the confidence to declare themselves the NAU No Más Muertes club president. As the semester kicked off and the club began to brainstorm what we wanted to do, the new leadership had an idea to sell stickers to raise money to donate to the No Más Muertes organization in Tucson.

Following the big plan of selling stickers to fundraise, the next several meetings were consumed by the logistics of the stickers. While a plan to fundraise may have been necessary at the time, it should not have taken up the space leaving it devoid of education and any other organizing efforts. To make matters worse that semester the other planned activity was to have a professional photoshoot of the club and the members as a marketing strategy. Time was set aside during the weekly meetings to discuss when and where we wanted to take the photos as well what to do with them after. At this point in the semester, members of the club felt unheard and disgruntled with the inaction. When the students would bring up their concerns, questioning the purpose, of the sticker fundraiser or the marketed photoshoot they seemed to go unanswered. This monopolization of No Más Muertes NAU by the self-elected leadership combined with the lack of critical praxis that represented the purpose of the organization created division and tensions needing to be addressed. The events that took place at this time have since reshaped the

current structure of NMM NAU's leadership to be less hierarchical and, hopefully, will continue to be more receptive to critique.

Looking towards the future, the leadership development of NMM NAU can take inspiration from the frameworks of decolonial, feminist, and critical pedagogy and put that into practice. Envisioning a leadership framed by critical pedagogy, for example, should involve interrogating the power dynamics and relationship between elected leaders and members without formal positions. Members of the No Más Muertes chapter at NAU should all feel their voices and ideas are not listened to but empowered and acted upon as a group.

Political Education

Political education has long been used as a critical tool towards liberation through the building of a social, political, and class consciousness. The goals of political education are to increase the people's involvement in collective action and engagement in transformative politics. According to Marx's "Dialectics of Theory and Practice," no one is "all knowing," but through the practice of political education and the translation of theory into praxis, the people can transform the material conditions of society. Dialogic learning, through dialogue amongst a group of people, is used to build collective knowledge as students are encouraged to question, think of new ideas collaboratively, and explore different points of view.

As part of our vision in the NMM NAU chapter, we aspire to inform, prepare, and spark passion in the members of the organization and community to address issues faced by the migrant community. Over the course of the past year for every meeting we would prepare materials, including articles, theory, and videos, on different topics related to immigration to discuss as a group. Some of these topics of discussion included the prison industrial complex, climate change forced migration, colonialism of borders, and mutual aid. What may have been

lacking in the discussion of these topics is the translation of political theory and education to action. The applicability and longevity of these topics beyond the one meeting they were discussed is a point of critical self-reflection. Below I have provided an example of how our group organized the range of political education topics over the course of an academic school year, including short videos and readings completed during the biweekly meetings. The political education and discussion topics were typically carried out through one meeting or multiple meetings if the issues are identified by the members as necessary to continue working through. Throughout the meetings, time was set aside to work towards actions related to the topics.

Topic	**Discussion**	**Readings & Activities**
Introduction to No Más Muertes	Who is No Más Muertes? What is the NMM NAU chapter's mission and vision?	Read: Caring for the Deceased, Caring for the Living from NMM newsletter
Introduction to mutual aid and movement building	Defining mutual aid and solidarity What does it look like for NMM NAU to organize and practice mutual aid?	Read: Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex from Indigenous Action

Introduction to US-Mexico borderlands	What is happening at the border right now? What have people seen in the media lately related to immigration and the border?	Watch: Disappeared: How U.S. Border Enforcement Agencies are Fueling a Missing Person's Crisis Part 1
History of US-Mexico borderlands	Who is ICE, Homeland Security, and Border Patrol? Defining asylum seeker vs. undocumented vs. refugee Understanding anti-immigrant policy	Read: History of Institutional Violence at the US Border from SOAWatch
Know your rights	What are undocumented and citizens' rights when facing ICE, Border Patrol, police? How to support undocumented community members, within and outside the context of Flagstaff	Refer to the ACLU's guide on Know Your Rights- Immigrant Rights and the 100-mile border zone
Root causes of forced migration	What are the causes of political & economic instability in Latin America? Defining border imperialism	Read: There is No "Migrant Crisis" by Harsha Walia

Prison industrial complex & detention centers	What is the prison industrial complex? What is happening in immigration detention centers? Exploring abolitionist thought and sharing resources	Watch: Angela Davis, The Shifting Concept of the Prison Industrial Complex Read: Ending Immigration Detention: Abolitionist Steps vs Reformist Steps

The building of consciousness around the issues migrants face both at the border and all the way into Northern Arizona is a guiding vision of No Más Muertes NAU. What this consciousness building could look like in practice is the use of intentional dialogue with community members and university students alike about the kinds of support they could provide to their migrant neighbors and the issues that face them. Additionally, having honest conversations with the community about the impacts of recent immigration policies can create greater people power, knowledge, and support in the long-run. Drawing on the pre-existing knowledge and skills of community members as well as working with local organizers is even more important as a group made up of students from out of town and those who will only be living in town for four years until graduating and moving on.

While I have briefly discussed some of the campaigns from the past year, in the sections below I will go into more detail about how they were developed and critically reflect on what could be done differently. I apply core tenets of critical pedagogy to work through the lessons learned from the organized campaigns. This section is a result of self-reflection, journaling, and dialogue with others to lay the groundwork for the growth of No Más Muertes at Northern Arizona University.

Campaign: The Winter Drive

During the 2022-2023 academic year, No Más Muertes NAU organized a “Winter Drive " to collect weather appropriate clothing and blankets. The idea for this campaign arose out of a concern for those enduring the elements of the brutal and snowiest winter in Northern Arizona. In terms of critical pedagogy, a problem was collectively identified and then the work to find solutions began. The university’s Office of Inclusion: Multicultural and LGBTQIA+ Student Services, also known as the IMQ, was the central organizing space for the biweekly meetings and conveniently where we stored the donated items. To build capacity throughout the drive, NMM NAU collaborated with different student organizations, who also met in the IMQ, including Latine Student Union and Somos as well as a chapter of the Brown Berets. As the snow melted and weather warmed, the winter drive in turn became a general donation drive with the request for supplies of all kinds. The original purpose of this campaign got a little lost in the abundance of different ideas and approaches of which I will tease out as I discuss the successes, barriers faced, and lessons learned.

In the meetings we engaged in critical dialogue around the purpose of the winter drive, questioning whether we were supporting unsheltered folks up in so-called Flagstaff or migrants at the Southern border and how to do both. Members of the group discussed the immediate needs of unsheltered people in so-called Flagstaff in light of one of the snowiest winters experienced and that we should be doing something to support them. As a result of such conversations, we spent a week learning about the direct aid efforts practiced by Kinlani Mutual Aid and Indigenous Action. Specifically, we read Indigenous Action’s “Winter Street Patrol Basic Guide Zine,” and discussed what we could do as a group in solidarity. As I am analyzing these dialogues, I reflect on the ways in which the discussions were or were not humanizing those we intended to be in community with. Situated within so-called Flagstaff, Arizona, as students at a

state university comes with certain privileges that have often separated us from the broader community beyond the university. Our identities as students engaging in discussions over people not in the room at present makes for a different relationship to the work.

Much of our discussions involved logistical updates on the amounts of donations received, where to place donation boxes, and how to create a general awareness on campus about our winter drive campaign. Particularly in creating a flier for the drive to post on social media and hang around campus, there was talk around how much to include about No Más Muertes itself. Some members of the group were concerned that by mentioning the full mission statement of No Más Muertes some people would be more hesitant to donate to the drive due to political or ideological differences. We ended up with a short blurb describing the NMM organization as providing "humanitarian aid and solidarity in Southwest borderlands," a list of requested items, and no mention as to the purpose of the drive itself. In promoting the winter drive, it would have been more powerful to let the community know why and for whom we are collecting the items for as a matter of efficacy and building towards a deeper consciousness of the issues at hand.

One thing that differentiates charity from solidarity is the underlying relationships. In acts of solidarity, there is welcomed communications between all involved, meanwhile, in charitable acts there is wall put up between giver and receiver of said charity (Spade, 2020) While in our meetings we had discussions on what it means to be more than ally and to not fall into the nonprofit industrial complex, this previous winter drive in many ways fails to turn the theory into practice. Never did we as group go out on the streets to talk to unsheltered folks and ask them how we could support them. Nor did we rekindle our pre-existing relationship with Kinlani Mutual Aid to hold dialogue with their organizers about how we can work together. These are just some steps that could have been taken to make the winter drive a truer reflection of the NAU

No Más Muertes' practice of non-extractive solidarity. This does not mean that we as a group failed our community or had false intentions, what it does mean is we, I, have more to learn.

When thinking about the winter supply drive through the lens of decolonial theory, I first ask the questions of whether doing a supply drive is an inherently colonial act and if it is even good to be doing at all. Northern Arizona and so-called Flagstaff are home to over a dozen Indigenous tribes, including the Apache, Hopi, Hualapai, Navajo, and Yavapai, and the university sits on this stolen land. When organizing with this and a praxis of decoloniality in mind, there comes a responsibility in centering Indigenous voices. In order to center those most directly impacted by colonialism, there must be genuine conversation about their lived experiences, concerns, and needs. NAU No Más Muertes organizers would first be tasked with figuring out how to answer if a winter supply drive is something that people want and if so who and what do they need? To put this theory into practice calls for meeting people where they are and allowing them to voice their concerns and ideas in their own language. To do this organizers and members of NAU's NMM should be going out onto the streets and talking to unsheltered relatives themselves. By asking unsheltered relatives about their needs and how they can be of help, they can begin to form real relationships and be in community with each other. When having these conversations with unsheltered relatives, it is unnecessary to impose the theoretical language of decolonialism but more important to put the knowledge into action.

One of the struggles I recognized through our winter supply drive was pinpointing its purpose and communicating that to the public as a form of consciousness raising. What we did in actuality lacked a central analysis and application of decolonial theory that could be communicated to those donating why we were doing this drive at all. What could be done in the future by the members of NMM NAU is to put into dialogue and collectively map out the

systemic powers contributing to why people are unsheltered and in need of supplies in the first place. By building the knowledge together as a group, members may develop a stronger purpose for the drive that can then be better communicated to those on campus and in the larger community beyond. The fliers used to promote the drive, for instance, could include a recognition of the stolen land of which it is taking place and the high percentage of unsheltered relatives that are Indigenous in so-called Flagstaff. NMM NAU members can and should use this drive to make explicit the connections between settler colonialism and the displacement of unsheltered relatives to the public to give meaning to their contributions and bring them into the movement for a decolonized future.

Discussing Sodexo and the Prison Industrial Complex

At one biweekly meeting that took place in the past year, the topic of discussion was the Prison Industrial Complex. The objective of this meeting was to read about the ways detention centers were profitable actors in the Prison Industrial Complex and to discuss the implications for border aid. As the conversation unfolded, someone brought up the issue of Sodexo's complicity in profiting off carcerality. It was mentioned that Sodexo has reportedly been selling their food to prisons and detention centers while simultaneously feeding college students throughout the country, including at Northern Arizona University. The question of what to do, if anything, about Sodexo took over the meeting. Students began to talk about how this was representative of academia furthering carceral violence and contributing to the profitability of prisons and detention centers. Boycotts, petitions, protests, and marches were amongst the actions students suggested to take down Sodexo and the prison industrial complex. It was when someone shared that many of the Sodexo were immigrants or children of immigrants themselves that the dialogue grew more generative.

Whenever organizing for social justice, it may be reiterated that the lives and voices of those most directly impacted are humanized at the center of the work. At the No Más Muertes meeting, the students circled around this idea of doing organizing work that could ultimately hurt the ones we are supposed to be in community with. If there were to be a boycott of Sodexo, requiring that the workers do not work and the students do not eat Sodexo food, how would the safety of the workers be ensured? How humanitarian would it be to get immigrant workers fired from their jobs in the name of social justice?

By breaking down the challenges and contradictions and weighing the benefits of boycotting a corporation such as Sodexo, something impressive happened. Amongst the group of about eight college students from different social, cultural, and academic backgrounds, a collective lightbulb switched on as did the exchange of ideas. The questions posed during this meeting reflected the students' abilities to think critically and reflexively about community organizing. During that meeting, they demonstrated the value of open dialogue in a group of organizers. The energy in the room led to the conversation being carried over into the next meeting and left me, and possibly others, with much to think about regarding the tangibility of it all.

In following meetings, linkages between the struggle for economic, racial, and migrant justice alongside the fight for abolition continued to be brought up. For some students, these meetings were the one of the first times they were critically engaging in ideas of abolition. Dedicating one meeting, of approximately an hour and fifteen minutes, to give a crash course on abolitionist thought is not enough to fully understand the long history behind abolitionist organizing and what has been learned through the struggles. However, this becomes part of the challenge of figuring out how to meet the students where they are at, to explicate the

connections, and find actionable ways to approach them that may be in political education work. In order to apply abolitionist thinking to the idea of boycotting Sodexo, one of the first steps should be asking the question of how this action can raise consciousness about the prison industrial complex. The members of the No Más Muertes chapter at NAU should continue to unpack the implications of the boycott thinking through how it can connect to the dismantling of the prison industrial complex. Members should also ask the question of what pillars are holding up the prison industrial complex and how does this action target one or more of those pillars? Discussing these questions as a group can help members locate the action within the fight for an abolitionist future.

Additionally, it will be important to take the discussions of the prison industrial complex and boycotting Sodexo beyond the biweekly NMM NAU meetings. NMM NAU members, for example, should begin to inform their fellow students on campus by hosting events, distributing literature, or utilizing social media. They should collaborate with other student groups who are already focused on social justice issues, drawing connections from their work to the pillars upholding the prison industrial complex. By bringing in other student organizers, they can reach a broader audience, raise more awareness, and increase the disruptive power of the boycott. In the efforts to draw in more students who may otherwise not get involved, members can discuss the possibilities for reinvestment in resources, not only redirecting funds from Sodexo by cutting ties with them, but pressuring the university to reinvest in life-affirming resources on campus such as mental health resources, housing, and community programs.

Imagining a decolonial approach to the topic of Sodexo and the prison industrial complex may place emphasis on different points of the discussion. When I think of organizing anticolonial action within so-called Flagstaff I immediately think of the sacred peaks desecrated

by Snowbowl ski resort, the number of Indigenous folks living unsheltered and targeted by police in town, and the environmental racism experienced on the surrounding Navajo nation (Boggs, 2017). I think as organizing members of NAU'S NMM we have a lot to learn from the Indigenous organizers who have been fighting against these settler colonial entities where we live. In my theoretical considerations chapter I recognize a reciprocal relationship between anticoloniality and abolition, and when putting that into consideration here I think about the question of who we are in community with and who are we organizing for or with? The thought of what it means to be fighting so many fights and the sustainability of doing it all then comes back around to the debate around the purpose of the small group of students that make up the No Más Muertes chapter at Northern Arizona University.

On Palestine & Anticolonial Liberation

"From Palestine to Mexico, all the walls have got to go," -protest chant.

In the time I have spent helping to facilitate the NMM club at NAU, the other members and I have made a point to discuss the parallels between the imperialist and colonial violence, stemming from the same imperial powers, inflicted upon communities around the world. To make explicit the connections between the fight for migrant and racial justice here in the American Southwest and anticolonial resistance abroad has helped to deepen our understanding of what we are up against. As people living in the United States, and in many ways benefiting from its imperialism as US residents, there is a responsibility in speaking out against the country's role in genocidal and ethnic cleansing practices beyond its borders. This praxis of solidarity and the shared struggle for liberation I believe as pertinent to the work of NMM is why I have chosen to discuss the ongoing Palestinian fight for freedom here.

As I sit here finishing this paper, Western media is waging a war against Palestinians and it seems most Americans are on board with genocide. I cannot help but to think about how I am coming from a place of immense privilege to be able to go to graduate school, to be worrying about getting a better paying job, to have a roof over my head and food on the table everyday. My worries are nothing as entire family lines are systematically wiped out and schools in Palestine are concluding their academic years due to a lack of students to teach and teachers to teach them. It is hard to focus on writing an academic paper for a master's thesis project, an act so insignificant as thousands of Palestinians are losing their homes, families, and their lives. All the while their mass death is being broadcasted and consented by the propagandized and racialized response of the general public.

While many professors, researchers, and writers cite Frantz Fanon in their academic papers or hold seminars on "Decolonizing Academia," many of these same people condemn anti-colonial resistance when it actually happens. Those who do speak out in support of Palestine face the possibility of losing their jobs or blacklisted by the institutions (Al-Jazeera, 2023). Support for Palestinian's right to resist against their occupiers wavers under the pressure to stay neutral and to see both sides. However, neutrality is a politically informed choice to allow the violence to go unchecked and to consent to a continued genocidal apartheid.

I feel powerless, guilty, angry, and deeply saddened as I write this from the comfort of my own home. What I do feel is in my power to do is to dismantle misinformation while flooding my social media accounts with live accounts from Palestinians in Gaza and sharing educational resources that provide historical context to what is happening. I can continue to beg the people around me to pay attention to what matters and for universities and corporations to end their supportive ties with Israel. I hope that at least I can reach those seeking to learn and make more

informed decisions about which side of history they want to be on. My greatest hope in keeping me motivated to organize and educate towards liberation lies in my belief in the possibility of a free Palestine in this lifetime.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

"I think it is healing behavior, to look at something so broken and see the possibility and wholeness in it."- Adrienne Maree Brown, Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds (2017, p. 14)

Ultimately, the plan for this project was to explore the questions of how the No More Deaths/No Más Muertes student chapter at Northern Arizona University can develop an identity and sustain its organizing work in Northern Arizona and what the movement building, leadership development, and political education of the group can look like. As I previously discussed, the plans evolved with the process of carrying out this project and the question I found myself exploring grappled with what I learned from my experiences. I asked how I could learn from the practices of NAU'S No Más Muertes to envision a stronger purpose and identity for the group. In order to engage with these questions of identity and organizing practices, I looked towards the perspectives and personal experiences collected over the course of my time with NMM at NAU for the answers. To help make meaning out of this data, I studied and learned from a broad range of organizers, educators, and theorists whose conceptualizations of liberation work inform much of the work in NAU's NMM chapter.

Revisiting my research questions throughout my analysis of the personal experiences and theory seemed to unravel more questions than answers. What I realized was that the questions I was left with exemplified what it can look like to critically organize and educate. The answers to how to successfully organize a student club striving to make a change on campus and in communities are not the ones I can definitively conclude. I cannot say what the correct ways to organize or build a social movement or the best way to teach people the complexities of a politicized world. However, I did not take on this project expecting to become an expert in political education and community organizing but rather as a practice of reflection,

documentation, and knowledge sharing. I learned that it is difficult to navigate one's own political ideologies and critical theories of the world while grappling with the decision to make compromises in the fight for justice. It is hard to put theory into action and it looks different than on paper, from context to context and time to time.

Reflecting on the actions and practices of No Más Muertes at NAU from the time I have been involved, I have learned the importance of drawing on pre-existing relationships in the community and building new ones that empower people to get involved in their communities. In terms of political education, those involved in student organizing groups such as the NAU No Más Muertes, have the most to learn from those most impacted by the issues of our biweekly dialogue. Encouraging and facilitating critical dialogue amongst students can further push them to think of new, creative actions to take on while questioning their purpose. And often, the students themselves have a wealth of knowledge from their own lived experiences to share with others and see themselves as capable of enacting change. While past scholars, pedagogues, and organizers alike have paved new ways to demonstrate the value of dialogue and the varied ways to turn theory into praxis, my fellow members and comrades' experiences revealed is a fiery hope in the future.

During the past couple of years, I have been fortunate enough to work with a number of passionate, emerging leaders in the NAU and greater Flagstaff community. The students I have worked with through No Más Muertes here at Northern Arizona University have deeply inspired, educated, and empowered me. Through them I have learned the importance of rest as resistance and the ways to center social justice in every aspect of life so as not to burn out. It has inspired me to witness the ways these students have built networks of care and mutual aid amongst one another and with allied professors and staff at a university that can be an otherwise isolating

place for students of color, queer, and indigenous students. When students felt uncomfortable by racism on campus, it was the students who spoke up and organized. When student workers felt they were neither adequately supported nor properly paid for their labor they unionized and organized. Even when students are made to feel powerless, they continue to fight for what they believe in, to fight for one another.

Through this project I have learned that students do have more power than the institution makes them out to be and despite all the efforts to silence their resistance. This power does not come from the degree they are working towards nor is it necessarily won via the student's demands being met. It is a strength that comes from the power of community and the students' practice of creative methods of political education and networks of care. When offered the tools to learn and organize collectively, students are capable of cultivating powerful, more just, and transformative communities.

A central question that seemed to keep coming up in the reflection process of this project was that of who we are in community with and who we are organizing for/with. I think this line of questioning can summarize how I have thought about my own experiences organizing, learning, and educating in my time at the university, and specifically in the No Más Muertes student chapter. Trying to figure out the purpose of the NAU NMM club has had me returning to to these questions over and over. In regards to the winter supply drive I have reflected on how there was a lack of clarity of who it was for and how a conclusion could be drawn. I've thought about what it means to be organizing as a group based in northern Arizona and our connections to larger organization of No Más Muertes and its efforts to end migrant suffering at the US-Mexico border. There is not one answer, but many, to that of which community NAU's

NMM is a part of and meant to be organizing with, from our community as students, as residents of so-called Flagstaff, as organizers and educators for migrant justice and so much more.

Limitations & Considerations for Future Research

There are several limitations and challenges I faced in the completion of this thesis project. Regarding the theoretical considerations and literature review there is a range of different sources I could pull from to strengthen my own knowledge on the topics I write about throughout this paper. While I apply an interdisciplinary approach to the use of theory to support my project, with the inclusion of several different critical theories and numerous theorists, it could be insightful to see how it would have resulted with the application of one theoretical framework. By using a central theory to guide the project, I would be able to become a greater expert of the ins and outs of said theory to offer a specialized perspective to political education and organizing. More evidently, sticking to one theoretical frame probably would have made this easier for me but a good challenge can help a person grow stronger.

In terms of the methods, I used personal experiences and participation as ways to gather and analyze information, however, I did not complete interviews for this project, which significantly limited the scope of the research. The decision to not do interviews as part of this project grew out of the limitation of impartiality, as the people I would have wanted to interview are also friends and colleagues of mine, and the time constriction, as I would prefer the potential participants to be more active participants and co-author the thesis paper alongside me. Had I decided to include interviews in the methods of this project, I would be able to more sincerely incorporate the stories and direct experiences of those individuals involved. Given the opportunity to take more time, resources, and emotional energy to continue with this project, I

would consider using semi-structured interviews, framed by a narrative inquiry methodology, to offer a platform for the stories and experiences of the chosen participants.

Another consideration for future research around this project would be collaboratively creating more lesson plans and curriculum material whereby members of No Más Muertes are directly involved in that process, thus co-authors of what results. This way this project can be cumulative and carried on for years to come as a space to practice the cycle of critical reflection and praxis. As I have written about the power of collective action and group dialogue, I do think it would have been more powerful to have intentionally practiced collective methods to carry out this project.

Final Reflections

Over the course of this thesis project, it would be a lie to say I did not struggle to narrow down a topic and to then carry out the necessary research components. I struggled with the idea that every issue in society and the efforts towards building a more just world are so inextricable I could not just focus on one. I came into this Sustainable Communities program expecting to focus on a topic more closely related to environmental sustainability and climate change. So I tried to fit myself into the boxes I thought I needed to fill. Upon shifting my thesis ideas and methodologies several times, I realized the answer was right in front of me the whole time. Why not center my project on the work I have been a part of for years? It is through this conclusion that I view this project as a deeply personal journey navigating the academic world. I have much more about myself, my skillsets and interests, than I ever expected going into this project. I was challenged in ways I did not plan for either from getting sick with COVID–19 early on to struggling with my own mental health all the while coping with the state of the world. As my

complicated relationship with academia unfolded throughout this process, I was grateful to have the community around me to keep me grounded and always challenging me.

When I feel inspired it is when I feel like creating new worlds. I want to write myself a new story and write myself into new worlds. But my inspiration is not an escape from reality, rather it is a grappling with it all in radical creativity and imagination. Radical change emerges out of working together to imagine new worlds, inspiring and empowering one another to fight for it, and as Angela Davis defines “radical simply means grasping things at the root,” through whatever means necessary.

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