AN ANCIENT THREAD OF "INSEPARABLE ONENESS": A Theoretical Exploration of Community and Kinship in Grassroots Environmental Justice Movements

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ABSTRACT

This thesis arose from a particular fascination and frustration with the prescribed nuclear family unit and the competitive isolation that capitalism breeds within normative communities, particularly in the United States. In this paper, I use the approach of theoretical exploration combined with case study research to explore the role of community and kinship within grassroots environmental justice organizations. I initially wanted to explore examples of people and groups who found strength and resistance by engaging in "non-normative" or "queer" community-building practices. I have since redefined my topic as a broad theoretical exploration in which I cite theories of non-normativity, among many others. I use critical race theory, Black feminist theory, queer theory, and theories of expansive kinship, among others, to assert the importance of community building and collective action, based on expansive care networks and equitability. By analyzing several grassroots environmental justice organizations in the Philadelphia area, I assert the relevance of kinship practices and relationality in social justice activism, as well as communal resistance and resilience. This is a project of theory building, in which I conceptualize a kind of movement building that is non-patriarchal and non-hierarchical. Instead, what I am exploring is a basis for community relations predicated on mutuality, love, and collective concern rather than profit or power.

Keywords: *kinship, community, grassroots organizations, environmental justice, Philadelphia*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this thesis project, I explore kinship and community in grassroots environmental justice movements, based on case-study research of organizations in the Philadelphia area, which is where I am originally from. My exploration is framed by the idea that a shared sense of kinship between people and with the natural world is an important aspect of grassroots environmental justice organizing. I initially hypothesized that having a strong community and loving kinship relationships is crucial to human and environmental well-being, centering ideas of non-normativity and deviance. I have since redefined my research as a theoretical exploration, in which I apply existing literature and research to the analysis of the data collected in my case study interviews, to better understand grassroots community organizing within environmental justice movements. My hope is that this research can contribute to an ongoing process that works to define, conceptualize, and theorize forms of movement building and social justice activism that is non-patriarchal and centers on kinship and relationality. Importantly, this research also uplifts the words and voices of several key actors who are on the front lines of grassroots environmental justice efforts.

When beginning my research, I theorized that environmental justice movements who center on non-normative forms of community-building would find more success, by some measures, than normative environmental organizations, in the missions they intend to address. Though my thesis is no longer centrally focused on normativity and deviance, it is still a crucial framework in which to consider grassroots organizing and environmental justice movements more broadly. I wanted to focus on societal norms and expectations that are intrinsically connected to the hegemonic culture of power and dominance that is grossly pervasive in modern capitalist society, particularly in the United States. Non-normativity, or a rejection of a normative

worldview, respectable behavior, and regulated ways of living, can mean embracing closeness to community and loving others with a deep sense of mutuality. To reclaim a deviant way of life, a refusal to conform, a departure from respectability politics, is deeply connected to the process of reclaiming community, kinship, and closeness to other life, human and non-human. The act of deviance through non-normative ways of life can be a foundational aspect of social justice and liberation movements, particularly movements for environmental justice.

I engage with scholarship about queer, ecofeminist, and Black feminist theory, which informs my discussion of non-normativity and deviance, or in other words, a reclamation of a marginalized position. I also explore critical race theory and critical environmental justice, to detail the intersections of these topics and give context to the history and current situation of pervasive environmental racism in the United States. Further, I explore Indigenism and traditional ideals of kinship, which are based on ancient Indigenous knowledge surrounding community care and environmental care. Close connection to other people is tied to closeness to one's greater environment. By rebuilding connections with other people, we can start rebuilding our ecological connections and vice versa.

In addition to engaging with this scholarship, I focused my case study research on environmental justice organizations and movements in Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania more broadly. Due to the combined impacts of its industrial history and racially discriminatory practices such as redlining and exclusionary zoning, environmental racism and injustice is extremely prevalent in the Philadelphia area. Low-income, predominantly Black neighborhoods in and around Philadelphia are the most impacted by pollution segregation just as they are by redlining and other social issues (Rhynhart, 2020, n.p.). Pennsylvania is ranked second in the nation for states with the most significant differences between races and between the wealthy and

poor in exposure to air pollution (Griffin, 2019, n.p.). Low-income communities and communities of color are more likely to live in neighborhoods that are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards. Philadelphia Councilmember, Katherine Gilmore Richardson, commented on the environmental justice situation: "In Philadelphia, your zip code determines your life expectancy," (*City launches Environmental Justice Advisory Commission,* 2022, n.p.). As a result, these communities are especially vulnerable to the impacts of industrial development, especially because of oil and gas combustion emissions which contribute to ozone smog. These communities face glaring consequences and health risks, such as higher rates of asthma, cancers, cardiovascular disease, mental illness, and higher mortality rates at younger ages. Black children in Philadelphia now make up the majority of the approximately 12,000 asthma attacks that occur throughout the whole city each year (Griffin, 2019, n.p.).

Philadelphia has become increasingly vocal about their environmental justice issues, and community organizing efforts are being recognized and supported more by local and state governments. The creation of the Interagency Environmental Justice Working Group points to a shift in government approaches to addressing environmental injustice in Philadelphia. The city is also beginning to recognize the need for investment in and support of grassroots activism, which is spearheaded by directly affected residents on the frontlines of these environmental issues. As of 2022, the city began establishing a community resilience and environmental justice grant fund, dedicated to supporting frontline communities experiencing environmental injustice (*City launches Environmental Justice Advisory Commission,* 2022, n.p.). City and state officials are finally paying attention to the obvious conclusion; to create tangible change within environmentally vulnerable communities, Philadelphia must address the discriminatory practices carried out through their permitting practices (Griffin, 2019, n.p.). Engaging with directly

affected frontline communities in a key aspect of creating a more equitable distribution of environmental burdens in the Philadelphia area and creating a system of accountability to prevent privatized interests from usurping the rights and needs of community members.

Mural Arts Philadelphia is the nation's largest public art program, and a central part of their mission is to ignite social change through art. For the past 35 years or so, Mural Arts has engaged artists and communities through a process of collaborative mural-making, creating art that is meant to transform spaces and lives (*About,* 2022, n.p.). One of their core program areas is environmental justice, and as of 2018, Mural Arts has partnered with three other U.S. cities to address local environmental issues. In coordination with Akron, Ohio, Detroit, Michigan, and Memphis, Tennessee, Mural Arts began the "Art and Environment Capacity Building Initiative," which is a program that focuses on working with organizations in respective cities to help create a model of sustainability. The second round of this initiative, which is currently underway, is focused on climate change and resilience. This project centers ideals of environmental justice, particularly that climate change is and will continue to disproportionately impact low-income communities and communities of color, and these communities also lack resources and power to combat these injustices. A critical aspect of climate resilience, as acknowledged by Mural Arts, is that "social cohesion and trust, collaborative civic partnerships, and inclusive and diverse civic spaces" are key aspects of creating resilience among environmental justice communities (*Arts & Environment,* 2022, n.p.).

The Climate Justice Initiative, spearheaded by the Mural Arts' Environmental Justice Department, is a collaboration of organizers, artists, and activists in frontline environmental justice communities (*Climate justice initiative,* n.d., n.p.). CJI creates public art, specifically about climate change and environmental destruction, in Lenapehoking (the homelands of the

Lenape people). This collaboration is an attempt to collectivize and strengthen community action in the face of environmental injustice and climate change. CJI specifically highlights and centers local leaders in low-income communities of color across Lenapehoking. The structure of CJI is based on the Action Circle model, which is an "organizational framework of power-sharing and relationship-building" (*Climate justice initiative,* n.d., n.p.). Through CJI, local activists and organizers collaborate on the distinct environmental issues they are addressing, with a focus on three main areas referring to climate justice: air, land, and trash. For my research, I have been able to interview three CJI collaborators, two of whom are a part of the air circle, Zulene Mayfield of Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living and O Payne of Philly Thrive. The third Interviewee is RuthAnn Purchase, who is part of the land circle. In my interview with Purchase we mainly discussed her work with the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware. The air circle addresses issues of air pollution caused by incinerators, refineries, and fossil fuel power plants, which all lead to severe health consequences through air and water contamination. Air circle collaborators are fighting for the right to breathe clean air, especially in low-income working-class communities of color. The land circle addresses issues of displacement, dispossession, and environmental destruction that came because of systems of colonization, including extractive industries and industrial agriculture. Land circle collaborators are centering Black and Indigenous communities and supporting land healing, reconnection, and sovereignty, through practices such as community agriculture, Indigenous stewardship, and mutual aid (*CJI,* n.d., n.p.).

My research adds to previously explored research topics within the realm of grassroots activism and community building, highlighting the need for further investigation. My project is exploring how grassroots organizing and mutual-aid-based activism can be extremely beneficial

to local communities by influencing both policy and improving the material conditions of directly affected communities, with or without the help of local and state officials. Working within and simultaneously outside of the system is an example of non-normativity and non-conformity, which could be categorized as an act of deviance. One of the people I interviewed for this project, O Payne, expressed that, to them, normativity itself is largely characterized by distance. Separation and detachment between people and living beings more broadly has led to individualism, which allows us to easily lose sight of what O calls "the thread that tethers us all together, the united field, or universal oneness." This oneness, this unity, this radical love, is in and of itself the essence of being; it is *life*. They explained that the preservation of community and togetherness, which can lead to collective mobilization, is the preservation of life itself.

I interviewed three participants from the air and land circles, which form the basis of my case studies. In the following section, I describe the methodology I used to collect and analyze my primary source material and formulate these case studies. In Chapter 2, I provide a literature review, laying out the theoretical context which grounds and informs my research. I focus on critical race theory and critical environmental justice as well as Black feminist theory, queer theory, and theories of kinship. In Chapter 3, I offer an example of a normative or mainstream "nonprofit" environmental organization, The Sierra Club, as a counterpoint to my three case studies of grassroots community organizations that are central to this study. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I elaborate on my case studies, using the data collected from my interviews. I conclude this thesis with a discussion of my findings in conversation with the theoretical frameworks through which I have structured my research around and my final conclusions.

Methodology

      In this study I set out to explore community and kinship relations in United States grassroots environmental justice movements and organizations. For my research project I interviewed three individuals involved in different grassroots organizations and movements in the Philadelphia area. The Mural Arts of Philadelphia has recently implemented an Environmental Justice department, which is spearheading a project called the Climate Justice Initiative. CJI is a collaborative collective of organizers, activists, and community leaders who are all involved in varying environmental justice missions. One of the collaborators I have been in touch with is RuthAnn Purchase, a cultural historian working with the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware. She is working to advance the practices and appreciation of Indigenous wisdom and ways of life through Indigenous land sovereignty and liberation. I have also been in touch with O Payne, who works as the healing justice coordinator at Philly Thrive. Philly Thrive is an organization that worked to close the PES oil refinery in South Philadelphia, which has disproportionately impacted the health and living conditions of low-income people of color. They are currently working on cleaning up the site entirely and focusing on reinvestment in affected neighborhoods. Lastly, I spoke with Zulene Mayfield, the chair of the Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living (CRCQL). CRCQL has been fighting for over 30 years to close down a trash incinerator in the city of Chester, as it has been excessively polluting neighborhoods made up of predominantly Black residents.

      I conducted three Zoom interviews with each individual participant. The interviews were unstructured and more like conversations. I had developed a list of guiding questions I used to prompt the interviewee, but I allowed the conversation to wander and for my interviewees to delve into whatever topics they deemed appropriate based on their experiences in environmental

justice organizing and community building. My interviews and analysis were qualitative, and my process for transcription involved note-taking during the interview and recording the zoom meetings so I could return to them while doing my analysis. Some preliminary interview questions included:

- How did you become involved in environmental justice organizing?
- How would you characterize the community/organizational structure of your organization?
- What do you do and what is your mission?
- How do you engage directly with affected communities?

I used a qualitative approach because I wanted to center the personal experiences, thoughts, and beliefs of the organizers and activists I interviewed.

My process for analyzing the interviews involved a close reading of my notes and the Zoom recordings. I intended to capture the voices and words of the interviewees as well as possible, looking for any themes or patterns in what they said, while referring to my scholarly sources to see how they compared with what the interviewees were telling me. I was careful to analyze the information I gathered from my interviews with a respectful and collaborative approach, ensuring that any information I used portrayed and expressed the interviewees' voices in a way that felt accurate and positive to them. I confirmed that my interviewees give the green light to everything I write about my case study interviews. I paid close attention to how I intended to share the information from my interviews, and hoped to ideally try to work *with* these individuals and their wider communities. This was my main ethical consideration, and it became especially important in my work with the Lenape Indian tribe of Delaware, as the

interviewee from this organization, RuthAnn Purchase, was initially wary of participating in my research due to previous experiences with academia. I promised to run my research and final thesis by the tribal elders, my interviewees, and the other organizations I worked with to ensure a reciprocal, thoughtful, and respectful research process.

<u>Chapter 2: Literature Review</u>

Background

In this study, I investigated how community and close kinship relations are critical to reformulating and reframing our understanding of grassroots environmental justice movements. Through several examples and scholarly sources, I explore the idea that social isolation and the capitalistic competition created within mainstream community structures can hinder progress and collective mobilization. I use a combination of scholarly sources and primary source data from interviews to assert the importance and presence of community-building and strong kinship relations in environmental justice community organizing and resistance. Environmental grassroots organizations and social movements are important opportunities in which to value and focus on building equitable and sustainable communities and practices.

This topic holds great potential in examining the intersection of theoretical frameworks such as critical environmental justice, critical race theory, Black feminist theory, Indigenism, Ecofeminism and queer theory. I engage with the concept of non-normativity as resistance, citing Critical Race Theory, Queer Theory and Black Feminist Theory. I use critical race theory and critical environmental justice, citing authors such as David N. Pellow, Robert E. Jones, Shirley A. Rainey, and Janae Davis. I discuss several works detailing mutual aid efforts and grassroots organizing, including works from Dean Spade, Robert Bullard, Glenn S. Johnson, and Julie Sze. I also explore authors such as Leonard J. Davis, Cathy J. Cohen, Kimberle Crenshaw, as well as Andil Gosine and Nancy C. Unger who are cited in the book *Queer Ecologies* (2010), to inform my discussion of queer and Black feminist theory as theories of non-normativity. Authors such as Donna Haraway, K. P. Whyte, Eric Kinenberg, and M. A. Jaimes Guerrero are instrumental in my discussion of kinship and Indigenism, specifically detailing the importance of traditional notions of kinship that reach far beyond the realm of modern Western community ideals.

Environmental Racism and Injustice

Critical Environmental Justice Scholarship

The environmental justice movement has delineated a need for a radical rethinking of a socially and environmentally sustainable future on local and global levels. During the notable Environmental Justice Summit conference in 1991, participants crafted "the Principles of Environmental Justice," which drew on a collection of anti-racist and ecologically sustainable ideology paired with an emphasis on anti-militarism, anti-imperialism, and gender-justice politics (Pellow, 2016, 3). Still, more nuanced discussions of environmental justice, such as environmental engagement among marginalized groups are less developed and largely left out of the conversation within political contexts (Davis, 2018, 90). Davis (2018) explains the growing body of literature surrounding non-Indigenous political ecologies of conservation that centers the "colonial systems of slavery and its legacies," with a focus on "environmental ideology and practice, resource access and control, and state power," (105). The environmental justice movement has long been composed of people mainly from communities of color, Indigenous communities, and working-class communities. Their central mission is and has been challenging environmental injustice, racism, and gender and class inequalities that result from the disproportionate impacts of environmental harm facing these marginalized groups. Environmental justice offers a vision of what a more equitable future could look like, in the face of environmental racism and inequality (Jones & Rainey, 2006, 474).

Pellow (2016) offers an explanation of how nature discourses have been used to reinforce and uphold "heteronormativity, regulate sexuality, and criminalize and marginalize persons deemed sexually transgressive" (Pellow, 2016, 4). Pellow and other scholars have reimagined environmental studies to include an understanding of the intersection between sexual identities,

expressions, and practices that have been deemed "unnatural" and the way capitalism and individualism have deemed certain subjects, including nature itself, defective and in need of control and subjugation. This discussion calls for the importance of shifting environmental justice studies to account for overlaps in gender, feminist, sexuality, and queer studies. Gender and sexuality variance have been the targets of oppression and environmental exploitation but have also been used as sites of resistance and reclamation. People with gender or sexuality variant identities engage in these non-normative identities and ways of life. They challenge the "colonization of their peoples, cultures, and lands, and that confront enslavement, genocide, and heterosexism" (Pellow, 2016, 12).

A later article by Pellow (2021) asserts that there are generally two phases of environmental justice scholarship. The "first-generation" environmental justice scholarship focused on environmental racism. It worked through the lenses of race and class. The "second generation" extends beyond these lenses and deepens a consideration of how gender, sexuality, and other markers of difference influence environmental justice struggles (Pellow, 2021, 223). Pellow cites BLM co-founder Alicia Garxa, quoting: "Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise" (Pellow, 2021, 221). This highlights the importance of including environmental injustice and environmental racism within the scope of Black liberation and addresses the pertinent need for a more intersectional and all-encompassing approach to liberation and radical reform, as well as abolition, to dismantle systems of oppression that extend to all aspects of life and all social institutions.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory offers a lens through which to analyze attitudes toward, beliefs about and participation in environmental issues that are ascribed to marginalized racial and ethnic groups. Long-standing findings have shown that in the United States, Black, Latinx, and Asian communities all report greater levels of concern for environmental issues than their white counterparts. These findings are consistent even when other aspects of social identities, such as gender and income, are controlled. However, the higher levels of concern among racial and ethnic minorities contrast with the lack of minorities represented in environmental organizations, agencies, and the environmental sciences (Dietz & Whitley, 2018, 12334). Several factors contribute to this disparity between concern and participation. A US national survey found that Black, Latinx, and Asian communities perceived their communities as less concerned than whites. Similarly, within lower-income communities, the study found that people believed themselves to be less concerned than they were. Perceived norms shape peoples' behavior. In this case, what Dietz and Whitley (2018) call the "environmental belief paradox" could be a major factor in the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities active in the current mainstream environmental movement, whether professionally or personally. Racial and ethnic discrimination, and societal, social, and economic inequities, among many other systemic hindrances for people of color, contribute greatly to this disparity.

Evidence suggests that the impact of social norms is greater for "less privileged than for the privileged because the cost of mistakes is much higher for those with fewer resources" (Dietz & Whitley, 2018, 12334). Further, many community-based organizing projects tackling environmental issues often engage in various intersecting social justice movements. This indicates that some environmental engagement among communities of color could be obscured by the broader approach taken by community-based organizations (Dietz & Whitley, 2018,

12335). These authors explain that individuals and households, through collective action, can make important contributions, reducing risks and allowing for the opportunity to take varying approaches to social change. They conclude that though individual action cannot fully solve major problems like climate change, through collective action, the participation of individuals can be very beneficial. They state that "the urgent challenges of global environmental change should encourage more synthetic work that examines how identity and community influence environmental decision making," (Dietz & Whitley, 2018, 12335), alluding to the importance of considering intersecting identities and ideals of community. Correcting false perceptions of lack of environmental consciousness also point to active collaboration and codesign being key aspects of participation in and the success of social justice movements.

Jones and Rainey (2006) further outline perceived norms and notions of environmental engagement, detailing variations among various racial groups. They conclude that public responses to environmental problems are shaped by a variety of factors, including sociocultural, economic, and environmental. They base their claims on cumulative research within the field of environmental justice and assert that those who are most directly exposed to local environmental risks and related health impacts are also those who are the most concerned about their local environments, and likely, most engaged in these injustices and creating movements of resistance and reclamation (Jones & Rainey, 2006, 480). This study concludes that connections between environmental concern, health, and justice are more notable for specific groups of people under particular socio-environmental conditions. This echoes sentiments present in the work of Dietz and Whitley (2018) cited above, that the notion of marginalized communities who are most impacted by environmental injustice being less active in movements for environmental justice is unfounded and largely based on perceived norms and a lack of data.

Conditions of Environmental Injustice

Environmental justice scholars Bullard and Johnson (2000) discuss the emergence, or rather, the newfound attention to grassroots community resistance that has arisen given the glaring injustices which have bred oppressive and dangerous practices, policies, and conditions, particularly regarding environmental injustices. Some of the conditions that have given rise to these grassroots organizing missions include "unequal enforcement of environmental, civil rights, and public health laws; differential exposure of some populations to harmful chemicals, pesticides, and other toxins in the home, school, neighborhood, and workplace," (Bullard & Johnson, 2000, 557-558). Further, Bullard and Johnson (200) adduce "faulty assumptions in calculating, assessing, and managing risks; discriminatory zoning and land use practices; and exclusionary practices that prevent some individuals and groups from participation in decision making or limit the extent of their participation" as being catalysts for grassroots environmental justice movements (Bullard & Johnson, 2000, 557-558).

Rainey and Johnson (2009) write about grassroots activism, particularly the role of women of color within the environmental justice movement. They write about how historically, grassroots organizing has largely been exclusive of people of color. Only within the last three or so decades have grassroots organizations and movements become more inclusive of people of color, despite frontline communities often being predominantly non-white. This inclusion has allowed a wider scope and range of social justice issues impacting a wider variety of people to take up space in these environmentally focused social justice movements. Krauss (1993) discusses the importance of framing toxic waste issues within the context of subjective experiences of "ordinary women" (Krauss, 1993, 259). She asserts that this focus will reveal the "potential for human agency" particularly in response to environmental injustice and human

rights issues (Krauss, 1994, 259). Thus, many environmental justice groups have taken on a bottom-up, democratic approach, often spearheaded mostly by women and operating as collective units to achieve their goals of equity and justice (Rainey & Johnson, 2009, 150-151).

Grassroots community organizing as an act of resistance has gained traction in response to environmentally unjust practices, policies, and living conditions. Some unjust environmental conditions include unequal enforcement of environmental, civil rights, and public health legislation and disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards among vulnerable populations. Risk management, exclusionary practices, and discriminatory zoning laws have resulted in astounding injustice, sparking resistance movements among marginalized communities experiencing environmental injustice (Bullard & Johnson, 2000, 557-558). For example: "African Americans in Louisiana's 'Cancer Alley,' Native Americans on reservations, and Mexicans in the border towns all have their roots in the same economic system [...] characterized by economic exploitation, racial oppression, and devaluation of human life and nature" (Bullard & Johnson, 2000, 573). Industrial plants being located in impoverished areas is often proposed as a way to increase job opportunities for nearby residents. However, having industrial facilities in one's neighborhood does not inherently result in increased jobs for nearby communities. What often ends up happening is that vulnerable communities, typically predominantly people of color and low-income communities, are forced to contend with both disproportionate poverty and pollution. This disparity points to the necessity of community-based practices and grassroots organizing in affected communities as opposed to government or commercial intervention (Bullard & Johnson, 2000, 574).

Grassroots environmental movements often protest hazardous land uses in certain areas, and directly affected communities often spearhead the movements. Much of grassroots

organizing has also included a specific environmental justice focus within their work (Towers, 2010, 23). The growth of environmental justice networks and individual radicalization has led to the grassroots environmental movement being, to an extent, absorbed by the environmental justice movement, as it better describes the specific intersectional nature of these organizing missions. Environmental justice in grassroots organizing has called for distributive and procedural justice, meaning that environmental hazards are "fairly" distributed across all communities. Thus, ideally, all people and communities would be equally protected under the environmental and public health law. Still, this equal protection does not promise complete prevention or mitigation of adverse environmental impacts. Grassroots environmental groups spearheaded by minorities have called out corporations and the government for being complicit in targeting their neighborhoods and creating conditions of environmental racism which have deteriorated the health and well-being of these communities (Towers, 2010, 25). Intra-organizational networking and collaboration have resulted in grassroots environmentalists becoming aware of a distributional and structural injustice pattern among marginalized groups. As a result, many have radicalized their agendas to include a specific focus on environmental justice and environmental racism, often also with an emphasis on mutual aid projects.

Normativity in Economic and Social Structures:

Normativity and Forced Conformity

Social norms and normativity as theoretical frameworks are a central aspect of this research project, specifically as it pertains to being in pursuit of justice and equity. Davis (1995) asserts that the word "normal" can be defined as "constituting, confirming to, not deviating or different from, the common type or standard, regular, usual" (Davis, 1995, 4). The idea that there is a standard norm of what a should be, in terms of what a human body looks like or how a

human body behaves and inhabits space in the world, inherently creates the idea of a "deviant" body. The "norm" creates an idea of what "should" be, created through statistical analysis which creates a new kind of ideal. It creates the norm under which conformity and respectability exist. Davis writes: "The norm powers the new ideal of ranked order, and then is supplemented by the notion of progress, human perfectibility, and the elimination of deviance, to create a dominating, hegemonic vision of what the human body should be" (Davis, 1995, 9). Through normativity and normative social ideals, deviance and non-conformity have been demonized and othered, but have also been weaponized as a tool of resistance and liberation. Reclaiming a marginalized position can be viewed as intentionally opposing standard normativity which seeks to oppress and diminish the generatable power by deviant or disenfranchised peoples.

A crucial aspect of normativity and conformity has been through the hegemonic process of patriarchal colonialism. This refers to the colonial project of imposing Eurocentric notions of men as superior to women and white people as superior to non-white people through Euroamerican international law and prescribed social norms (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003, 60). Patriarchal colonialism is a form of control and subjugation has been carried out through colonization, slavery, and the reshaping of natural landscapes, which has greatly disadvantaged and oppressed Indigenous Americans among other marginalized groups (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003, 58). A central way that colonialism has changed the landscape of the world is through the industrial revolution and the introduction of a capitalist market economy. This shift in the political structure of the world was necessitated through the authoritative ideal of the nuclear family structure, creating an ideal unit of consumption, which is isolated from its greater community and in competition with other nuclear family units.

Forced normativity through patriarchal colonialism and capitalism have been called out and contended with by other marginalized groups as well. The Black Lives Matter website used to explicitly state: "We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and 'villages' that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable" (Demise, 2020, n.p.) though this wording has since been changed. Demise (2020) writes about how the colonizing forces of white supremacy have taken up a particular interest in attacking Black family structures. Specifically, the intentional state project of diminishing and suppressing Black femininity, motherhood, and matriarchal tradition. He argues that: "the most brutal social structure that Western civilization has managed to force on the present-day Black family—the African family—is the alienating nuclear family structure" (Demise, 2020, n.p.). The nuclear family structure resulted in great social and environmental degradation by erasing traditional ways of living. The nuclear family thrives on competition with neighbors and extended families rather than communal living and collective strength. Through the disconnection of families and diminishing of African-rooted practices, like fostering loving community and fictive kinship, that Black peoples throughout U.S. history have used to contend with white supremacy, these communities are actively being suppressed and undermined (Demise, 2020, n.p.).

Rejection of Normativity through Social Action:

Social Responses to Environmental Injustice

In response to these overtly oppressive structures, marginalized groups are resisting and collectively organizing in opposition to widespread injustice. Julie Sze (2020) asserts that the introduction of neoliberalism has centered markets, capital, and consumerism over "communitarian notions of belonging or justice" (Sze, 2020, 2). Social movements developing in

the face of environmental injustice are mobilizing expansive and large groups of people, within and beyond local contexts (Sze, 2020, 3). Sze explains that environmental violence is inextricably intertwined with the history of the United States. It is a part of a political and economic system which is based on racialized extraction of natural resources as well as labor. She elaborates that capitalism itself is dependent on control, particularly a control of nature, but it also relies on the control and exploitation of people of color (Sze, 2020, 7). She believes that environmental justice cannot be achieved or hoped for within existing liberal and capitalist institutions, as they cannot solely depend on market-based or technological solutions (Sze, 2020, 8). Instead, we need to shift our focus towards bottom-up solutions that center history, art, love, and refusal (Sze, 2020, 9). Sze's book argues that environmental justice movements are freedom struggles, and that this movement centers freedom through "imagining and enacting solidarity, radical hope, anti-consumerism, and anti-capitalism," (Sze, 2020, 14). She outlines a tangible path forward, in which grassroots community organizing is central, in an attempt to create bottom-up solutions, emphasizes the value of collective action, and engages social justice through a lens of radical hope, love, and communitarianism.

One of the most crucial aspects of resistance in the face of forced normativity and conformity is through the practice of mutual aid and grassroots organizing, in which on the ground communities resist and self-preserve through practices of kinship and relationship building. In the book, *Mutual aid: Building Solidarity during this crisis (and the next),* Dean Spade (2020) discusses the importance of mutual aid and how the practice allows people to become involved in social movements based on their immediate concerns and material needs. Mutual aid produces a new, or perhaps reclaimed/resurgenced, way of living where people operate based on solidarity, which fosters systems of care and well-being that address systemic

harm and oppression. Spade explains that mutual aid is key to building successful social movements and mutually reinforcing caring relationships. He explains that for people to be politically and socially active, their basic needs must be met. This is where mutual aid comes in, as successful organizing comes only when folks are in a position where they are not struggling to survive (Spade, 2020, n.p.). This book also talks about the importance of breaking down stigma, shame, and isolation when it comes to surviving and overcoming crises. As outlined by Spade, capitalism results in social problems that flourish under its exploitative systems, where the inequitable distribution of resources and shouldering of social and environmental burdens is attributed to individual moral failings as opposed to systemic inequalities that are perpetually reproduced (Spade, 2020, n.p.).

Mutual Aid

Mutual aid organizing is an increasingly integral part of grassroots movements, and environmental grassroots is no different. Mutual aid allows people to become involved with social movements based on their pressing needs and concerns. It provides new social networks and kinship connections through solidarity and collaboration, which allow for the creation of systems that foster kindness and directly address harm. Mutual aid projects are crucial to meet peoples' needs and mobilize them to create movements of resistance (Spade, 2020, n.p.). Mutual aid is important for this because collective collaboration and mutualism to meet each other's needs address the undeniable reality that the systems currently in place will most likely not meet peoples' needs effectively. Capitalism and colonialism have created a societal structure that has broken down historical mutualism and care networking systems. Social inequities that result from exploitation and discrimination within mutual aid networks are understood as problems of oppressive systems, as opposed to individual shortcomings (Spade, 2020, n.p.). Mutual aid sheds

light on systemic failures and shows a new way forward through community-building and returning to traditional notions of kinship. Mutual aid during environmental disasters has been especially beneficial and prevalent. Following destructive storms, floods, fires, and earthquakes, people have often come together in resistance and collaboration when the government often fails to address or inevitably addresses the fallout (Spade, 2020, n.p.).

Non-normativity as Resistance:

Black Feminist Theory

Grassroots and mutual aid organizing can be framed within the context of normativity and deviance, which is situated in queer and Black feminist theory. Within the context of my thesis, these theories ground my discussion of the politics of deviancy, a reclamation of marginalization, and a rejection of respectability politics. The idea of deviation from normative modes of existing is borrowed from queer and Black feminist theory (Cohen, 2004, n.p.) and applies greatly to environmental justice and community organizing. Deviating from constructed ideals of normativity is an idea regarding marginalized identities and how engaging in socially unacceptable behaviors and practices is in and of itself a form of resistance (Cohen, 2004, n.p.). By not adhering to projected ideals of what society should look like and how people should behave, one is reclaiming marginalization and weaponizing it in an attempt to reclaim their own identity and place in the world, ultimately searching for liberation and autonomy (Cohen, 2004, n.p.). This is and of itself is a 'queering' of how one exists in the world and outlines the importance of recognizing less mainstream forms of organizing and community building.

Black feminist perspectives delineate the need for an intersectional lens when discussing the oppression of both women and communities of color. Crenshaw (1989) explores a Black feminist critique of feminist theory and antiracist politics, asserting that a more intersectional

position must be taken within the context of Black women's liberation (140). Definitions of patriarchy and the way in which it has been carried out have historically been based on the experience of white women (156). On the other hand, experiences of encountering racism have been largely based Black men, resulting in Black women's protection and safety being dependent on the extent to which their experiences coincide with either white women, or Black men (143). This is especially prevalent within the field of environmental justice, as much of the burden of environmental injustice within affected communities falls on women, especially Black, Indigenous, and other women of color. It is especially important when considering the general lack of representation of Black women and other women of color within the mainstream movement for environmental justice. However, more localized, grassroots organizing initiatives around environmental justice are largely women of color and directly affected community members whose voices are all too often silenced.

This is where the politics of deviance come in, as with this silencing of women and affected community members has also come a powerful resistance to and reclamation of marginalization. In "Deviance as Resistance," Cohen (2004) discusses the reclamation of non-normative ways of living among marginalized communities. Cohen discusses the idea of simultaneous repressive and generative power, where marginalized groups and individuals contrast their actions and lives to dominant narratives of normativity and respectability (Cohen, 2004, 30). Respectability represents the expectation to conform to dominant norms. It can be seen as a policing and sterilizing of nonconformist, deviant behavior among oppressed groups and individuals (Cohen, 2004, 31). Cohen explains the idea of Black counter publics, which can be seen as a queering of one's participation in the public sphere, representing a rejection of normativity and respectability politics. Through individual acts of deviance, marginalized groups

will be able to generate some level of autonomy and self-possession in opposition to dispossession, which could lead to the development of oppositional worldviews and counter-narratives (Cohen, 2004, 41). By participating in a deviant life, individual choices opposing normative ideas of society's structure create a space for these counter-publics and counter-narratives about Black queer life (Cohen, 2004, 38). Deviant individuals represent those who are forced into marginalization but are also actively unwilling to conform to normativity and respectability, and "lived opposition," and autonomous self-possession are actively chosen (Cohen, 2004, 43).

Queer Theory and Ecofeminism

Black feminist theory and theories of normativity intersect greatly with queer theory, which is an increasingly essential part of the conversation of environmental justice. Greta Gaard (1997) outlines the need for a "queer ecofeminism" in which the recognition that many different systems of oppression are "mutually reinforcing" becomes a more central aspect of both ecological and feminist movements (114). She writes about the connection between oppressive structures which impact people, and the similar oppression and exploitation of nature (114). The ecofeminist movement was spurred by the realization that the liberation of women cannot be achieved until nature has also been liberated (115). Gaard specifically details the need for ecofeminism to intersect with queer theory in order for it to be most inclusive (115). An important aspect of both queer and ecofeminist theory is the idea of superiority, delineated through the construction of the "self", which is based on difference from the "other" (Gaard, 1997, 116). The prescribed superiority of the self is then used to justify and explain the subordination of the other (Gaard, 1997, 116). This is a central aspect of environmental justice issues as well, in that largely unaffected communities have difficulty deriving compassion or

concern for those who are directly affected, due to economic, racial, social, and other constructed notions of difference.

From the book *Queer Ecologies* (2010) I cite two chapters by authors Andil Gosine and Nancy C. Unger who discuss ideas surrounding normativity and community within the context of queerness as a deviation from social convention. They consider the nuclear family and how normative ideals of the family are forced on non-white and otherwise marginalized communities. Gosine claims that "sexual diversity" in all forms is demonized, and within the dominant narrative, non-white, queer sexualities are blamed for destroying the environment. This book also ties in ecofeminism and explores the relationship between women and the degradation of nature. Non-normative community building, love, and reproduction challenge patriarchal capitalism and result in a growing number of non-conforming people and non-normative (queer) communities (Gosine, 2010, 166). Unger discusses how non-white and Indigenous communities are criticized and demonized for having larger family structures and having more kids, as this is projected as environmentally and socially irresponsible, even though these communities and families have a fraction of the carbon footprint than that of the normative white nuclear family of 4-5 people (Unger, 2010, 179). This is just one example of the oppressive and environmentally destructive nature of normative, capitalistic ideals around community.

Kinship and Indigeneity:

Kin Availability

One way that the normative nuclear family structure has been forced on communities is through its construction among immigrating families in the U.S.-Mexico border. Landale et al. (2002) conducted a binational longitudinal analysis demonstrating family stability and structure among Mexican children with immigrant parents in the U.S. versus Mexican children who stayed

in Mexico. In many circumstances, families immigrating from Mexico will be more likely to succeed if they immigrate to a nuclear family unit. "Functional" families, which do not satisfy the narrow conception of the family under the nuclear family structure but can meet the care-taking needs of the children in a family, are often excluded from successful conceptions of family structure within the immigration process. This study examines nuclear and extended family structures and found that Mexican children of immigrants experienced distinctly more family instability than children in Mexico. Mexican children of immigrants in the U.S. were more likely to transition from extended family households to simple households after immigrating. Further, children of immigrants were less likely to live with married parents and more likely to live with cohabiting parents than children in Mexico, insinuating a forced upholding of the nuclear family structure among immigrants. Children of immigrants in the U.S. were much less likely to live in households with extended family structures than their Mexican counterparts, likely because of kin availability and selective emigration structures that prohibit extended families from immigrating in non-normative structures (Landale et al., 2015, n.p.).

Kin availability and expansive community relations have been shown in numerous examples to improve the quality of life of those engaging in expansive kinship relations. Having a strong community has even been said to reduce mortality rates under particular circumstances. Klinenberg (2002) writes about the Chicago heat wave of 1995, citing social and economic conditions of vulnerability as the main contributors to mortality during this deathly disaster. Some conditions of vulnerability included living alone and not having social contacts nearby. Klinenberg's book, *Heat Wave,* is an in-depth analysis of vulnerabilities and what contributed to certain populations of people withstanding natural disasters better than others, despite no glaringly obvious differences. The Chicago heat wave resulted in almost 800 deaths, and one of

the major findings was that living alone, and general loneliness resulted in a higher mortality rate within certain neighborhoods and populations. Local experts in Chicago asserted that Latinx peoples' "family values" made these communities less vulnerable to the heat wave. Chicago's Latinx communities tended to live in areas with high population densities and busy commercial centers. Elderly white people, who were largely financially stable but isolated from their communities, had much higher rates of mortality. On the other hand, predominantly Black neighborhoods had high heat wave deaths but were conversely assessed as having strong familial and community networks. However, Black communities had been experiencing abandonment by employers, stores, and residents in recent decades. The author asserted in an interview: "The social ecology of abandonment, dispersion, and decay makes systems of social support exceedingly difficult to sustain" (Klinenberg, 2002, n.p.). This displays the importance of a strong social foundation and kinship network and how these things can increase one's resilience in the face of crisis and tragedy. Yet strong community and kinship can only go so far when people are also faced with economic struggles and commercial deterioration.

Indigenous Kinship

Indigenous American communities have been forced to contend with forced conformity for official tribal recognition while also upholding traditional ideals of strong kinship and community in order to maintain resilience and uphold ancient cultural values. The term Indigenism refers to a global movement which has gained traction in recent decades and is based on Ecofeminist and post-colonial perspectives. Indigenism addresses "trickly down the patriarchy," which concerns male domination in world tribal politics. This phenomenon also led to "Native Womanism," which uplifts sacred kinship traditions and centers gender egalitarianism (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003, 58). Colonialism being forced on Indigenous communities and their

traditional cultures has resulted in a process of designating tribal nations with "quasi-sovereignty" within the U.S. This created Federal-Indian relations based on various treaties and agreements negotiated between the government and tribal members (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003, 62).

Jaimes*Guerrero (2003) discusses patriarchal colonialism and Native American women's perspective on early feminism, which came about because of Euro-American patriarchy in U. S. society. He further discusses the myth of "tribalism" regarding the language and laws of U. S. colonialism, which was forcefully imposed upon Native American peoples and their respective cultures (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003, 58). The paper compares and contrasts these Native American women's experiences with pre-patriarchal and pre-colonialist times, in the context of "indigenous kinship" and traditional communalism. The author writes: "The term Indigenism is conceptualized in a postcolonialist context, as well as a perspective on Ecofeminism to challenge what can be called a "trickle down the patriarchy" that marks male dominance in tribal politics" (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003, 58). This piece calls for "Native Womanism" in sacred kinship traditions and advocates giving women respect and authority in "matrilineal descendancy and matrifocal decision making" for increased gender equitability (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003, 59).

Whyte (2014) explores the domain of indigeneity and how Indigenous peoples must adapt to climate-induced environmental changes. Under this domain, there is a disruption in the continuance of systems of responsibility that communities rely on for living in close connection with the earth. Some Indigenous women feel a responsibility to their communities under these conditions and, as a result, are more likely to be exposed to the harms of climate change and environmental injustice. Despite their own health suffering, they are choosing to take on leadership roles in climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. The author argues that this is

an important aspect to consider is "the political responsibilities of nonindigenous parties for supporting distinctly Indigenous efforts at climate change adaptation and mitigation" (Whyte, 2014, 599).

Expansive Kinship

Davis et al., (2019) discuss the plantation mode of development throughout history and consider white supremacy, capitalism, and modern development as aspects of the current environmental justice crisis in the U.S. The paper cites multispecies framing as outlined by Indigenous West Africans. Davis et al. (2019) conceptualizes the plantation within an understanding of human control and subjugation of nature. The work highlights the socioecological ethos of some enslaved peoples' practices, exploring how these practices can be traced back to Indigenous West African practices of "good use," which was founded on the idea that land is a source of spiritual and material nourishment. In this tradition, humans are responsible for its protection and ensuring nature's use for collective benefit. The idea of "good use" was maintained during the era of slavery in the U.S., and enslaved Africans used their traditional knowledge to combat European colonialism and land subjugation. The idea of "rational use," which influenced colonial expansion, contrarily promoted seizures, enclosures, privatization, commodification, and extreme cultivation to accumulate and generate excess, was in direct opposition with these traditional West African notions of sustainable land-use (Davis et al., 2019). This source is helpful in a discussion of how cultural, ethnic, and racial dynamics play a part in environmental justice issues throughout history and how marginalized groups who experience disproportionate effects resist and mobilize in opposition to these oppressive practices in the name of land expansion and economic gain.

Haraway (2016) outlines a concrete way to reject ideals that center economic growth and environmental destruction: by expanding our "kin" networks. She claims there is an essential need for humanity to rethink kinship within the current epoch. She explains that the task at hand is to make kin through "inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other" (Haraway, 2016, 1). Haraway claims that we must make trouble by stirring up a tangible response to environmental devastation and injustice, while also settling and rebuilding through the practice of kinship. The notion of "oddkin" instead of "godkin" is prevalent throughout this book. This means a central focus on "multispecies flourishing," where kinship is extended to human as well as other-than-human life, as opposed to more normative ideas of genealogical and biogenic kinship. "Oddkin" requires us to engage with other life in "unexpected collaborations and combinations," we can create collective knowledge and action through a wide variety of tactics (Haraway, 2016, 2). Haraway explains the need for a stretching and recomposition of kin, based on the idea that on a deep, core level, all earthly beings are kin (Haraway, 2016, 103). She states: "All critters share a common "flesh," laterally, semiotically, and genealogically," and just as ancestors are unfamiliar kin, all earthly kin is unfamiliar, aside from living family, and that this should put us in active pursuit of expansive kinship relations (Haraway, 2016, 103).

Post-capitalism

Through normative familial and social ideals, marginalized communities have been made increasingly vulnerable to systemic inequalities and discrimination. One way of reclaiming suppressed ways of living and ideologies among marginalized groups can be restructuring their communities and expanding kinship. By mobilizing themselves, vulnerable communities can collaboratively address individual and collective needs to improve their quality of life and create

broader social change. Non-normative community building as an act of resistance can lend itself to a vision of what a post-capitalist world might look like, where relations with other humans and nature are reciprocal and basic needs are consistently met. An example of non-normative community building among marginalized groups is the fictive kinship networks created among homeless people for emotional and material support and protection. Particularly among homeless youth, there is growing literature on the importance of kinship and group dynamics in survival and safety (Smith, 2008, 756). These youths created self-supportive networks to meet each other's basic needs, such as food, shelter, and protection (Smith, 2008, 757). These "street families" offer homeless youth relationship opportunities to foster intimacy, support, and trust even under highly undesirable circumstances (Smith, 2008, 759).

Eco-anarchism

The eco-anarchist movement shows examples of sustainable kinship and community seen through the lens of post-capitalist ideology. Eco-anarchism is a political ecology based on radical communitarianism, committed to community well-being, and offering alternatives to systems of exploitation and destruction. Eco-anarchism seeks to address and prevent socio-ecological disasters and create a system that fosters social and ecological transformation within a free ecological society (Clark, 2020, 9). An important example of eco-anarchist ideals in modern history is the Sarvodaya movement in India. Sarvodaya members have been called "Gentle Anarchists" and are known for revolutionary resistance in response to British empirical control through nonviolent direct action. This movement follows a guiding principle of pursuing the common good and addressing systems of domination. Their key ethical ideology, ahimsa, meaning 'non-harm,' delineates the importance of respecting the innate goodness of all living

things. Sarvodaya and eco-anarchism believe in societal ideals based on universalism and communism as opposed to domination and oppression (Vettickal, 2002, n.p.).

Sarvodayan politics and economics attempted to uphold a system of democratic self-rule that centers on ideas of autonomous local community-building. There are several aspects of democratic self-rule, including a village council for local governance, a village assembly, and a community-controlled economic system. Under this economic structure, production is based on real material needs instead of capital surplus (Vettickal, 2002, n.p.). This system of cooperation, in theory, practices bioregional production rooted in reciprocal and sustainable land use. A sustenance economy would ideally end the exploitation of workers and land, likely preventing ecological deterioration. Sarvodaya established a campaign for bhoodan, meaning 'gift of land,' under which land was donated for projects of cooperative village farming. As a result of this campaign, 5 million acres of land have been put into cooperative projects. "The goal was for all localities to be transformed into self-governing, largely self-sufficient eco-communities" (Vettickal, 2002, n.p.). The movement has also attempted to establish a 'peace army,' which would be mediators instead of police. To end systemic violence and encourage peaceful communalism, state police power would ideally be replaced by a non-violent group such as the peace army. The intention of these systems of leadership was to ensure that every village and neighborhood would have a functional example of cooperative, caring, and life-affirming community-building to foster a gradual transformation for the entire state and eventually the world (Vettickal, 2002, n.p.). Eco-anarchism provides a powerful example of how non-normative community building and anti-capitalism go hand in hand and together are crucial to fostering and rebuilding social and ecological well-being.

Conclusion

The literature review in Chapter 2 clearly shows the importance of community and reclaiming collective identity and mobilization in the face of environmental injustice. It also displays the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to environmental justice studies. My research project meaningfully adds to previously explored research topics within the realm of grassroots activism and community building, highlighting a need for further investigation. This research is unique because of my exploration of non-normativity and differential forms of community building. The idea of non-normative community building is centered around the notion that currently practiced and more dominant forms of community and kinship are based in isolation and competition. Alternatively, non-normative community-building practices would be based on mutual aid and communal care, where individual needs become community needs and are addressed collectively. The topics of intimate, caring community relations and kinship are extremely crucial to the discussion of grassroots efforts. Specifically in their focus of working with on-the-ground communities directly experiencing environmental injustice at the hands of the city and state. By relying on neighbors, communities, and local organizers, many organizations and activists have been able to push their movements forward and create meaningful change without compromising their values and beliefs.

Chapter 3: Counter Example to my Case Studies

Mainstream Environmental Justice and its Potential Shortcomings: The Sierra Club

In this chapter, I use the Sierra Club, one of the most influential and well-known U.S. environmental organizations, as an example of how mainstream organizational structures can be problematic and have glaring shortcomings. Firstly, I want to make a distinction between what I am referring to as normativity and the idea of a normative organization. When I speak of normativity, I am referring to an adherence to socially acceptable behaviors, often because of patriarchal and hierarchical structures and institutions, dating back to colonization. Non-normativity, then, is a rejection of these restrictive social norms that deem certain individuals and groups above others. In my exploration, I associate a non-normative label with grassroots organizations. These groups center community-based projects and work to meet peoples' material needs as opposed to solely working within policy or lobbying, attempting to create sweeping changes, and working within normative structures to do so. However, my labeling of community-organizing as non-normative contradicts notions of utilitarian versus normative organization (Etzioni, 1975, n.p.).

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1975) developed these organizational labels, which are still relevant and widely used today. He designated utilitarian organizations as those which have some tangible benefit incentivising participation. For instance, positions in utilitarian organizations pay their employees or participants, have salaried positions, and people are often hired on a contractual basis. On the other hand, Etzioni characterizes normative organizations as those which are joined on a voluntary basis as a way to collectively and mobilize a group based on a common interest or goal for some form of personal satisfaction. By Etzioni's definition, non-profit and community organizations would often be characterized as normative, instead of

non-normative, and what I refer to as normative organizations would instead be utilitarian (Etzioni, 1975, n.p.). However, these organizational definitions fail to recognize that voluntary organizing and participation can and do often offer tangible benefits, which is a central part of my argument for the importance of grassroots community organizing. For the purposes of my research, I will not apply the theory of normative and utilitarian organizations, however this distinction does come up in one of my case studies, which I will explain in the next chapter.

The Sierra Club is one of the oldest environmental organizations in the United States and categorizes itself as a community organization. Their mission statement includes protecting and exploring wild earthly areas, promoting responsible use of resources, and to educate and enlist people as earthly advocates and protectors, using only lawful means to do so. California's branch of the organization specifies that their mission included enabling grassroots activists to speak as a united voice to promote conservation and sustainability in California. The Sierra club has a staff of advocates and organizers who "defend and advance environmental policies," (*About the Sierra Club*, n.d., n.p.). Grassroots organizing is mainly characterized by the groups' membership being mostly made up of ordinary people, particularly people among directly affected communities (Bullard & Johnson, 2000, 557-558). Thus, grassroots organizations are meant to represent the masses, and often operate on a volunteer basis. The Sierra Club may be by some definitions a grassroots organization, but it operates very differently from the community-based organizations I will be discussing in my case studies. The Sierra Club has encountered controversies and intra-organizational issues because of their organizational structure, which I will expand upon further (*About the Sierra Club,* n.d., n.p.).

Sze (2020) discusses criticisms of the Sierra Club dating back to the 1990s, explaining the importance of intersectionality being at the root of environmental justice movements. She

explains that the Sierra Club as well as other mainstream environmental organizations were criticized, mainly by communities of color, for the lack of diversity in both the organization's demographics and in their approaches to environmental problems. Specifically, they were exposed as being mainly focused on lawsuits, land trusts, and national-level policymaking which came at the expense of local communities and grassroots organizing initiatives (Sze, 2020, 15). Anti-immigration groups and advocates of population-control made arguments, informed by eugenics and racism in mainstream environmentalism, that more people mean more pollution. Based on this assertion, there was a growing sentiment of anti-immigration as being inextricably linked to environmentalism. In 2004, there was an election carried out in order for an anti-immigration faction to become a part of the Sierra Club board of directors (Sze, 2020, 15). Though the anti-immigration faction lost the election, discriminatory practices and the entertaining of such problematic ideas have been present within mainstream environmentalism. This may be an example of these discriminatory ideas being directly manifested within a large-scale environmental organization.

One long-standing issue has been the organization's founder, John Muir, being outwardly racist during his lifetime. John Muir founded the Sierra Club based on the premise of creating Yosemite National Park, to protect the natural beauty of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The area Muir designates as Yosemite, however, was already inhabited by the Ahwahneechee people, who had lived there long before Muir's declarations of its pristine natural beauty (Fox, 2020, n.p.). It was Muir's intention of protecting Yosemite that led to his founding of the Sierra Club in 1892, though his mission failed to ensure any sort of benefit for the original and rightful inhabitants of this land. Muir used words like "dirty" to refer to Indigenous Americans he encountered and had been known to use harmful slurs to describe Black people. Muir also was

publicly and closely associated with Henry Fairfield Osborn, who played a role in the founding of the American Eugenics Society (Fox, 2020, n.p.).

Michael Brune, the Sierra Club's executive director, prior to his recent resignation, called out Muir's racism and the troublesome founding of the organization, claiming that it wasn't just Muir who was racist, but rather the entire historical system of creating wilderness areas was itself racist. Brune openly admitted that Muir's abhorrent racism continues to alienate Indigenous people and people of color who interact with the organization. Brune characterized the early years of the Sierra Club as "basically a mountaineering club for middle and upper-class white people" (Fox, 2020, n.p.), further admitting to the organizations' exclusionary and problematic beginnings. The Sierra Club has more recently put more emphasis on diversifying the organization, particularly its leadership, and ensuring that Indigenous people, Black people, and other people of color be at the forefront of important organizational decision-making processes. They have also committed to further investing and emphasizing racial justice and environmental justice work more broadly within their mission statement (Fox, 2020, n.p.).

In 2010, Michael Brune, who was still acting executive director, made an announcement on behalf of the Sierra Club that the organization had been accepting large swaths of money from Chesapeake Energy, one of the largest gas-drilling companies in the world. Between the years 2007 and 2010 the Sierra Club had taken $25 million of gas-drilling money, and Brune first admitted it when he announced his decision to discontinue accepting donations from Chesapeake Energy (Walsh, 2012, n.p.). Brune's declaration after years of secrecy appeared to the public to curb an impending public relations problem, as opposed to a true acknowledgement of misconduct, according to Fox. Many saw his admitting of this transaction to gain credit and public recognition for his decision to refuse taking more money, despite the years of secrecy

leading up to his announcement. This news was especially striking and unsettling to environmentalists and environmental justice communities in Pennsylvania and New York. The Marcellus Shale, which is along the border between Pennsylvania and New York, is surrounded by land that has been leased to the gas industry and has led to a plethora of public health concerns in the surrounding residential areas (Walsh, 2012, n.p.).

The discovery that the Sierra Club, one of the most well-known and the oldest environmental groups in the country, had been taking money from an industry that was responsible for so much destruction and subsequent human rights violations was astonishing and disturbing to many, especially in these communities (Steingraber, 2012, n.p.). Grassroots organizers have been fighting for their lives in response to industrial development and land occupation by Chesapeake Energy, and it became abundantly clear that local communities organizing initiatives were not being represented or supported by this larger-scale environmental group. Following Brune's declaration in 2010, local organizers had hopes that the Sierra Club would publicly vocalize their support for the environmental groups in Pennsylvania and New York seeking statewide prohibitions of fracking. Steingraber (2012) claims that this never happened and asserts that the Sierra Club may have served as a political cover for the gas industry and protected politicians who do the bidding of oil and gas companies. They have been admittedly complicit in bringing large-scale fossil fuel extraction onshore, despite their founding mission of environmental protection and human rights advocacy (Steingraber, 2012, n.p.).

Goodman (2010) explains this issue further, explaining that the issue of fracking is particularly prevalent for Philadelphia, as New York City has banned fracking in its watershed. A spokesperson for the Marcellus Shale Coalition, which is a group of over 70 gas-drilling companies, presented misleading statistical information regarding the safety of the gas drilling

along the Marcellus Shale, based on research that was funded in part by the oil industry. The study concluded that no severance tax should be forced on the Marcellus Shale gas drillers and claimed that no fracking operation in that area had ever been tied to water contamination (Goodman, 2010, n.p.). According to the literature, it was quite a shock and disappointment to many when the public became aware that the Sierra Club had been taking donations from Chesapeake Energy. The secrecy of this exchange prior to Brune's announcement is an example of how the Sierra Club differs from the grassroots organizations I explore in my case studies.

In my case studies, I found that all three of my interviewees attested to the interconnectedness, honest, and collaborative nature of their respective organizations and environmental movements. In the situation with Chesapeake Energy, it seems that the Sierra Club was operating under false pretenses in their assertion that their organization protects and advocates for the environment and victims of environmental injustice. This exemplifies that the Sierra Club was and perhaps still is operating as an entity that is largely removed from and unengaged in the communities it seeks to serve and protect. Further, the sense of accountability, social responsibility, and public transparency that is apparent in the grassroots organizations I studied have not always been similarly upheld in the Sierra Club, which is a well-funded, widely influential, and more mainstream group than their grassroots counterparts. My main takeaway from the comparison of these examples of different types of environmental justice organizations is that grassroots activism is uniquely defined by radical acts of hope, defiance, and community building. This contradicts certain mainstream non-profit organizational models, in their willingness to compromise, conform, and thus their potential inability to truly combat systems of oppression.

Chapter 4: Fighting "Pollution Prostitution"

Case Study #1: Zulene Mayfield of Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living

Fine particulate matter pollution has been a major contributor to increasing rates of asthma in the city of Philadelphia. PM2.5 pollution in Philadelphia, formed by nitrogen oxide emissions from power plants, is ranked the 12th worst out of 187 metropolitan areas within the United States. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "elevated levels of fine particulate matter in the air pose significant health concerns for the people of Philadelphia and many areas in the United States," (Griffin, 2019, n.p.). Nicetown, a neighborhood in North Philadelphia, has a 99% minority population, and is experiencing extreme health disparities due to air pollution. Children living in Nicetown experience the highest rates of asthma hospitalization in all of Philadelphia. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has classified Nicetown as an "Environmental Justice Area," which is defined as a location in which either at least 30% of the inhabitants are from minority groups or 20% are below the poverty level and are experiencing environmental discrimination. Nicetown's population is over 60% Black and around 40% live below the poverty line. In 2017, the Philadelphia Department of Air management Services approved a building permit for a heat and power plant in Nicetown. The plant approval allowed emissions of over 20 tons of volatile organic compounds each year in addition to the emissions already present in the area, because of the bus traffic and nearby highways (Griffin, 2019, n.p.).

The demographics of majority minority neighborhoods, like Nicetown, are desirable sites for stakeholders and developers to institute environmentally harmful land uses. For the most part, low-income residents, and communities of color in these neighborhoods lack the resources and political power to dispute such land uses, as the companies responsible have the financial

capability to sway elected officials and fend off community backlash (Griffin, 2019, n.p.). Chester, a city located in nearby Delaware County, is similarly notorious for environmental racism within its communities. Chester's population has a predominantly Black population and is one of the poorest communities in Pennsylvania. Conversely, the city is situated within Delaware county, which has a majority white, affluent population. Until recently, Philadelphia burned all its recyclable plastic at an incinerator located in Chester. The city still sends around 30% of its trash to waste-to-energy facilities, one of which is centrally located in Chester, the other in nearby Camden, New Jersey (Jaramillo, 2019, n.p.). The Delaware Valley Resource Recovery Facility in Chester emits more particulate matter than any other facility in the country. The Covanta Camden Energy Recovery Facility is the second largest emitter of lead among incinerators across the country. Zulene Mayfield is the chair of Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living (CRCQL, pronounced "circle"), which is a group fighting against the city's harmful incinerator site. CRCQL is a grassroots community-based organization, and is one of my case studies, as Zulene Mayfield kindly agreed to participate as an interviewee in my research. She was quoted by WHYY, saying: "It's literally killing people. The City of Brotherly Love chooses not to incinerate their trash within their borders, they don't mind poisoning our children" (Jaramillo, 2019, n.p.).

Chester is a city in Delaware County, Pennsylvania which has been plagued by environmental justice and discriminatory siting issues for decades. As explained in chapter 2, with a predominantly poor, Black population, the city has been a convenient site for undesirable land uses. Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living (CRCQL, pronounced "circle") is a community-led grassroots organization, founded in 1992 in response to the city's pervasive environmental racism. CRCQL is an activist group largely made up of Chester residents who are

concerned about air pollution and subsequent health problems in their own neighborhoods. The group has employed many methods of activism and community change, including court testimonies, letter writing, canvassing, and working with other advocacy groups. They use non-violent direct action, for example they have held many public hearings and meetings which are a necessary part of educating and empowering residents, as the health impacts of the trash incinerator and other harmful industrial land uses are often widely unknown by affected communities. CRCQL has been successful in fending off other industrial polluting projects proposed in the Chester area. The organization has also brought widespread attention to the environmental racism and pollution segregation prevalent in areas, predominantly populated by low-income communities and people of color (*About CRCQL,* n.d., n.p.).

Zulene Mayfield is a long-time resident of and environmental justice organizer in Chester and the founder of CRCQL. In 1992, a large-scale trash incinerator was built a block away from her neighborhood, which was the catalyst for her long-lasting dedicated participation in the fight against environmental racism in Chester. She has been committed to the fight for environmental justice for over thirty years. She was thrust into the world of environmental justice, as her very own community and family members were being directly implicated. The Covanta Trash Incinerator, located in Chester county, is now the largest trash incinerator in the county and has proven to have severe and even deadly consequences for nearby residents. In my interview with Mayfield, my first question was how she got involved in environmental justice organizing, to which she responded "the environment jumped on top of us" explaining that her involvement in environmental justice organizing was not a choice she made, but rather a necessary mode of survival in response to the incinerator. She explained that when the incinerator came in 1992, no

one knew what it was. They have been trying to shut it down ever since, to preserve the lives and livelihoods of Chester residents.

Mayfield says that a key aspect of CRCQL's current mission is to keep the issue alive and relevant, as the incinerator has existed for so long at this point it is easy to lose sight of the issue's severity. She says that CRCQL organizes in any and every way that they can, by going on the radio, making comments for news outlets, staying active on social media and their website, as well as holding weekly meetings among others. They engage with people outside of the directly affected Chester community who assist and are equally concerned. Even if they aren't directly impacted, many people see the importance of their mission and participate because it is a good cause. Mayfield characterized her own work as the organization's chair as tedious and time-consuming. She spends most of her time working with other people, which can be exhausting in its own way, but the collectivity and community-minded work ensures she doesn't shoulder the burdens alone.

Mayfield adamantly opposed my characterization of CRCQL as non-normative, and understandably so. She was very clear that she did not want CRCQL to be labeled or boxed in. This organization and its mission is a matter of life and death for Mayfield and her community, not something to be dissected or characterized by academic jargon. She sees all social issues plaguing her community as being interconnected, further elaborating on not wanting her work to be boxed into a certain category. She explains that CRCQL "gets the pulse of the community" and shifts its focus to ensure that issues impacting the community's quality of life and that are personally relevant to them are also being addressed. She cited police brutality and issues in the Delaware county school system as a couple of the other social issues CRCQL focuses on and is tuned in to. Further, Mayfield claimed that what she does and what the group does is normal,

while what big-name environmental organizations, like the Sierra Club, are doing is what should be considered not normal. This relates to the idea of a normative organization, and that it is one based on voluntary membership inspired by a shared interest of common goal. Instead of characterizing CRCQL and Mayfield's community as non-normative, I will use the phrase non-conformist, to uphold a differentiation between CRCQL's organizational structure and that of more mainstream groups, like the Sierra Club.

I asked Mayfield if she would talk a bit about what land sovereignty means to her. She explained that her community is being pushed off of their land and stripped of sovereignty. Currently, Penn American Energy is intending to construct a liquid natural gas facility and export terminal in Chester. With the impending doom and dread brought about by proposed projects such as this one, residents are scared and left with little to do with their fear and concern. Some people will be able to leave due to their fear and dread, but many will not have that option. Mayfield asserts that these companies devalue the land in Chester, as the environment is nearly unlivable. She and her fellow community members experience constant land insecurity, and she characterizes this process of pushing people off their land as "reverse gentrification." Because of the polluting industry in Chester, it isn't being gentrified in the traditional sense but this industry itself is a mechanism of pushing people off their land and driving them out of their homes.

Companies and corporations carrying out these industrial projects don't care about individual people, and often operate under the guise of creating job opportunities for Chester residents in these waste facilities in refineries. Mayfield calls this "pollution prostitution," referring to the exploitation and simultaneous destruction of Chester residents' livelihoods and communities. She said in our interview, speaking as "the industry" directed to the residents of Chester: "you're so poor you can't control what comes into the community." This sentiment

displays a central aspect of discriminatory siting practices: that the affected communities lack the power and resources to fight back. Mayfield has actively refused to lay down and accept this mentality, despite push back and controversy, and instead has made great sacrifices to fight for herself and her community in any way she can. Something she said that really stood out to me was that Chester residents are most fearful for their children, and an inevitable loss of community traditions. People are no longer seeing the same opportunities for their kids, and these children are further being bogged down by skyrocketing rates of asthma and other severe health ailments because of the areas' pollution.

Mayfield also asserts the problems she has encountered with public health systems as well as academia. She gave an example of an upsetting experience she has with a nearby University. She explained that some students wanted to do a case study of Chester, enlisting the help of CRCQL, but failed to be transparent about the fact that they were being paid thousands of dollars to carry out this study, while Chester residents were not ensured of any sort of benefit from participation. Mayfield questions: "What's the impact on residents? What's the outcome? We don't need to know all the statistics because we live it." She says that when a university comes in wanting to do a study, the community will believe once the study is finished, something will happen, change will be made. But it ultimately doesn't create any sort of change. This is reflected in Mayfield's notion of "pollution prostitution," as academics and professionals will come into an environmental justice community and exploit directly affected peoples for their own benefit. Mayfield concretely states: "don't expect that the community will be unpaid and also do 80% of the work" while participating in such research projects. She says that unless she can be shown a clear concrete plan of how a study can help, she doesn't value it. She

pragmatically states that some people do value data, and in that sense, it is not *not* important, but that she personally, has "got other shit to do."

Mayfield explains that everyone is affected by environmental justice issues, whether they live in an environmental justice community or not. The question, then, is how to get people who don't think they are affected to have empathy and act in solidarity. Mayfield vaguely explained situations in which people will come into the community wanting to participate but will refuse to participate in the ways they are asked to. People will insist that they only work on policy issues when what they really need is canvassers and people out in the field doing direct action work. She also claims that there is a growing financial incentive in the environmental justice and sustainability field, which clouds the intentions of participants. Sustainability and solidarity have been compromised as a result, made worse by larger environmental justice groups who do not assist directly affected communities unless they are directly benefited. Mayfield aptly says: "Fight is not dependent on the amount of money. You can either assist of get the fuck out of the way."

I asked Mayfield how she deals with the stress and obstacles that arise in her work. She responded realistically, saying that no matter how this kind of work is done, there is a level of stress and trauma. Chester is a traumatized community, which always breeds stress, but having other people in it with you creates an atmosphere of happiness and a sense of community. A sense of "we're all in this together." Mayfield states that CRCQL members are "everyday folks" and though they don't always see results, which is the hardest thing in this type of work, she and the organization are able to define their own wins and goals, even if small ones. She explains how deeply grateful she is to have such a solid team, not behind her, but beside her, and that together they never waver or back down. Mayfield is absolutely resolved in her claim that

CRCQL and Chester residents fighting for justice are not going anywhere. They haven't shut down the incinerator yet, but they have absolutely not left the battlefield. They have more skin in the game than anyone else, and their unwavering energy towards and hope for change will propel them through any hurdles that may come up along the way. It seems abundantly clear to me that despite Mayfield's and CRCQL's work being thankless in many ways, their strength and perseverance keeps them going, in large part due to their close kinship networks and the loving community bonds among Chester residents and others involved in the movement.

Chapter 5: Upholding "Expansive Kinship"

Case Study #2 RuthAnn Purchase and the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware

The Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware is a tribal community concentrated in Kent County, Delaware. This group is made up of direct descendants of the Indigenous communities who originally inhabited the Hudson and Delaware River valleys (Dobbs, n.d., n.p.). The original inhabitants of the New Jersey, New York, Delaware, and Pennsylvania communities were Munsee and Unami-speaking peoples and are commonly now known as the Lenni-Lenape people. The collective name attributed to the descendants of these groups is "Delaware". The word Delaware is not of Indigenous origin, but instead was assigned to these peoples by English settlers in the early 1600s (Dobbs, n.d., n.p.). Lenni Lenape roughly translates to "original people," "real people," and/or "common people," designating this community as the true and rightful inhabitants of the area (*Leni-Lenape Indians,* n.d., n.p.). The early Lenape people were a widespread association of independent groups who lived mainly in the Delaware River Valley (L*eni-Lenape Indians,* n.d., n.p.). These communities were displaced by Quakers and other European religious minorities, who established the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in the later 17th and early 18th centuries (Licht et al., n.d., n.p.).

The English and allied Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy used deceitful treaty agreements and the threat of military force to force the Unami and Munsee people to flee their homelands and migrate west. This removal of the Unami and Munsee speakers from the Delaware and Hudson River valleys resulted in them relocating to the borders of the English occupation (Dobbs, n.d., n.p.). By the mid 18th century most of the Munsee and Unami people joined various villages along the Susquehanna, Allegheny, and Ohio rivers and began to be collectively known as the Delaware. The political life of these groups going forward consisted of

centralized clan-based governing bodies. Their clans were matrilineal, delineated the Wolf, Turkey, and Turtle clans, and had governing clan chiefs (Dobbs, n.d., n.p.). Present day, the Lenape people of Delaware are working tirelessly to protect and uphold the cultural identity of their people and their collective histories. Social and cultural programs promoting the physical, emotional, and economic health of this tribal community have been developed in more recent years. These programs have been created with the specific cultural and communal needs of the Lenape people in mind, with an added emphasis on civil and human rights within the community and amongst its citizens (*Lenape Indian Tribe Delaware*, n.d., n.p.).

My second case study is of the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware, and my main method of research has been through interviewing RuthAnn Purchase, who is cultural mapping program manager with the Lenape Indian tribe and has cultural and geological connections to the tribe throughout more recent history. RuthAnn Purchase is focused on listening to and promoting the ancient knowledge of the Lenape and other Indigenous-American peoples in her work. Purchase, in coalition with tribal members, believe that through these practices of knowledge sharing and archival work they can begin to heal our collective relationship with the land and all living things. This natural connection was and continues to be severed through the colonial practices of land ownership, commodification, and exploitation of both the earth and its inhabitants. Purchase works in the Lenape Census district, mapping a variety of oral histories, research, and art to accumulate and sustain long-standing traditions of Indigenous stewardship, using sustainable land and interpersonal practices that will benefit generations to come (*CJI Collaborators*, n.d., n.p.).

RuthAnn Purchase is a linguist and sociologist of Lenape-Welsh descent, and her studies have taken her to many places across the world in search of "those universal truths that guide us

to live together well with All Our Relations," (*RuthAnn Purchase–Lenape Union Land Trust,* 2022, n.p.). Purchase's maternal grandmother was a doula in the tribal community, and she feels great honor in her work to restore the language and culture of her mother's mother's people. Purchase's grandmother and her people were forcibly removed from Egg Harbor, New Jersey and were made to move to Meniolagomeka, an "Indian Town," founded by Moravians in the Lehigh Valley. Purchase is identified as a water protector who is deeply connected to the Unami dialect of the Lenape language and engages in sustainable development through the arts as well as social sciences. She founded the Leipsic River Watershed Association through the GreenBridge Community Development Corporation, also called "Friends of Lenape Everywhere." RuthAnn works in the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware Federal Census District and works in cooperation with the Native American House Alliance in Philadelphia as an outreach coordinator (*RuthAnn Purchase–Lenape Union Land Trust*, 2022, n.p.). Simon Purchase James, who is a volunteer coordinator for the tribal citizen science program and Lenape forest gardener, was present in my interview with RuthAnn and shared some important insights.

In our interview, Purchase asserted that there are many environmental justice and food/land sovereignty initiatives happening among Native American groups in the Philadelphia area. She specifically brought up Chief Mann and the Ramapo Mountain Pass people in Mahwah, New Jersey. The Ramapo Mountain Pass people under the leadership of Chief Mann are in the process of starting a community farm in search of food sovereignty. In 2006, lawyers representing the tribe and other residents of Ridgewood, New Jersey sued the Ford Motor Company for dumping thousands of tons of paint sludge and other toxic waste from the company's nearby former assembly plant (Depalma, 2006, n.p.). The lawsuit claimed that Ford caused sprawling contamination of soil and groundwater in the mountainous region of

Ridgewood, near the New York State line, during the 25 year stretch that the plant was open. Ford has cleaned the area several times and removed tons of hazardous waste material, but residents keep finding more. One of the lawyers representing the current and former residents in the lawsuit said that Ford's failure to remove hazardous materials has resulted in serious illnesses and diseases among residents in the area. Certain cancers, skin diseases, and leukemia rates have been observed as twice as high as the statewide average (Depalma, 2006, n.p.).

The Ramapough Lenape Nation are seeking assistance in creating a community farm that will be utilized for sustenance and for the education of children and families in the traditional ways of sustainable farming used by their ancestors. This project is a way of recovering cultural methods of food sovereignty and sustainability. As a result of the toxic waste dumping in their communities, they have lost the ability to hunt game animals and gather foragable foods and healing plants. This has also resulted in a loss of language that is associated with hunter-gathering traditions. They hope that through providing this resource the Ramapough people will reclaim sovereignty over their sustenance production and cultural healing through regenerative and sustainable practices (*Seeding a Native Future*, n.d., n.p.). This tribe has also been attempting to relocate people off the superfund site that is facing extreme contamination and public health issues. The Ramapough people also hope to use funds from Ford motor company directly to help them relocate as well as officially implicate the community garden project (*Seeding a Native Future*, n.d., n.p.).

During my interview with RuthAnn Purchase and Simon Purchase James, a large topic of conversation was the conflicting ideals of traditional Lenape culture versus those that have been forced upon the tribe because of patriarchal colonialism. Purchase and James both claim to be socially as well as genetically connected to the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania. Due to the strict

requirements of the Bureau of Indian affairs, for someone to be officially recognized in the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware, they need to prove 25% direct blood relations. They cannot prove this, but they are both able to prove their direct lineage and genetic connection a bit further back. Purchase's grandmother was the midwife for the Lenape people, and was a part of a closely related group of Native Americans that merged with the Lenape tribe. The Bureau of Indian Affairs is very strict about requiring proof of geological and genealogical connection in order to have federal or state recognition as a member of the Lenape tribe. The BIA requires that a tribe document their consistent and continuous community life and prove that they have always been a community. The tribal community RuthAnn Purchase is directly a part of cannot prove this, but the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware can. This is a very difficult rule to follow, but the Lenape can follow this rule because they have maintained a very strict tracking of their genealogy.

Because the Lenape Tribe of Delaware was historically located below the Mason Dixon line, races were not allowed to intermarry. There was strict segregation in this area, separating Black, white, and Indian communities. As a result of this segregation and strict laws about intermarriage, the Lenape people kept very close records of their genealogy so as not to marry a cousin who was too closely related. This strict tracking of bloodlines ended up benefiting the tribe, as they are now able to prove through records that they have kept an intact bloodline and it is much easier for them as a group to prove continuous community life. This rule, however, makes it difficult for some individuals to prove their connection to the tribe if it is not a direct genetic connection within the last couple generations. The Lenape people now have a very high Native Americans per capita in this federal census district but have also been forced to conform to very strict and racist ideals of genealogy and communal ties.

Early on in our interview, Purchase asked me to reflect on a concept. She said this concept was fresh to her as well, as she had never articulated these exact words, but at the same time she said she had never spoken to anyone about my topic before. She said that the Bureau of Indian Affairs requiring proof of ethnicity and direct genealogy is an imposed ideal of kinship within the community. This law has only been imposed and upheld because of prejudice, and because these communities historically existed within segregated communities. Purchase explains that today, the tribe is very colorful, diverse, and accepting, but being forced to comply with the BIA is a "terrible burden especially for a disenfranchised community." Purchase explains this dichotomy, and the ethicality of the Lenape people leveraging segregation and archaic ways of thinking in order to maintain their tribal identity. While it is in many ways a beautiful thing that they have been able to maintain a unified continuous and intact community, it came as a result of something terrible. She explains that it is a strange and perplexing conundrum and made a specific request that I hold space for the two kinds of community present within the Lenape community: that of prescribed and forced patriarchal colonialism, and that of ancient and traditional kinship bonds.

Purchase discussed how the imposed structures of "Indian Law" are widely misunderstood by actual Lenape community members, and that it goes against the brilliant community they know themselves to be, who take care of each other, know each other, and are deeply resilient. It is difficult to hold both conflicting realities in Lenape storytelling, and that it is important to make a specific note of the more non-normative and less regulated ways in which they are community with one another. Purchase explained that there is an understanding of family among the Lenape that is based on the idea of non-related family and that "we're all in this together." Other examples of non-blood related kinship, outside of the prescribed rules of the

Bureau of Indian Affairs, that center on ideals of unofficial adoption, family building, and passing on of wisdom. She further explains that if you are seen as an asset to the community then you are a part of it. Purchase considers the Lenape people a refugee community in a lot of ways, and that people are included based on their ability to have something to offer and that you are not taking advantage of the community.

Purchase said that she is expected at the tribal events, even though sometimes they are specifically meant for blood-related relatives only. The Lenape people fully accept and value her as an integral part of their community, despite her inability to prove direct lineage. She explained that she is now taking care of elderly people whom her own grandmother helped bring into the world, and to her, it is extremely beautiful that one of her ancestors saw these community members in through one portal, and now she will likely see them out through the other end of life. Though the Bureau of Indian Affairs presents a strange dichotomy that restricts the community in some ways, on the ground level, at the grassroots level, they are a unified community of related and unrelated people who are "just all in this together." Another example of this dichotomy of imposed law by the BIC, which Simon Purchase James aptly asserted during the interview, is in the Lenape people's traditional system of matriarchal community-building. James explained that there is a present struggle and conflict between the traditional matriarchal culture and the dominant patriarchal relations that have been forced onto this community. This leaves a struggle for tribal members who are men, as they are stuck in a position of society telling them to take on a dominant role while knowing that traditionally that is not inherently how things have been done. Again, Purchase stated how difficult it is to consider both realities, with imposed structures of Indian law on the one hand versus a beautiful, resilient, diverse and caring community on the other.

In our interview, Purchase discussed ideas of ancestral connection as well as earthly connection amongst all living beings. She explained that in the Lenape tradition, there is a belief that energy never dies, and that anyone could be an ancestor trying to get in touch with her or giving her a message. She said that even I, through this project, could be an ancestor who was given the task of communicating with her, and that because of this, she must treat me and everyone and everything with the utmost respect, because she doesn't know "who is with me." For her, this means that she needs to be open to new things and new people, and that this is clear evidence of "a fabric of society from an ancient world view that has been torn at but not destroyed" She states that in a "remnant community" such as the Lenape people, where all conscious memory of ancient traditions have been lost, it is extremely important to hold onto this thread of community and togetherness that ties this group to their ancient traditions and helps maintain a deep level of integrity and worldly connection.

Further, we delved into how kinship ties extend to all of earth's inhabitants. The sense of never truly knowing who someone is and always needing to be open to new life extends to plant and animal life as well, as the Lenape people see non-human earthly inhabitants also as potential ancestors or vehicles for intergenerational communication. For instance, trees are ancestors too, and hold a great wealth of knowledge that far predates one human's life. The Lenape people view trees and other non-human life as teachers and elders who are wiser and more knowledgeable, meaning that we must listen to them and allow them to teach us their ancient wisdom. James explained that this expansive kinship is very distinct and tangible, as opposed to an idealized notion of spiritual and other-worldly connection. Instead, these expansive kinship relations inform day-to-day life and decision-making in the tribe and allow them to see

environmental justice as not only an affront to the humans impacted but also a crime committed against nature itself, of which humans are merely a small part.

Towards the end of our interview, Purchase told me a story about a Chief who was dealing with the imposition of federal tribal acknowledgement. She said that in response to this conflicting political agenda, this Chief claimed: "I put my head down and I let it go over my head." In reaction to this, I started thinking about the idea of bowing one's head in resistance, and how this felt connected to the idea of deviance and a refusal to conform. By choosing to not engage, Purchase explains that this Chief is refusing to let oppressive regimes win and asserts that the Lenape tribe of Delaware are doing the same. Though the Bureau of Indian Affairs and tribal regulations may appear as though they are winning, the strength of their community is enduring and "off the record." Much of my conversation with Purchase was about how her community upholds traditional ideals of Indigenous stewardship and widespread kinship. Further, she spoke about how this preservation of community is a form of non-normativity and active resistance. Purchase claims that this refusal to conform has been how her community has survived political impositions, circling back to the notion that kinship is tied to resilience and can also lead to resistance.

Chapter 6: Embracing "Inseparable Oneness"

Case Study #3: O Payne of Philly Thrive

Oil refining in the Philadelphia area has historically been a large contributor to the city's air pollution. Since 1870, oil refining has taken place in South Philadelphia, polluting the area with cancer-causing benzene, particulate matter, among other harmful pollutants. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the oil refining facilities in South Philadelphia, one at Point Breeze and the other at Girard Point, were home to a major Lenape settlement, and had been used for hay farming since the 1700s. Residents of South Philadelphia have long been burdened with the adverse impacts of oil refining in the area, but in 2019, it came to a head, when the Philadelphia Energy Solutions (PES) refinery caused multiple large-scale explosions (Brockmeier, 2022, n.p.). The fires caused by the explosions burned for over 24 hours, emitting toxic chemicals into the air in the predominantly Black neighborhood, Greys Ferry. Philadelphia Energy Solutions is one of about 12 out of 130 refineries in the United States that has consistently exceeded the EPA's "action level" of air pollution (Hiar & Seville, 2020, n.p.). Shortly after the accident in 2019, PES filed for bankruptcy and officially closed what at that point was the oldest and largest refinery on the east coast. This was in part due to the activism and work of directly affected community members in Greys Ferry, as well as the work of the grassroots organization, Philly Thrive, which was founded in 2015 as a response to the expansion of oil and gas operations in Philadelphia (Brockmeier, 2022, n.p.). Philly Thrive is one of my case studies, and in the next chapter I will be discussing the organization further as well as my interview with PT's Healing Justice Coordinator, O Payne.

Philly Thrive is a grassroots community-led organization, founded by a group of undergraduate students in 2015, developed in response to widespread pollution from the

Philadelphia Energy Solutions oil refinery located in South Philadelphia. This oil refinery was the largest on the East Coast and polluted the area for 157 years before it was shut down. According to Philly Thrive's Mission Statement, the refinery was responsible for over 50% of the toxic air emissions in Philadelphia, increasing rates of childhood asthma in surrounding communities to three times the national average. Catapulted by the fall out of the ghastly explosion at the PES refinery in June of 2019, explained in chapter 2, the relentless efforts of Philly Thrive's Right to Breathe campaign won a permanent closure of the refinery. They are now working on campaigns to redevelop the site of the historical refinery site, by reinvesting in the community and organizing for a complete cleanup of the site. They have high hopes of making this former refinery site into green space for the community. The current Right to Thrive campaign intends to ensure that those who were directly impacted by the refinery pollution be at the center of further clean-up and transitional efforts of the site. Philly Thrive runs community support programs, including a youth summer camp, gun violence healing circle, women's support circle, and weekly food box deliveries. They self-proclaim that they will not stop fighting until everyone has a right to breathe and is free of the polluting and oppressive industries that have enveloped the city for many many years (*Mission,* n.d., n.p.).

O Payne is the healing justice coordinator for Philly Thrive, and has been involved with the organization since its founding in 2015. A good friend of Payne's and a professor at Swarthmore College, Giovanna DiChiro, was in many ways the catalyst for Philly Thrives' founding and for Payne's involvement in the organization. During Payne's early days living in North Philadelphia, they were invited to turn an old Methodist Parsonage into their very own healing center. DiChiro wanted to bring some of her students from Swarthmore to North Philadelphia to support and collaborate with social justice movements, which is how Payne

became acquainted with one of Philly Thrives' founders, Alexa Ross, who was a student at the time. Ross, in collaboration with other students from Swarthmore College, Bryn Mawr College, and Drexel University formed the Maypop Group in 2013, during which time Ross and the other students moved into a house in West Philly together. They lived in a collective way and began to do the local environmental work that morphed into Philly Thrive. Since then, all the original Maypop group members have left the organization, except for Alexa Ross, who has stayed on and is now the co-director and campaign coordinator. Payne explained the importance of having at least one person who is willing to "go through the fire when others are too tired," and "who will do this no matter what, until their death." Payne explained that the movement itself is about relationships, which is contradictory to dominant culture, which is violent and justifies its own violence. They stated: "The primary tool to destroy connection is money." Payne explained that they often feel alone, and that this is an intentional project of separation, largely carried out through capitalist interests which separate us based on some arbitrary measure of value.

They asserted that their role as a healer is to support and care for those who are doing sacrificial work, such as Ross. However, Payne themself is not an advocate of sacrifice. They disagreed with my use of words such as "argue" "prove" "fight" and "combat" when discussing my thesis and asking questions about their work. Payne explained that they see academia as being "seeped in combat language, competitive language," and that this is a tool of patriarchy, which has a grip on academia, and creates a false sense of what should be valued. Payne explains that argument does not lead to harmonious outcomes, and that she is willing to "wrestle with you, but will not fight with you," as fighting centers the idea that one party is right while the other is wrong. This creates a fracturing relational vibration, instead of a harmonious one. Payne fears for the brilliant young adults whose minds are being colonized by academia, and that this is

what maintains a system of violence. They asserted that fighting and arguing is not their strategy, however, it is Ross's strategy, and Payne's role in it all is to support and hold those who are doing this kind of combative work. They say that they themself do not have to argue, they just have to say what is real, and people either believe or don't, which is outside of their control. They recognize that fighting is in many ways a necessary part of creating meaningful change, but they maintain that we must continue to search for and maintain the "inseparable oneness" which unites everyone and everything and offers an alternative to combative practices. We must not lose sight of the "inseparable oneness" as this is a necessary part of getting people to "wake up" and recognize what's real.

Philly Thrive has core principles that they follow, many of which are related to their community and relational practices. Firstly, they center those who are most directly impacted by the injustices they tackle and ensure that their leadership is representative of these communities. They also focus on what they call "people power" in that they are constantly working to expand their membership and community networks. A big focus for them is mutuality, democracy, and consideration in their community practices. The organization works together in "Action Circles," ensuring that every individual member has a home, a team, and a key role to play within the movement. O explained in our interview that to them, working in circles means working as a "living cell, rather than a machine," where non-hierarchical co-creation and collaboration are key. Philly Thrive recognizes that no one can do this work alone, and fostering a strong community is key to success. They center joy, love, and rest in this organization, as they realize the importance of taking care of each other and giving themselves and each other grace when doing this work. Their mission statement includes standing in solidarity with other social justice movements, as they recognize the importance of collaboration and cooperation in the fight for

liberating all oppressed peoples. The way they carry out these principles and the goal of their work is through non-violent direct action, using many of the same tactics as CRCQL such as canvassing, holding meetings, and other forms of outreach (*Mission,* n.d., n.p.).

Payne's work within Philly Thrive and in their own healing practices include holding listening and healing circles that make a concerted effort to recognize peoples' brilliance and hard work. By locating silence and truly listening to each other, we can move away from the dominant system of fragmentation and towards a true togetherness and mutuality. She explains that her practice is really all about community, and that her role is to "assist the body in returning to its capacity" after trauma has broken it down and wounded it. She intends to help people "honor the sacredness of form" meaning honoring their own forms and learning to deeply listen as a path towards creating loving kinship networks and healing within traumatized communities. Dr. Giovanna Di Chiro, the professor of environmental justice who helped plant the seed that became Philly Thrive, draws on concepts of "kinning," in her own work (*Kinning as Environmental Justice Praxis,* 2022, n.p.). Specifically, she discusses the importance of maintaining "diverse" relationships through imaginative thinking and "coalition-building," (*Kinning as Environmental Justice Praxis*, 2022, n.p.). This closely relates to Payne's connections between the work of grassroots activists and retrieving or reimagining a universal connection between all living things.

Payne spoke a lot about the "thread" that connects all of us, they explain that individuals must have the capacity to locate the thread that connects all of us, and allows for our bodies to become sanctuaries, despite violence and oppression. They speak of the "unified field" and that they have not forgotten our capacity to merge, to become one, to work *with* instead of against. Payne believes in an energetic field that "calls us to unity and closeness," explaining that we

"have chosen not to listen." After saying this, their face lit up with a contagious smile, as they said to me, "that is why I'm so excited about you, because you *are* listening." Payne was overjoyed by my categorization of her work and the work of Philly Thrive as "non-normative" and something she said that really resonated with me is that to her, normativity is characterized by a distance between people. They believe that human and natural connection should be rooted in kinship rather than kingdom, and that this is what the world has lost. "Thank you for not letting go of the thread of closeness. You are tethered to the thread. Thank you for being tethered to the thread and not letting that scare you, or even if it scares you, you still hold onto it anyway."

Payne describes Philly Thrive as a "rebel organization," and that Ross especially is a rebel on every level. They explain that the organization has "pissed politicians off," because they "don't follow the rules," but they have also gained respect in this regard and have garnered the support of certain politicians as a result. There is a distinct difference between community care, which is Philly Thrive's focus, and political or legislative action, not that these aren't also important. Relationships are primary in all forms, and they center "protection through care, instead of annihilation." The biggest challenge then, is to convince politicians and other local leaders to not to use the tool of the dominant culture, what Payne calls "tools of self-annihilation." Payne explains that love is essential to her healing practice, and that love is the key to healing, which will bring us back to "a whole, a unified field, an inseparable oneness." This "inseparable oneness" is a project of collaboration and togetherness, which is a language Payne believes most people have lost. People like Payne and others in Philly Thrive, are trying to bring people back together, which Payne believes is "holy work," and key to recognizing the diversity of life. Payne said: "there is no life without diversity," and a key aspect of seeking

justice is to embrace diversity and recognizing that "all outside of the self is the self," and we are all "one field." They conclude by discussing the importance of mutual aid, and that this is what leads us to wholeness. People have different gifts and talents that are mutually important to the thriving of the whole, and Payne explains that these talents are devalued because "the whole is broken," and it is imperative that we continue trying to fix it.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions

O Payne and RuthAnn Purchase, two of the people I interviewed, agreed with my characterization of their organizations as non-normative, and resonated with the idea of deviance and resistance through non-conformity. Cohen (2004) discusses the creation of counter-public and counter-narratives through deviancy and resistance to normativity. She claims that through individual and collective acts of deviance, marginalized groups can generate a certain level of autonomy and work towards liberation, and this also leads to the development of oppositional worldviews, or counter-narratives (Cohen, 2004, 41). Through grassroots activism and community organizing, counter-publics are created, in which differential norms are also created, oftentimes centering mutuality and collective care in direct opposition to more mainstream and oppressive community structures.

Jaimes*Guerrero (2003) details the outcomes of patriarchal colonialism among Indigenous American communities, specifically through forced conformity in the name of official tribal recognition (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003, 58). As RuthAnn Purchase explained in our interview, despite these prescribed tribal ideals and structures based on patriarchy and domination, the Lenape people still uphold traditional notions of community care and kinship which are important to their collective histories. This can be viewed as an act of deviance and a refusal to conform entirely, to sustain and ascribe real value to ideals of traditional stewardship, Indigenism, and expansive kinship. Haraway (2016) discusses the importance of creating "oddkin" in order to enhance "multispecies flourishing" to which expansive ideals of kinship are central (Haraway, 2016, 2). Notions of expansive kinship and the interconnectedness of all living things as environmental justice were both central topics of conversation in my interviews with O Payne and RuthAnn Purchase. Both of these individuals believe in the notion of "indeparable

oneness" (Payne) and similarly, an "ancient fabric of society" (Purchase) which frames all living things as one and asserts the need for kinship to be reframed in a similar way as discussed up by Haraway (2016).

Sze (2020) discusses the importance of kinship and community, laying out a concrete path forward in the face of pervasive systems of oppression. She concludes that environmental justice cannot be achieved or even realistically hoped for within current liberal and capitalist institutions, and that environmental justice cannot depend on market-based or technological solutions (8). Sze claims that we must shift the perspective of environmental justice to focus on bottom-up solutions, at the heart of which is love and refusal, or community and deviance, as I have earlier discussed. This scholarship explains that environmental justice movements are freedom struggles, centered around anti-consumerism and anti-capitalism, as well as building networks of solidarity and radical hope (Sze, 2020, 14). This generally applies to all three of my case studies, as it similarly delineates the need for mutual aid and collective action on the grassroots level.

Jones & Rainey (2006) assert that those who are most impacted by environmental injustice, those who are directly exposed to local environmental risks and negative health impacts, are often also the most engaged in movements for environmental justice (Jones & Rainey, 2006, 480). This reality was echoed in my case-study of Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living and my interview with Zulene Mayfield. Mayfield's words made it abundantly clear that the burden of environmental injustice falls entirely on directly affected communities, who are most often predominantly poor people of color. She had little interest in engaging with my optimistic framing of grassroots organizing within the context of community and kinship. Instead, she laid out her work and her mission in concrete terms, that made evident her intense

focus and seriousness around the work she engages in. Mayfield was adamantly opposed to my labeling, of her or the organization she works with, as "non-normative," or ascribing any label to them at all. She stated that she would not allow me to "put them in a box," and I have grown to understand this sentiment. My interview with Mayfield prompted me to reconsider my positionality in carrying out this research. She helped me realize that labeling a grassroots organization in this way offers no tangible benefit for the organization itself, but rather allows me to reduce her work, which is a matter of life and death for her and her community, into convoluted academic terms without laying out a path for further exploration or action.

My reframing of this project has been largely centered around a deeper analysis and broader theoretical exploration of mutual aid and community organizing. Spade (2010) outlines mutual aid as a new way forward, though perhaps more accurately a reclaimed and revived way of thinking about the world that has long been suppressed. Spade outlines the need to foster systems of care and well-being that also address systemic harm, which is deeply connected to my case studies of Philly Thrive and CRCQL, and my respective interviews with Payne and Mayfield. Both case studies outlined the importance of mutual aid and engaging with community organizing among frontline communities. Based on my initial findings in studying these two organizations, I agree with Spade's assertion that mutual aid is key to building successful social movements and mutually reinforcing kinship relations. I want to circle back to the collaborative network of organizers affiliated with the Climate Justice Initiative, which is how I got in touch with all three of the people I interviewed. This widespread local collaboration between various organizations and individuals associated with environmental justice movements is an example of the importance of community and interconnectedness. This coalition sheds light on the

widespread and pervasive environmental injustices currently plaguing many Philadelphia residents, as well as those in nearby cities and communities, such as in Chester.

On April 13, 2023, Zulene Mayfield wrote an op-ed in the Philadelphia Inquirer, following a debate between the current mayoral candidates for Philadelphia. Mayfield openly expressed her anger following comments made by Jeff Brown, one of the leading progressive candidates. In response to a question about whether he, as acting mayor, would continue the current waste contracts which allow Philadelphia to transport 400,000 tons of trash to be incinerated in nearby city, Chester, every year, Brown said, "Chester is Chester. I'm worried about Philadelphians and how their lives are," and further stated, "I don't work for them if I'm the mayor. I work for Philadelphia. And the trash has to go somewhere. And whoever gets it is going to be unhappy with it," (Mayfield, 2023, n.p.). Mayfield helped found Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living in 1992 in response to a polluting Covanta-owned trash incinerator being cited in her neighborhood. More than thirty years later, the incinerator has not been shut down, and supposedly progressive mayoral candidates in Philadelphia are taking no responsibility for the environmental racism and the subsequent public health crisis being imposed on Chester residents. Mayfield calls out Brown's overt racism in this dismissive statement, as even though he didn't mention race, it is a widely known fact that Chester is 72% Black, and another 10% of their population are other people of color (Mayfield, 2023, n.p.).

Brown's comments regarding the situation of environmental injustice in Chester strip directly affected residents of their humanity and make clear that economic and political factors are the only things that matter to leaders and legislators in their environmental practices and protocols. Brown stated that he does not work for Chester, and therefore feels no responsibility to this nearby community. To me, this establishes that his interests in "working" as mayor of

Philadelphia are not based on representation of its residents and citizens, but rather doing what is best for the city government financially and logistically. Philadelphia has faced and continues to face environmental injustice, predominantly in poor and Black communities, just as in Chester. If Brown is not willing to stand up to or take accountability for pollution in Chester, how can he be expected to advocate for and protect citizens of Philadelphia experiencing similar injustices at the hands of local governments and corporations? Mayfield writes: "Chester is the oldest city in Pennsylvania and is due respect. I want them to come see what Chester residents call our "C pride" – we love each other and our community." She further asserts that she and other Chester residents fight for how they want their community to be and expresses her hope for Philadelphia to embrace its name of endearment, "the city of brotherly love." Mayfield calls for the city to exercise some true community love, by making the decision to stop wreaking havoc on Chester. She concludes by saying: "To Philadelphians, I say: We are your neighbors, not your dumping ground," (Mayfield, 2023, n.p.).

Mayfield's op-ed exemplifies the kind of community ideals upheld by grassroots organizations, in which affected people and their environments are fundamentally considered. A sense of collective care across lines of separation comes through in Mayfield's words. By stating that Chester residents should be considered Philadelphians' neighbors, she elevates the importance of humanity and loving community over corporate interests, political influences, and economic concerns. This recent event also puts on full display the ongoing and prevailing fight for environmental justice among affected peoples in Philadelphia, Chester, Delaware, as well as many other communities, within and outside of the United States. Social justice movements for clean air, better living conditions, and equitable citing protocols, locally and globally, need our ongoing attention and engagement. The fight is far from over, as Mayfield stated in our

interview. If nothing else comes of my research, I hope I have written something that Mayfield,

Purchase, and Payne feel does justice to their work, and amplifies their words.

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