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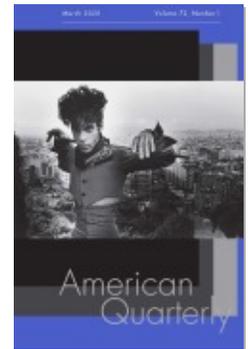
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The Vietnam War and Chicana/o Environmentalism in *El Grito del Norte* (1968–73)

Emily Cheng

This essay addresses *El Grito del Norte* (*EGDN*), a Chicana/o nationalist newspaper published in Española, a small working-class town in northern New Mexico, from 1968 to 1973. The paper was originally formed to support the politics of La Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Land Grants), the organization led by Reies López Tijerina that in the 1960s and 1970s sought the restoration of land grants established under the Spanish and Mexican governments. Written and run by women, the paper was founded and edited by Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez (known previously as Elizabeth Sutherland), whose socialist and third-world feminist politics shaped the paper’s concern with the connections between rural Chicana women of New Mexico and other women of color in the US and abroad.¹

Though the paper was committed to Chicana/o issues grounded in New Mexico, it soon moved away from its original role as a mouthpiece for the Alianza to include reports on indigenous issues in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. *EGDN* was, in Martínez’s words, the “only one” of “about twenty Chicano newspapers . . . that was completely international.”² Of particular importance was the newspaper’s reporting on Vietnam, which made it exceptional among a Chicano press in the 1960s that, George Mariscal notes, “was largely silent on the topic of the war in Southeast Asia.”³ The paper’s coverage included a special issue on North Vietnam by Martínez, a five-part series by Valentina Valdez explaining Vietnam and the war to readers, articles addressing Chicanos serving in the military by Enriqueta Vasquez that appeared in “El Soldado Razo Today” and her column, “Despierten! Hermanos,” reports on the military events of the war, poetry by Ho Chi Minh, and a report on the Chicano Việt Nam Project, a solidarity organization.⁴

While other scholars have written about the newspaper’s concerns with land in New Mexico and, to a lesser extent, its third-world feminist politics, I examine how these aspects of the paper come together with its internationalism

to represent a distinctive and radical “environmental” politics. I do not mean to argue that the writers and activists who contributed to *EGDN* identified themselves as environmentalists or to attach this label to them. What I do want to argue is that, in contrast to the mainstream environmental movement that emerged in this period, these women writers possessed an environmental understanding that fundamentally engaged social justice, particularly around issues of race, gender, and imperialism.

The environmental epistemology in *EGDN* was shaped by, but moved beyond, the long-standing relationship between Mexican-origin people, land, and nature in the US Southwest that was central to Chicana/o nationalist politics, as I discuss through Vasquez’s article “La Santa Tierra.” In considering Vietnam as another site in which to explore and understand the violence the US empire inflicts on land and colonized people, *EGDN* made connections between the US Southwest and Vietnam that developed its alternative environmental lens. Approaching the North Vietnamese as fellow peasants, or “campesinos,” whose harmonious relationship to the land was being attacked by US imperialism, the newspaper made womanhood central to forging this relationship between Chicana/o and North Vietnamese anticolonialism. The feminist politics of “global sisterhood” facilitated the writers’ interest in Vietnam, and their access to direct encounters with Vietnamese women through the international women’s peace movement. The women writers of the paper also deployed a gendered lens that highlighted the role of women in environmental resistance to masculine military violence and symbolically established similarities between the two communities through idealized portrayals of rural, domestic life.

With its attention to the lived human relationship to land, *EGDN* offered an alternative to notions of land that were central to mainstream American environmental thinking, which generally assumed the “separability of the human and natural realms . . . expressed through a melancholic attitude linking natural plenitude with human absence.”⁵ In this mainstream tradition, land has been considered through the ideal of wilderness, and the human realm predominantly characterized by the individual relationship to the land through possession. This attitude can be found in the transcendentalism of Henry David Thoreau at Walden Pond, the preservationism of John Muir associated with western wilderness such as Yosemite, the land ethic of Aldo Leopold that arose from his life on his Wisconsin farm, and the damage to nature in a quintessential middle-American suburb narrated in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*.

Leopold, for example, who is considered the “father of modern environmental ethics,” used the term *land ethic* to describe “the existence of an ecological conscience,” which “in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility

for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity.”⁶ The human relation to the land is characterized by conservation, the ecological health of land set apart from human society, and the defense of wilderness against human encroachment. If “the American project of environmentalism denotes an explicit quest to find alternatives to exploitative approaches to nature,” as Priscilla Solis Ybarra puts it, *EGDN* aligns with her characterization that in “Mexican American environmental writing, . . . the Mexican American and Chicana/o culture enacts values and practices that include nature all along.”⁷

My study draws on the recent work of cultural critics who have addressed notions of Chicana environmentalisms, such as Ybarra, Christina Holmes, and Randy Ontiveros, who has observed that “little attention has been paid to the complex relationship between the Chicana/o civil rights movement and the modern environmentalist movement.”⁸ I examine how the environmental discourse of *EGDN* can be put in conversation with events and issues in mainstream environmentalism, such as Earth Day and the use of Agent Orange in the Vietnam War. An environmental analysis of *EGDN* also contributes to our understanding of environmental justice movements that foreground issues of race, class, gender, and social justice, as well as what the African American civil rights leader Benjamin Chavis has called “environmental racism.”⁹ In the context of Mexican-origin people, Devon Peña suggests that we consider the long struggle for environmental justice, going back to the El Paso Salt War of 1877, and including the United Farm Worker’s antipesticide organizing and the land rights politics of the *Alianza*.¹⁰ Framing *EGDN* in this way addresses some of the limitations of existing literature on environmental justice that, as Holmes argues in her study of ecofeminism and Chicana feminism, has historically focused on US-based struggles and African American activism, and has been somewhat “androcentric.”¹¹

By focusing on the transnational dimensions of Chicana environmental discourse, and the way this discourse is grounded in internationalist feminist responses to the Vietnam War, I view *EGDN* as a model of how US environmental analysis must address larger issues of US global hegemony. As Rob Nixon argues, the “environmental humanities in the United States remain skewed toward nation-bound scholarship that is at best tangentially international and, even then, seldom engages the environmental fallout of U.S. foreign policy head on.”¹² Addressing these issues of transnationalism, internationalism, and US imperialism will allow for the interrogation of the “disproportionate impact that U.S. global ambitions and policies have exerted over socioenvironmental landscapes internationally.”¹³

Chicana/o Politics and Imaginations of Land

The environmental lens of *EGDN* arises out of its place-centered context in the US Southwest and is rooted in the meaning of land in the Chicana/o nationalist politics of the 1960s and 1970s. The column “La Santa Tierra” (“The Holy Land”), written by regular columnist Enriqueta Vasquez in December 1970, illustrates the integral role of land and the environment in the construction of a unique Chicana/o identity.¹⁴ Though not without the complexities and contradictions of the Latinx “inherit[ance of] geneologies of both colonizer and colonized,” articulated by Wald et al., the politics of land were fundamental to the environmental perspectives in *EGDN*.¹⁵ Articulating an environmental knowledge derived from the lived connection to nature, Vasquez writes that Chicana/os “respect and live in harmony with nature” and explains that “our viejitos taught us about nature and the creatures of the earth. We would sit for hours and study the sky,” including “cloud formations,” “birds,” and the “flow of the air currents.”¹⁶ Chicana/o identity and “cultural survival” itself were at stake in maintaining this connection to the environmental values gained from the wisdom of elders. “It is in this knowledge of the earth,” Vasquez believed, “that we have a good balance of nature and the function of human beings. It is in this that we find a place for ourselves; it is in this that we know what we are.”¹⁷

This environmental awareness arises from a community-based Chicana/o epistemology rather than from the “higher education of the Gringo value system.”¹⁸ In fact, this contrast in relationships to the natural world marks Chicana/o difference from white society. “The failings of the Gringo society,” says Vasquez, occur “because in all of its technology it does not make a place for HUMANS in relation to NATURE.”¹⁹ Speaking back to the drive of settler colonialism for “access to territory,” what Patrick Wolfe calls its “specific, irreducible content,”²⁰ Vasquez emphasizes how US white settler structuring of the human relationship to land threatens the Chicana/o values of harmony with nature. The “Gringo” “concept of ownership and possession of the land,” she insists, attempts to replace and erase the “indigenous concepts of Aztlán [that] still live here” in the Southwest, where the “concepts of humanity and nature are very much part of everyday living.”²¹

This environmental way of knowing is grounded not only in the narrative of the Chicana/o lived relationship to the land but in the place-based political struggles for land of La Alianza Federal de Mercedes. La Alianza was founded in 1963 in northern New Mexico by Tijerina, a former Pentecostal preacher, to challenge the legitimacy of the land claims made by the United States and US citizens in the years after the Mexican War of 1846–48. The

Alianza's actions included a nine-day occupation of the Echo Amphitheater campground in Carson National Forest in October 1966, during which the *aliancistas*, advocating on behalf of the heirs of the 1,400-acre Pueblo de San Joaquín de Chama land grant established by Spanish law in 1806, held a mock trial convicting two park rangers of trespassing.²² A subsequent 1967 raid and shootout at the Rio Arriba County courthouse in Tierra Amarilla, intended to rescue a group of recently arrested *aliancistas*, propelled Tijerina and the Alianza to national notoriety.

The Alianza challenged US ownership of huge tracts of common property that had been established by Spanish and Mexican community land grants, which had been transferred to the US public domain as national forests, parks, and monuments, as well as to large private ranch owners. As Ybarra argues, "The territories that the United States conquered and acquired from Mexico in the nineteenth century made the U.S. national park system possible."²³ The loss of land grant community property rights became part of US nation-building projects of environmental conservation and management. Indeed, most of the land of Carson and Santa Fe National Forests in northern New Mexico was acquired from community grant claims.²⁴ US management regimes in national forests offered another type of common land use and management, combining wilderness preservation and recreation with resource extraction by private companies, a shift that destroyed land grant communities and replaced them with the hegemonic values of a US land management regime.

While much scholarship attributes the loss of rights experienced by Mexican American land grant communities to the legal machinations of Anglo speculators, railroad companies, and politicians, David Correia emphasizes the agency of land grant communities in working to claim property well into the twentieth century.²⁵ Correia's treatment of property as both material object and "a set of social relations among people enforced by the state" informs my understanding of the Alianza and *EGDN* as community actors engaged in both symbolic and physical struggles over land.²⁶ Their work not only imagined the reclamation of land and disruption of US legal authority but sought to sustain a sense of community in the face of the destruction wrought by the racialized expropriation of land. As Wolfe puts it, "contests for land can be—indeed, often are—contests for life."²⁷ Alianza and *EGDN* ideas about the relationship between private property and community land grants were embedded in a social relationship between communities and the land. As Correia explains, private property claims by individuals were intertwined with "various common property obligations such as digging acequias, sharing common grazing areas, and comanaging and using uplands for hunting and gathering," and these ideas

about common land management were shaped by the practical requirements for “settling a dangerous and semiarid region.”²⁸

In addition to this place-centered struggle over the physical land tied to rural agrarian life in northern New Mexico, Vasquez’s linking of the condemnation of the “Gringo” invasion of Chicana/o ancestral lands in North America and the logic of “nature” as a “part of everyday living” in “La Santa Tierra” resonated with “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” the manifesto created at the first Chicana/o Youth Liberation Conference held in March 1969 in Denver. The imaginary of Aztlán, the mythic homeland of the Aztecs in what is now the US Southwest, made indigenous ties to place central to the cultural nationalist narrative and emphasized the importance of place and land to the struggle for Chicana/o self-determination.

In the opening lines of “El Plan,” the poet Alurista declares: “We are free and sovereign to determine those tasks which are justly called for by our house, our land, the sweat of our brows, and by our hearts. Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not to the foreign Europeans. We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continent.”²⁹ As Ontiveros argues, both Vasquez and Alurista constructed in their writing “a distinctive Chicano/a environmentalism that looked to Mexican cultures in America as sources of inspiration and guidance in building an alternative, healthier modernity.”³⁰ Embracing the concept of Aztlán reflected the desire of both writers “to make issues of ecology a part of the Chicano movement.”³¹ Reclaiming an agricultural relationship to the land for a people with their “hands in the soil” was also a mode of challenge to US conquest.³² In contrast to a “settler society” that “does not recognize indigenous conceptions” of land and that “views indigenes as failing to make productive use of it,” this narrative of indigenous presence highlights labor and belonging to the land in the creation of Chicana/o identity.³³ It repudiates the structures of racialization in settler colonialism and the process whereby the “notion of private property . . . necessitates the transubstantiation of the “other” into the regime of racial legibility and the consolidation of “whiteness” over the subjects of domination.”³⁴

“Global Sisterhood” and the Politics of Land

While the politics of *EGDN* originated in Chicana/o contexts associated with the US Southwest, its international and feminist perspective embraced a symbolic, political, and material meaning of land and the natural world that extended beyond this space. In April 1970 Martínez traveled to North Vietnam as part of a group of leftist Americans given permission to conduct a letter ex-

change with American POWs. Sharing her observations from this unusual visit to enemy territory during the war, Martínez's firsthand account, "Looking for the Truth in North Vietnam with Our Own Eyes," was published in "Special Issue: Raza Report from North Vietnam" on August 29, 1970.³⁵ Framed by the relationship between race, gender, and land, the article connects the colonial experiences of Chicana/os in New Mexico to those of the Vietnamese under French colonialism and US imperial interests. Three interrelated aspects of the special issue suggest how the newspaper's environmental lens brought together antiracist, anti-imperialist, and feminist politics in its coverage of Vietnam: the timing of its publication on the day of the Los Angeles Chicano Moratorium against the War in Vietnam, the feminist politics of global sisterhood, and the commentary on land and environmentalism in the US.

The cover of the issue suggests the confluence of these three themes. Signaling Chicana/o activism vis-à-vis the Vietnam War as an important context for this report on North Vietnam, the slogan "¡Raza Sí! ¡Guerra No!" appears in the top right-hand corner of the paper, above three sets of images comparing Vietnamese people and Chicana/os in adjacent columns labeled "Their People" and "Our People."³⁶ The paired images depict "children of North Vietnam" alongside "children of northern New Mexico," an image of "campesinos of North Vietnam" walking draft animals through a verdant landscape alongside a similar image of "campesinos of northern New Mexico," and photographs of "a North Vietnamese woman" and "La Chicana," preparing food in a kitchen.³⁷ Emphasizing peasant farm and domestic labor in bucolic settings, this idealized portrayal of the relationship between Chicana/o and Vietnamese "campesinos" and the land is grounded in ideas about womanhood and the gendered domestic sphere. The gendered lens highlights womanhood and its relationship to land as ways to answer the question posed by the heading to the images: "Vietnam War—Why?" that asks why the war is happening and why it matters to Chicana/os.³⁸

This focus on women and land in Vietnam built on the larger role of the Vietnam War in Chicana/o politics. The disproportionate representation of Chicano soldiers in the military led Chicana/o antiwar activists to protest the way poverty, poor educational opportunities, and limited access to student draft deferments created a pipeline of Chicanos into the military. In their view, Chicanos were being asked to fight for a cause with which they did not identify. The publication of the special issue on North Vietnam was timed to coincide with the Los Angeles Chicano Moratorium, the largest Chicana/o rally of the 1960s and 1970s, and the largest anti-Vietnam War rally by people of color during this period. Viewing Chicanos as an oppressed community of color in

the US, movement rhetoric identified Chicano soldiers with the Vietnamese, their racial metaphorical brothers, rather than with the US state,³⁹ an approach that reflected the politics of “internal colonialism” adopted by many people of color in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Derived from an analysis of black politics in the US and dependency theory in Latin America, this critical analytic tool aligned Chicana/os with colonized peoples throughout the world, particularly in the Americas.⁴⁰ However, while moratorium antiwar rhetoric connected conditions at home to the war in Vietnam, the rhetoric of internal colonialism ultimately “used the anti-war demonstration as a springboard to address domestic injustices.”⁴¹ The moratorium was fundamentally directed toward the domestic struggle, a struggle embodied in the protest slogan *La Guerra Está Aquí!* (The Fight Is Here!).

With its feminist and internationalist approach, *EGDN* brought concerns arising out of Chicana/o politics to bear on broader struggles for social justice in the US and on international struggles against the global structures of imperialism. For instance, the special issue features Vasquez’s “El Soldado Raso Today,” about Chicano military service and moratorium politics, and articles on the Red Power movement, a federal government loan scandal in Colorado, and Native American draft resistance, alongside Martínez’s report on North Vietnam and an article on the history of US imperialism. Martínez herself was scheduled to speak at the moratorium protest, but the police brutality that disrupted the rally prevented her from sharing her perspective on Vietnam.⁴² The gender politics of “global sisterhood” and third-world feminism were crucial to the newspaper’s expansion beyond the nationalist politics of the *Alianza* movement and the antiwar movement with its masculinist tendencies. While the newspaper remained committed in its coverage of Tijerina’s land rights politics, it broke early on with its role as a mouthpiece for the *Alianza*, reportedly because of Martínez’s feminist and socialist politics.⁴³

A feminist politics that viewed social justice struggles at home in the context of decolonization and global processes of imperialism encouraged symbolic and actual connections with women of color in the US and abroad. As Chela Sandoval writes, third-world feminism sought to disrupt the boundaries of the nation-state and to “link together citizen-subjects who had previously been separated by gender, sex, race, culture, nation, and/or class into a new alliance, country people of an unprecedented psychic terrain.”⁴⁴ In the context of protest against the Vietnam War, third-world women of color in North America were a key group in shaping the international women’s peace movement that brought US women into contact with their Vietnamese “sisters.” This sense of “global sisterhood” was “not just an ideology imposed by the West but was promoted

by women from the East as well,” as Vietnamese women actively “cultivated a belief in global sisterhood” to “promote an international peace movement.”⁴⁵ Face-to-face encounters between the Chicana writers of *EGDN* and Vietnamese women gave the writers’ access to information about the lived experience of Vietnamese people during the war that was not widely known in the West.

Indeed, Martínez’s report on North Vietnam was made possible by her travel under the auspices of the Committee of Liaison with Servicemen Detained in North Vietnam. This trip was organized by Cora Weiss, the American women’s international peace movement activist, whom the historian Judy Wu identifies as a “leader in WSP (Women Strike for Peace)” and who played a “central role in arranging American delegations to Hanoi during the U.S. war in Vietnam.”⁴⁶ Granted access by the US government to enter North Vietnam with the purpose of exchanging mail between American POWs and their families, these delegations “provided an opportunity to expose dedicated peace activists to wartime conditions in Hanoi” and other parts of North Vietnam.⁴⁷

The “main purpose of this trip,” according to Martínez, “was to see the truth with our own eyes and bring it back to Raza,” because the “regular press . . . doesn’t tell us the truth about what is happening here in New Mexico, so why should it tell us the truth about Vietnam?”⁴⁸ Martínez’s expectation of uncovering the reality of conditions in Vietnam reflects what Wu calls the “radical orientalism” of American political activists, who “both challenged and reinscribed Western perceptions of Asia” as they viewed the war in Vietnam “through idealized projections of the decolonizing Third World.”⁴⁹ However, while Martínez’s bonds with the Vietnamese people she encountered were shaped by romanticized assumptions about Asia and may not be an accurate reflection of “truth,” this should not invalidate her expressions of solidarity or her conviction that the North Vietnamese and Chicana/os in New Mexico had much in common and that they shared an environmental perspective grounded in colonial oppression.

In Martínez’s four-page report, the links between environmentalism, gender, land, and imperialism are crucial to imagining a cross-border alliance against US oppression. The opening of her report establishes the connection between the two communities through a vision of the land: “One of the first things that you notice on a visit to North Vietnam is the beauty of the land. There are mountains and valleys and caves and big skies and glowing sunsets, as in New Mexico.”⁵⁰ As in New Mexico, “the story of the war in Vietnam begins with the land. Many years ago, the peasants—campesinos—lost their lands to big, powerful rich men.”⁵¹ This “story” of “land robbery” under French colonialism, and the destruction of the land by US aggression, is inseparable from

women's oppression and resistance. For instance, in a subsection, "Visit to an Agricultural Cooperative," Martínez interweaves an explanation of the plight of Vietnamese peasants with an analysis of women's roles, lauding Vietnamese women as fighters, from the "Trung sisters . . . in the First Century, up to the girls' anti-aircraft crews of today," who show that "resistance fighting runs in the blood of the women."⁵²

Most powerfully, Martínez's report concludes with an account of her group's emotional encounter with a Buddhist nun. The nun tells her that "we, the women, must unite to stop this war. . . . I would like you to take that message back to the women of America."⁵³ As Martínez describes the encounter, "her eyes seemed to be burning into us. Our answer seemed to be the most important thing in the world to her—whether we would try to tell all our sisters in America why they must make the U.S. stop the war, stop the bombings."⁵⁴ Though the nun does not explicitly mention the land, Martínez's emphasis on the devastation of the war to the Vietnamese environment, and her emphasis on the relationship between the land and the people, is already embedded in this message to "stop the war" and "the bombings." The urgency of the nun's request to her third world "sisters" is so powerful that Martínez's sense of responsibility takes embodied form: "It was impossible to say anything. We could only move our heads up and down: yes."⁵⁵

The message that Martínez came back to tell brought these intersectional concerns to bear on the dominant discourses of land and nature that informed the mainstream environmental movement. She took aim, for example, at the environmental politics captured in the inaugural Earth Day in 1970, criticizing the universalist claims of the rhetoric surrounding Earth Day and provincializing the celebratory politics of care for the whole earth through the critique of US imperialism that undergirded her report. Martínez expressed the dissonance she felt hearing a radio report about this watershed event after a day spent witnessing the environmental devastation around Vinh, a major coastal city in North Vietnam:

Our group sat outdoors quietly, all of us thinking about the destruction we had seen that day. We had a radio and the Voice of America came on the air, talking about the celebration of "Earth Day" in the U.S. There were the Americans, worrying about their environment—what they call ecology—while the land of North Vietnam stood ruined and poisoned by American bombs. And only a few miles south of us, more bombs were dropping at that very moment, as the U.S. broke its 1968 agreement to stop. A wonderful "Earth Day."⁵⁶

Martínez's identification with the Vietnamese people frames her critique of Earth Day and mainstream environmental politics as part of hegemonic US

ideologies. Hearing about the event with the violence inflicted on the land and people of North Vietnam fresh in her mind, Martínez exposed the contradictions between the universal environmental interests proclaimed in the discourse of Earth Day and its narrow attention to the nation-bound environmental concerns of the “Americans,” a position from which she distances herself. She felt strongly enough about this message that she repeated the anecdote about Earth Day decades later in an interview and described herself as “enraged.”⁵⁷

Martínez’s criticism of Earth Day and mainstream ecology spoke to the larger issue that these modes of environmental thinking fail to integrate humans with nature, and in so doing can condone the violence done to the environment by the existence of unequal power relationships in human society. At stake for Martínez is not the ability of the land to replenish itself in human absence, as in mainstream American environmental thought, but the proposition that land is fundamentally connected to people and that the violence to the land has a social and human dimension. These interconnected modes of violence are explicitly enacted in US conduct of the war in Vietnam and parallel the violence done to the land and the rights of Chicana/os in the US. Martínez’s reference to the Voice of America, and its role in the state-sponsored global spread of US ideology, further highlights the incongruity of US celebration of the “Earth” while destroying Vietnamese land as part of its ongoing military intervention in Vietnam.

This commentary on Earth Day and the mainstream environmental movement reflected the social justice approach to land and the attention to racialized populations in the US and abroad, found in the pages of *EGDN*. Martínez’s response to Earth Day exposes the limitations of the mainstream, modern environmental movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Coalescing in the inaugural Earth Day on April 22, 1970, the movement found a major impetus in public concern over the rising use of synthetic pesticides and petrochemicals in the US environment described in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Earth Day was a watershed moment for bringing large numbers of people into environmental activism and shaping the terms of postwar environmentalism. Though there were certainly some participants who were people of color, including Chicana/os, and their participation in Earth Day events engaged racial politics, the major issues of pollution, urban sprawl, wilderness preservation, and overpopulation reflected the concerns of a largely white, middle-class constituency.⁵⁸ Indeed, the rhetoric of population explosion was often explicitly racialized, blaming people of color in the US and third-world countries for the hazards to the earth’s carrying capacity posed by overpopulation.⁵⁹

Martínez's position on Earth Day can be situated in the larger context of divisions between the emerging environmental and civil rights movements. Despite their involvement in political mobilization around civil rights, anti-nuclear politics, and anti-Vietnam War protests, many mainstream environmentalists split from social justice movements as the radicalization and fragmentation of civil rights groups led to the rise of identity-based liberation groups. For instance, a 1971 national survey of Sierra Club members found that "58 percent of all members either strongly or somewhat opposed" the question that the club should "concern itself with the conservation problems of such special groups as the urban poor and ethnic minorities."⁶⁰ As mainstream environmental politics moved away from participatory, social justice approaches, they shifted toward an "insider strategy based on litigation, lobbying, and technical evaluation."⁶¹ Both older conservation groups like the Sierra Club and Audubon Society and new environmental organizations saw a dramatic rise in membership, predominantly white and middle class.⁶² At the same time, black civil rights leaders publicly voiced concern over the politics of the new environmental movement. During the week of the first Earth Day, Jesse Jackson accused the environmental movement of pulling support from the civil rights movement and urged Congress "to focus its concern on the issues of hunger and sanitary housing," decrying the attention "being given to the traditional environmental movement."⁶³

"We Are People of the Land": Third-World Womanhood and Environmental Resistance

The integration of humans with land and nature was the premise for environmental resistance to the violence of US empire in *EGDN*. If the critique of Earth Day by Martínez showed how environmentalism was compatible with imperial violence, the environmentalist discourse in the newspaper worked in conjunction with international feminist politics to frame a transnational critique of racialization, imperialism, and militarism. The conversations between Chicanas and other third-world women at the Indochinese Women's Conference (IWC) in Vancouver, April 2–6, 1971, exemplified the important role that sharing personal visions of social justice and their experiences of struggle over land and the environment played in building rapport between women of color in the first and third world.

As Wu explains, the two IWC meetings held the same month in Vancouver and Toronto "represented the first opportunities for large numbers of North American women to have direct contact with their Asian 'sisters.'"⁶⁴ Indicating

the active role of the Indochinese women representatives, a Chicana attendee explained that these meetings were organized by the Voice of Women/WSP in response to the Indochinese women at the first IWC meeting in Vancouver four years earlier, who “asked that there be a second conference to include third world women since none of the participants there were third world.”⁶⁵ As the *EGDN* report “Chicanas Meet Indo-Chinese” highlights, the 1971 meeting brought together “revolutionary women of Indo-China and women from the U.S. and Canada. In addition to white women from peace groups and women’s liberation groups, there were many ‘Third World’ women—Chicanas. blacks. Asians. Filipinas, and Hawaiians. Indians [*sic*].”⁶⁶

The writers’ encounters with the “six Indo-Chinese women” delegates “from North Vietnam, South Vietnam and Cambodia” were the main focus of the two firsthand accounts published in *EGDN*: “The Enemy Is Imperialism,” by “Donna,” and “We Are People of the Land,” by Dolores Varela.⁶⁷ This solidarity between Chicanas and North Vietnamese women had an important environmental dimension. While Donna’s article established the larger colonial context, that the shared “oppressor” was “U.S. capitalism and imperialism,” Varela’s article built on this framework to articulate the centrality of the struggle over land to forging solidarity with third-world women.⁶⁸ Varela explained the interest she and Alison and Suzette Bridges, “who have been carrying on the Indian fishing struggle in Washington State,” had in listening to the Southeast Asian delegates talk about war “atrocities, especially against the women.”⁶⁹ She emphasized the importance of their common relationship to land in their conversation: “We talked mostly about the Indian struggle and I also told them of the struggle in New Mexico. They started comparing the reservations to the enemy’s concentration camps in their countries. Everything we said they could relate to, and compare it with what was happening over there.”⁷⁰ Connecting expropriation and removal from land in the settler colonial context of the US to the displacement of Vietnamese people into “concentration camps,” or in official US parlance, “strategic hamlets,” the women came together to develop a cross-border understanding of US imperialism. Together they enacted the kind of translocal Chicana feminist intersubjectivity that Christina Holmes describes coming out of a place-centered consciousness, as “actors from different regions and different positionalities . . . become deterritorialized and then reconstituted as subjects more likely to understand their intersubjective coextensions with others.”⁷¹

The shared experience of land violation and dispossession not only allowed the women to forge a bond but was also the basis of an environmental discourse to articulate protest against US oppression. Varela writes that the Southeast

Asian women “said they were people of the land, and they want an immediate end to the war. All the bombs and poisonous gasses have completely taken the life from their country—the birds don’t sing and the grass doesn’t grow anymore.”⁷² Varela expressed her solidarity with the Southeast Asian women and the violation of their land through her very title, “We Are People of the Land.” Her language opened up a spotlight on environmental assault as an intentional strategy of war against other-than-human life and against the Vietnamese people, whose experiences were further rendered invisible by their status as wartime enemies. This environmental lens, which was attentive to the politics of race, gender, and US imperialism, addressed the inequalities of power in human society that enabled environmental violence and made social justice essential to their environmental vision.

The attention of *EGDN* to the wartime experiences of Vietnamese women also allowed it to illuminate environmental issues that were often obscured by US interests. One example was the topic of herbicidal warfare in Vietnam. “Operation Ranch Hand” destroyed an estimated five million acres of forest in South Vietnam with the application of Agent Orange from 1961 to 1971.⁷³ In such operations, the US sought to destroy forest cover for the National Liberation Front (NLF, also called Vietcong in the US), destroying civilian crops, livestock, and village infrastructure that could be used to supply enemy soldiers. As David Zierler writes, in the US herbicides were used to target particular flora considered weeds, but in Vietnam “the forest was the weed.”⁷⁴ Coupled with the destruction of local villages and agriculture, the attempts to remove villagers into strategic hamlets, which Valdez calls “concentration camps,” villages designed, controlled, and policed by US and ARVN forces, can be seen as a biopolitical project that required the wholesale destruction of the lived environment of the Vietnamese people and its replacement by a militarized environment designed to control Vietnamese people.⁷⁵

While Agent Orange was a weapon designed to destroy the physical landscape, the environmental lens of *EGDN* emphasized the direct impact that herbicidal warfare had on humans connected to the land. In a five-part series on the Vietnam War for *EGDN* in January 1970, Valdez included an extended treatment of Vietnamese women’s resistance to the US military destruction of the environment.⁷⁶ Valdez provided numerous examples of the ways that South Vietnamese village women stopped attacks on their villages by US-allied ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) soldiers. Valdez described how the women directly confronted ARVN soldiers approaching their village, carrying “dead animals and withered tree branches destroyed by the chemical sprays,” which they would hurl “in piles in front of the troops, a real exhibition of

destruction. They would shout that they were unarmed, and were protesting this destruction.”⁷⁷

Confronting soldiers with material evidence of chemical attacks served to humanize the victims, linking villagers to the effects of the aerial sprays that were carried out from a distance. In doing so, Vietnamese women made visible the injustice of the violence against them, as well as exposing and challenging the power differential that existed between unarmed village women and armed male soldiers. *EGDN* thus drew attention to the effects of the massive US wartime defoliation effort in Vietnam and to the use of herbicidal warfare and “Agent Orange,” before this topic gained a foothold in US public consciousness as a result of the health problems amongst US veterans.⁷⁸ This put *EGDN* in the company of other early voices in the 1960s protesting the use of herbicidal warfare in Vietnam, such as some antiwar activists and scientists concerned with “ecocide.”⁷⁹

The environmental lens of writers for *EGDN* not only led them to attack the effects of herbicidal and chemical warfare in Vietnam but also engages with the ideology that animated these acts of environmental violence. In a 1969 article, “Vietnam Story: The People Fight Using Nature and Courage,” Valdez wrote, “don’t you think that a country that uses such synthetic materials as gasses, napalm, helicopters, and all kinds of different bombs is really the aggressor? Just by the machinery it uses?”⁸⁰ Deploying the environmental epistemology I have argued can be found in *EGDN*, Valdez suggested that it was the very unnaturalness of US industrial and military technology that branded the US as the imperial invader. She thus articulated, in an international context, Vasquez’s accusation in “La Santa Tierra” that “Gringo” technology fails to “make a place for humans in relation to nature.” Her writing also resonated with Martínez’s view in her “Raza Report” that the violation of nature provided the basis for an ontological critique of the “white people of the West,” who revealed their “unnatural soul” through the use of “unnatural weapons.”⁸¹

The conclusion of Valdez’s article articulated clearly the stakes involved in the opposition between the newspaper’s third-world feminist politics, its environmental epistemology, and its critical resistance to US empire and capitalism. As she wrote:

What kind of freedom are we fighting for? Is it the kind of freedom you get after you or a black person come back from fighting and can’t even find a decent job? Is that the kind of freedom you want to give the Vietnamese? Or is it really for the freedom of the U.S. millionaires to go and take more of the land and minerals of the Vietnamese and Asians, like they took our land and mines away from us? And how they are taking away our minerals

and making billions of dollars out of it and they give us a few huesos—bones, like jobs and powdered milk, welfare, to keep us happy. Is that the kind of “freedom” you want to give the Vietnamese?⁸²

Her assessment of the desire of US capitalism for the labor and raw materials controlled by internally and externally colonized “third world” peoples connects the exploitation of Chicana/os and blacks in the US to Southeast Asians. Building on the politics of land and the environment that emerges from the transnational imaginary connecting Chicana/o nationalist politics, the US settler colonial context, and US imperial interests in Vietnam, Valdez offers a broader structural commentary on racialized US exploitation. Her impassioned interrogation of US ideas about “freedom” suggests how environmental analysis functioned to call into question and to delegitimize the Cold War ideology of the US as the global defender of democracy and freedom.

Conclusion

EGDN thus spoke to the contradictions between US capitalism and environmentalism, a capitalism that required the continued extraction of natural resources through US imperial intervention, destroying both the environment and its human inhabitants. *EGDN* critiqued US warfare in terms that challenged mainstream environmentalists to recognize the interrelated environmental and human violence of their own country. Recalling Martínez’s commentary on the contradictions of Earth Day, we should understand her reaction as simultaneously a criticism of environmentalism and of the ideologies of freedom and democracy that served as an alibi for US imperialism.

By representing US violence against the Vietnamese land and people as unnatural, ethical violations, the Chicana women writers of *EGDN* linked a depoliticized construction of the environment to the imperial violence and environmental devastation wrought by the US nation-state. If the focus of mainstream environmentalism emphasized care for “nature” within the boundaries of the US without substantive attention to issues of race and social justice, it could never connect to the struggles of marginalized groups in the US or to the struggles waged by people around environmentalism and imperialism outside the US.

The women who wrote for *EGDN* were clear about the consequences of failing to address the interconnections between environmentalism and the political terrain of race, empire, and military violence. While mainstream environmental discourse imagined ideas about the environment as universal, as the work of

environmental justice activists and scholars have made clear in the last three decades, environmental impacts and risks are experienced unequally in the US and globally. For the writers of *EGDN*, the US assault on the Vietnamese environment was not just an omission from the growing environmental debate of late 1960s and early 1970s in the US, but a gap that exposed the limitations of certain strands of environmental thinking, such as green capitalism, that did not fundamentally challenge US capitalism and empire.

Not addressing these issues of human inequality and unequal power runs the risk of allowing environmentalism to travel alongside imperialism, and to perpetuate its complicity in the logic of preserving the US standard of living by continued capitalist extraction and exploitation of third-world natural resources and by outsourcing the environmental impact of this exploitation to marginalized communities in the US and the global South. The environmental sacrifices of poor people and racialized others thus underwrites the relative environmental security of privileged global North spaces. As these Chicana writers and activists from the civil rights era showed, understanding the relationship between environmentalism, capitalism, and the imperatives of the US empire is essential to building an environmental vision grounded in social justice.

Notes

1. At the point in her long career as an activist and writer when Martínez moved to New Mexico to support Tijerina's cause, she had been working in the black civil rights movement in New York City through the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and was coming to identify with Chicana/o politics. For more on Martínez, see the special issue "Elizabeth 'Betita' Sutherland Martínez: A Life in Struggle," *Social Justice* 39.2–3 (2013).
2. Judy Wu, *Radicals on the Road* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 216.
3. George Mariscal, *Aztlán and Viet Nam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 5.
4. Ho Chi Minh, "The Wheel Turns," *El Grito del Norte*, September 14, 1969; Enriqueta Vasquez, "El Soldado Razo Today," *El Grito del Norte*, August 29, 1970; Vasquez, "Despierten! Hermanos," *El Grito del Norte*, May 19, 1970; "Chicano Viêt Nam Project," *El Grito del Norte*, May 19, 1972.
5. Michael Ziser, "Home Again: Peak Oil, Climate Change, and the Aesthetics of Tradition," in *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Stephanie LeMenager, Teresa Shewry, and Ken Hiltner (New York: Routledge, 2011), 185.
6. Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 183; Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970), 258.
7. Priscilla Solis Ybarra, *Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 5, 7.
8. Randy J. Ontiveros, *In the Spirit of a New People: The Cultural Politics of the Chicano Movement* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 87.
9. Benjamin Chavis Jr., foreword to *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Cambridge, MA: South End, 1993), 3.
10. Devon G. Peña, *Mexican Americans and the Environment: Tierra y Vida* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 100–103.

11. Christina Holmes, *Ecological Borderlands: Body, Nature, and Spirit in Chicana Feminism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 33.
12. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 34.
13. Nixon.
14. Enriqueta Vasquez, "La Santa Tierra," *El Grito del Norte*, December 7, 1970.
15. Sarah D. Wald, David J. Vázquez, Priscilla Solis Ybarra, and Sarah Jaquette Ray, eds., *Latinx Environmentalisms: Place, Justice, and the Decolonial* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019), 7. For further discussion of Latinx environmentalisms and the complexities of Latinxs as colonizer and objects of colonization, see the introduction by the editors and the foreword by Laura Pulido.
16. Vasquez, "La Santa Tierra."
17. Vasquez.
18. Vasquez.
19. Vasquez.
20. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (2006): 388.
21. Vasquez, "La Santa Tierra."
22. Tjerina questioned whether *aliancistas* were indeed American given the illegality of U.S. landholding. See Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí! ¡Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 70.
23. Ybarra, *Writing the Goodlife*, 102.
24. There were four principal grant types—pueblo, community, individual, and impresario grants to foreigners—under Spanish and Mexican law. See Peña, *Mexican Americans and the Environment*, 79–81.
25. For legal explanations of land grant history, see Malcom Ebright, *Land Grants and Lawsuits in Northern New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994); David Correia, *Properties of Violence: Law and Land Grant Struggle in Northern New Mexico* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 29.
26. Correia, *Properties of Violence*, 7.
27. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 387.
28. Correia, *Properties of Violence*, 7, 35.
29. "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán," accessed December 3, 2017, www.umich.edu/~mechaum/Aztlan.html.
30. Ontiveros, *In the Spirit of a New People*, 93.
31. Ontiveros, 98.
32. "El Plan." This idealized agrarian relationship with the land was symbolic, rather than a claim to demographic accuracy. In 1969 Mexican Americans were primarily an urban population with US roots that postdated the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. See Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí!*, 86.
33. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1.1 (2015): 55.
34. Njoroge, in Cynthia Franklin, Njoroge, and Suzanna Reiss, "Tracing the Settler's Tools: A Forum on Patrick Wolfe's Life and Legacy," *American Quarterly* 69.2 (2017): 239.
35. Elizabeth Martínez, "Looking for the Truth in North Vietnam with Our Own Eyes," *El Grito del Norte*, August 29, 1970.
36. "Vietnam War—Why?," *El Grito del Norte*, August 29, 1970.
37. "Vietnam War—Why?"
38. "Vietnam War—Why?"
39. See Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí!*, 89.
40. For a discussion of internal colonialism in the Chicana/o movement, see Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "Internal Colonialism: An American Theory of Race," *Du Bois Review* 1.2 (2004): 281–95.
41. Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí!*, 141.
42. Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 217.
43. Sofía Martínez, "Go-Go Betita," *Social Justice* 39.2–3 (2013): 107.
44. Chela Sandoval, "Mestizaje as Method," in *Living Chicana Theory*, ed. Carla Trujillo (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman, 1998), 355.
45. Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 194. See Wu for an extended study of the ways in which both North American and Southeast Asian women participated in global sisterhood during the Vietnam War era.
46. Wu, 194.
47. Wu, 199.

48. Martínez, “Go-Go Betita.”
49. Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 4.
50. Martínez, “Go-Go Betita.”
51. Martínez.
52. Martínez.
53. Martínez.
54. Martínez.
55. Martínez.
56. Martínez.
57. Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 215.
58. For a discussion of Chicana/o participation in Earth Day, see Adam Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 83, 92–93; and Ontiveros, *In the Spirit of a New People*, 90.
59. See Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968).
60. Luke Cole and Sheila Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 30.
61. Cole and Foster, *From the Ground Up*, 29. At the regulatory level, the start of the 1970s saw the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, and the passage of key laws such as the Clean Air Act in 1970, Clean Water Act in 1972, and the Endangered Species Protection Act in 1973.
62. Dorceta Taylor writes that a 1972 study of “1,500 environmental volunteers nationwide showed that 98 percent of the members of the environmental organizations were white and 59 percent held a college or graduate degrees [sic]” (“American Environmentalism: The Role of Race, Class, and Gender in Shaping Activism, 1820–1995,” *Race, Gender & Class* 5.1 [1997]: 40). Study cited is C. L. Zinger, R. Dalsemer, and H. Magargle, *Environmental Volunteers in America*, 1972, prepared by the National Center for Voluntary Action for the Environmental Protection Agency, Grant # R801243, Office of Research and Monitoring.
63. Quoted in Immanuel Ness, *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1300.
64. Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 193.
65. “Chicanas Attend Vancouver Conference,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought*, ed. Alma M. García (New York: Routledge, 1997), 151.
66. “Chicanas Meet Indo-Chinese,” *El Grito del Norte*, June 5, 1971.
67. Donna, “The Enemy Is Imperialism,” *El Grito del Norte*, June 5, 1971; Dolores Varela, “We Are People of the Land,” *El Grito del Norte*, June 5, 1971.
68. Varela, “We Are People of the Land.”
69. Varela.
70. Varela.
71. Holmes, *Ecological Borderlands*, 48.
72. Varela, “We Are People of the Land.”
73. Holmes, *Ecological Borderlands*, 2.
74. Quoted in Holmes, 2.
75. Varela, “We Are People of the Land”; Valentina Valdez, “Vietnam Story: The People Fight Using Nature and Courage,” *El Grito del Norte*, September 14, 1969.
76. Valdez’s articles relied heavily on Wilfred Burchett’s *Vietnam: Inside Story of the Guerilla War* (New York: International Publishers, 1965). This storied left-wing Australian journalist, who wrote several books based on his experiences with the NLF, influenced Valdez’s writing, and most of her anecdotes about women’s resistance are paraphrased from Burchett. Burchett has also been credited with the “first recorded denunciation of herbicidal warfare,” in a 1962 article published in a Soviet newspaper. See David Zierler, *The Invention of Ecocide: Agent Orange, Vietnam, and the Scientists Who Changed the Way We Think about the Environment* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 95. Burchett’s article is “War against the Trees,” *Novoe Vremia* [New Times], February 1962, 26.
77. Valentina Valdez, “Who Is Fighting?,” *El Grito del Norte*, January 17, 1970.
78. Zierler, *Invention of Ecocide*, 96.
79. For a study of scientists protesting “ecocide” in the Vietnam War, see Zierler, *Invention of Ecocide*.
80. Valdez, “Vietnam Story.”
81. Martínez, “Go-Go Betita.”
82. Valdez, “We Are People of the Land.”