Pertenencia Mutua: Indigenous Oaxacans Contesting Settler Colonial Grammars

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Abstract. Drawing on settler colonial grammar of place, the colonial practice of naming and renaming Native land through mapmaking processes that historically deny, erase, and homogenize Indigenous communities, this essay argues that Indigenous Oaxacans disrupt settler colonial renaming of land by engaging in their community’s collective understanding of pertenencia mutua (mutual belonging)—an Indigenous Oaxacan relational consciousness of belonging across Abya Yala (“the Americas”) that allows them to recognize their role as Indigenous visitors on Native land and as Native to Abya Yala. Theorizing through pertenencia mutua offers a deep understanding of Indigenous efforts to (re)build communities in their struggle against settler colonial violence, including through naming practices and grammar of place. Using semistructured interviews, oral histories, and social media content, I analyze how Indigenous Oaxacan young adults engage on the ground and on social media to unsettle colonially named places by placing their identity and their own communities in relational existence. Such unsettlings call for the re theorization of place.

Keywords: pertenencia mutua (mutual belonging), relationality, Native/Indigenous land acknowledgments, settler colonial grammar of place, Oaxacalifornia

I am a Bene Xhon Zapotec woman born and raised on Tovaangar by “immigrant” parents from Xhiin (a place where Sapote is abundant) and Lao Ya’a (on the mountain peak). I now raise my child and work on the ancestral lands of the Tongva and Acjachemen. As Indigenous peoples of Oaxaca, we know that to be a good visitor on other Indigenous lands, permission and respect is foremost. This cross-Indigenous relationality, however, has been fraught due to settler colonial empires and borders of the US, Latin America, and Canada. While Indigenous peoples have rightfully argued that land acknowledgments made on university campuses and in other settler institutions have no serious commitment to return occupied land to the Native peoples on whose land they are on, they are nonetheless having an impact on Indigenous visitors, mostly students, who are undoing settler grammar of place by recognizing their existence as Native peoples on other Native peoples’ lands.
Analyzing interviews and social media content, such as posts, hashtags, bios, and “pin-drops,” I argue that the challenges to settler colonial grammars that young Indigenous Oaxacans undertake function to generate allyship with other Indigenous peoples beyond settler colonial institutions. In this process they bridge past and present relational experiences with Native peoples, including Afro-Indigenous Oaxacans also in diaspora, that contest colonial demarcations of land, water, and space. To be clear, I do not argue that Indigenous visitors “belong” to Native lands or communities they are not ancestrally from. It is also not my intention to romanticize or homogenize Indigenous views and practices. Doing so would be complicit in Native elimination, further legitimating settler colonial state inclusion, recognition, and nativism. My intention, instead, is to bring intersecting discussions from Indigenous diasporas of the global south to the global north in common struggles for land back, “El Derecho a no Migrar” (The Right to Not Migrate), and intergenerational communal practices of recognition and belonging that disrupt the violences of settler colonialism, as these are imposed through physical, racial, gendered, and grammar borders. What follows in this essay is a focus on the combination of practices of refusal that are often accompanied by an emergent expression of pertenencia mutua (mutual belonging), especially in naming practices by Indigenous peoples that involves Indigenous languages and epistemologies.

**Mapping and Theorizing Oaxacalifornia as Terminology of Spatial Difference and Intergenerational Landscape of Resistance**

*Oaxacalifornia* is a term coined by the late anthropologist Michael Kearney to describe a sociocultural and political third-space. Oaxacan migrants create this third space as a network of support against Indigenous discrimination and labor exploitation from their non-Indigenous mestizo Mexican counterparts. Oaxacalifornia’s early theorization focused on migrants, many of them farm-workers, organizing in the Frente Mixteco-Zapoteco Binacional (FM-ZB), now the Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales, or the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations (FIOB). As a binational organization with multiple chapters throughout the US and Mexico, the FIOB has been influential in how *Oaxacalifornia*, as a term, has expanded and reflected cross-border ties between and within these settler states. It centers Oaxacans in the multiple migratory routes they are forced onto and how early generations reflect upon their political, social, and cultural practices they bring from their ancestral homelands to their new place of (temporary) settlement. Mixtec leader, mentee, and later colleague of Kearney, the labor studies sociologist Gaspar Rivera-Salgado further
brought the term *Oaxacalifornia* to the fore of academia and entrenched it in his early grassroots organizing with the FIOB. Many Oaxacans have maintained their traditional practices, their pueblo-based identities, organizing, and connections to their pueblo(s) while living in California, Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin, Netzahualcoyotl in the state of Mexico, Baja California, Veracruz, and the smaller Indigenous Oaxacan streams to Nebraska and Nevada—the latter two for the Bene Xhiin and Bene Lao Yá’a, respectively, for more than twenty years.

In their struggle for justice and rights, including their right to not migrate and work in inhumane and exploitative conditions in order to feed their families, emerging young adult Oaxacans continue to strengthen and re-create Oaxacalifornia on the ground and into digital spaces of collective survival, dignity, and self-determination as Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala, understanding their histories and ongoing struggle for land acknowledgments and land back with their own. As my ethnography and conversations with interviewees demonstrate, *Oaxacalifornia* is a term that today reflects Indigenous Oaxacan geopolitical spaces and places built, re-created, and sustained in multiple and mutual ways by Oaxaca’s *pueblos originarios* (original/ancestral peoples) in their homelands and in the growing US-raised diaspora. By taking the experiences of the US-raised into account, how they see themselves and how they interact with Natives in the US while holding their own pueblos’ wisdom and ties, I highlight that Oaxacalifornia further empowers and becomes a tool of inter-generational and cross-Indigenous resistance and allyship that puts words into action. Ho-Chunk anthropologist Renya Ramírez has expanded on mutual Indigenous spaces as *Native Hubs*, which she describes as urban spaces created by and for displaced Natives and Indigenous migrants to connect socially, politically, and culturally across tribal lines while maintaining their belonging or identity to the rez, pueblo, or village.

**Pertenencia Mutua (Mutual Belonging)**

The land is for us a Mother, who supports us, feeds us and collects us in her womb. We belong to it; therefore, we are not the owners of any land. Between a mother and children the relationship is not in terms of ownership, but rather of mutual belonging. Our Mother is sacred, that’s why we are sacred.

In the 1980s, Ayüüjk intellectual Floriberto Díaz Gómez described the Tlahuitoltepec way of living in relationship to the land, la Madre tierra, as “pertenencia
mutua” (mutual belonging). Díaz Gómez made a clear distinction that land is not property or a resource that belongs to the people or can be sold; rather, the community—a people—belong to it. Accordingly, because land is sacred, one’s relationship to the land is also sacred. Benjamín Maldonado Alvarado further expanded that pertenencia mutua is expressed linguistically, culturally, politically, as it ties belonging to a people, a place, and also responsibility to the pueblo. These responsibilities to the pueblo are layered by communal political, cultural, voluntary labor, and territorial practices that shape peoples’ mutual belonging to a particular geography and its life forms—a pueblo or pueblos.

My intervention in analyzing pertenencia mutua lies at the intersection of intergenerational communal organizing and pueblo pedagogy in diaspora. Pueblo is land, a place that holds meaning, memories, relationships, and responsibilities with the people in it and off territory. As Indigenous peoples connected to a pueblo, or more than one pueblo, many Oaxacans are conscious that when one acknowledges lands not ancestrally theirs, they are expressing a form of relational respect. This respect starts with one’s own relationship, participation with (emphasis intended), and love to their pueblos and for the people who are tied to the hills, the mountains, the valleys, the maize, maguey—all which are ancestral to their lands. Belonging to their pueblo gives life, meaning, a connection that while tied to pueblo and paisana/os (townswoman and -men), it is intrinsic to how they make ongoing relational presence to one another. As I detail below, this relational presence and mutual belonging is distinct from how non-Indigenous mestizo Latinx and Chicano recognize each other. It is a way in which wherever they may be, wherever they have been forced to migrate, connection to ancestral homeland continues to be. Pertenencia mutua is not only tied to past but is very much tied to present and future that goes beyond human kinship and beyond settler borders. Indigenous Oaxacans do not cease to be. How diasporas maintain and reinvent mutual belonging is important for understanding how Indigenous Oaxacans see their unique position as Indigenous visitors on Native land and as Natives to Abya Yala.

I analyze emerging relational acknowledgments and discussions that critically theorize Oaxacalifornia not as a process of renaming Native land or claiming a mythical homeland but, rather, as one that draws on Indigenous practices and knowledge systems of respect, recognition, and relationality for self-determination and sovereignty as Tongva, Acjachemen, Bene Xhon, Binnizá, Ñuu Savi, Ayüüjk, and beyond. Putting Oaxacalifornia in context with Indigenous-based land acknowledgments and relational practices outside settler colonial institutions allows for a critical observation of the ways Indigenous visitors
problematize how they become racialized and assimilated in the discourses of Latinidad, as “American,” and in colonial notions and recognition of belonging and citizenship, even in Chicanidad that has erased Indigenous peoples from “Latin America” by forcing a mestizx Chicanx and/or Aztec/Mexica identity or claiming the US Southwest as “Aztlán”—Chicanx’s “ancestral homeland.” Therefore, this essay troubles, as much as it encourages, Indigenous, Latinx/Chicanx, and Latin American studies to think about pertenencia mutua as an ongoing way of life among Indigenous diasporas from “Latin America” that critically involves respect, (ac)knowledge(ment), and relationship to the lands they are ancestrally from and the Native lands they have been displaced to.

I contend that it is pertenencia mutua as pueblos originarios in which Indigenous Oaxacans, particularly outside territory, continuously reciprocate recognition and respect for one another and the land itself.11 Their Indigenous relational consciousness starts among the pueblo, the greater Oaxacan community, especially in diaspora. Relational consciousness is a process that gets reshaped in diaspora in finding connection not only to their pueblo but to other Indigenous experiences. The more they encounter other Indigenous peoples with common knowledges, ontologies, practices, and cosmologies (e.g., other Indigenous Latin American diasporas), the more they see themselves in relational consciousness.12 As the stories that have emerged in my research demonstrate, these processes are self-determining acts that refuse settler colonial state boundaries of recognition and propose, instead, a mutual belonging beyond imposed state-boundaries and borders.

For the many Oaxacans living in the US Southwest, pertenencia mutua is an everyday part of life. It is also how people have survived centuries of ongoing colonialism, displacement, and racial violence. The collective and ongoing efforts of the first major wave of migrants in the 1960s and their US-raised children continue to plant pertenencia mutua despite the geographic distance and the years living away from their ancestral lands, their “illegal” and “state (un)documented” imposed status that constrains their free movement. It is being in and away from a place that is experienced and expressed as a form of belonging to a pueblo originario. That form of being implies place as always imbued with meaning and ancestral memory. Tonawanda scholar Mishuana Goeman powerfully describes that Indigenous mapping has many functions:

They teach the future generations about their peoples’ intimate relationship to the land, they act as a mnemonic device in which a past story, memory or communal memories are recalled, and they are important to political processes. The importance of naming the land from a tribal collective memory is one of the most important political and social tools to tie people together in a shared story. Land in this moment is living and layered memory.13
Indigenous mutual belonging, as expressed by Zapotec, Mixe, Mixtec, Triqui, and Chinantec, is built through communal actions as an act of survivance. It is how those who have been displaced and dispossessed remain conscious of their relations and respect for place, even when they are away from or “out of place.” Naming land from a pueblo collective memory is an act of refusal embedded in everyday life that is culturally, politically, socially, cosmologically, ecologically, and spiritually rooted.

As a Zapotec woman social media user from Teotitlán del Valle expressed, “We need to use our Indigenous language names to refer to our pueblos. We need to hold onto that.”14 To refuse settler colonial grammar is thereby to make relational consciousness, presence, as much as it is to carry forward global understandings of Indigeneity, self-determination, and allyship. The emergence of language revitalization courses in Zapotec, Mixtec, and Triqui in California and in Oaxaca, which have been self-initiated and driven by the pueblos themselves and often not state or nonprofit funded, is also including the Native ways in which these communities have referred to their pueblos (i.e., from Yatzachi el Alto to Lao Yaa’, Yalina to Yialhin, Zoochina to Xhiin) and (sub)regions and peoples (Nuu Savi, Bene Xhon, Bën Xiidza). As Indigenous to Abya Yala, pertenencia mutua is therefore an act of self-determination that challenges colonial erasures. It is a mapping process that refuses and reconfigures Anglophone and Hispanophone settler colonial geographies. Pertenencia mutua is a coming of consciousness that for those in diaspora involves both how they see themselves in relationship to their pueblos and how they see themselves in relationship to other Indigenous displaced peoples in the “US” and beyond. In this sense, I contend that Indigenous Oaxacans create pertenencia mutua through a relational consciousness to other Native/Indigenous peoples who share overlapping histories and ongoing violations of dispossession, land resource extraction, and settler colonial renaming of land.

**Settler Colonial Grammar**

*Settler colonial grammar of place* (or *settler grammar*), a framework by Gorman, as the colonial practice of naming and renaming Native land, which is a mapmaking process informed by “settler colonial spatial logics” that historically makes Indigenous peoples and communities invisible, becomes useful in considering how Indigenous Oaxacans acknowledge their presence on Native lands.15 Putting settler grammar and pertenencia mutua in conversation demonstrates how Indigenous visitors contest settler colonial mapping and renaming of land that is informed not only by their own experience as displaced,
invisible, and racialized communities but through their own Native ontologies of respect to the land. It is this experience, and what I refer to as Indigenous relational consciousness, that interviewees speak to in acknowledging their respect for being on Native land as forcibly displaced Indigenous peoples. This never-ending colonial control over Native/Indigenous lands, bodies, all living things, including waterways, and the forced removal and relocation of them, is precisely what allows settler colonial governments seeming legitimacy.

The geographer and historian Raymond B. Craib describes the remapping of Mexico as a process of “naming [that] constituted a basic strategy of imperial and colonial control.” This strategy of colonial control and empire not only described New Spain’s power over Indigenous territory but continues today in the form of Mexico’s ongoing illegitimacy as a state controlled and ruled by a mestizo and criollo elite. 16

Naming or renaming is therefore informed by what Maylei Blackwell calls “multiple colonialities,” which she describes as the multilayering of Indigenous land by British, Spanish, French, Dutch, and Portuguese in the “Americas.” 17 The theorization of multiple colonialities becomes crucial to globally interrogate the “authority to some grammars while denying, erasing, or overlaying others.” 18 In Australia, Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson explains how colonial grammar practice came about in 1770 through Captain Cook’s written accounts of land that declared terra nullius (no one’s land or empty land) designation through English colonial doctrine of powers. 19 Similarly, Kahnawà:ke Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson describes how settler accounts legitimized power in renaming land over Native accounts that gave rise “in defining not only difference [in power and legitimization] but establishing presence” (my emphasis). 20 This colonial presence, as Simpson further argues, established terms of visibility for colonists.

Methods

This essay started from my participation in UCLA’s Mapping Indigenous Los Angeles (MILA) project—a digital storymap project that tells the many Indigenous lives in Los Angeles. 21 MILA’s objective is to contest Los Angeles’s colonially mapped city where Tongva peoples and former villages, including Indigenous displaced peoples like Maya, Mixtec, Zapotecs, Samoans, and Tonga, have been made invisible by settler colonial structures. I began coconducting interviews with Zapotec migrants for MILA’s Latin American Indigenous Diaspora digital storymap section in the summer of 2015, alongside Blackwell and Penelope Uribe-Abee, who later joined to support us digitally. 22 Community
members told stories of Indigenous LA through images, videos, and maps they provided for the MILA project. In describing MILA’s purpose, Zapotec participants were often surprised to hear that Los Angeles’s Native peoples still exist. Although their reaction initially troubled me, I quickly understood that their migration as adults, their working-class rigorous daily schedule in the US, and their educational experience (in the US or in Mexico) were structural conditions that constrained and sometimes enabled their awareness to Native peoples, lands, and presence.

Since my work with MILA, I have witnessed a growing consciousness and acknowledgment for Tongva peoples and their lands by the growing Indigenous diaspora from Latin America, particularly Maya, Indigenous Oaxacans, P’urhépecha, and Afro-Indigenous young adults who organize on social media and beyond. My observations lead me to ask, how do Indigenous visitors engage in Native land recognition and relational presence in the US and how is their recognition on Native land also informed by their own pueblo practices of respect? Likewise, I ask if and how Oaxacalifornia empowers Indigenous survival and connection across Indigenous Peoples’ and lands.

Indigenous Oaxacan social media users are clearly engaged in Native land recognition in relation to their own pueblo and family’s experience. To better understand and learn from these engagements, I participated in ethnographic-style interviews with Indigenous Oaxacan youth. Relatedly, I analyzed their social media postings across X (formerly known as Twitter) and Instagram. The posts, tweets, or stories I read and analyzed reveal a process of what I refer to as relational consciousness through pertenencia mutua that involves their own ontologies and epistemologies of place (pueblo), communal practices of life, responsibilities, and displacements. It was through Oaxacan social media that I realized how discussions of land acknowledgment were happening beyond the university. Indigenous peoples were critically and directly stating that such acknowledgments by institutions are not enough. When posting, these users were also pinning their location as “Occupied Tongva Land,” “Chumash Uncontested Lands,” or “Esselen Land” (see fig. 1), using the Native names of place, rather than the names designated through settler colonial grammar (i.e., Los Angeles, Santa Barbara / Oxnard).

Interviewees were carefully selected based on their consistent activism with Indigenous Oaxacan organizations and the larger Oaxacan community on issues of Indigenous justice and sovereignty. I selected participants based on...
Pertenencia Mutua

Mixteca Chumash x Tongva Lands

Oaxaqueña

Esselen Land

Zapotec

Tongva & Kizh Land (LA county)

Unceded Kumeyaay land


Unceded Miwok land

Oaxaqueña

Occupied Ohlone Land

She/her | oaxaqueña

Stolen Onöndowa'ga Land
what had emerged as key terms in my early research, including *Oaxacalifornia*, *Indigenous land acknowledgment*, *Native land recognition*, and specific California neighborhood locations such as *Pico-Union* and *Koreatown*. I entered these terms and locations on X and Instagram's search engines with and without hashtags. I transferred my findings into a spreadsheet to create a list of Indigenous Oaxacan media users who expressed their Indigeneity in multiple ways in hopes of having a count of Oaxacan people and organizations on social media. From 2020 to 2023, I interviewed eight Oaxacan youth and closely followed thousands of posts of more than eighty social media Indigenous Oaxacan users, mostly in their twenties and raised in California, whose most widely used social platforms are Instagram and X. Due to distancing measures caused by the pandemic, and the different locations all interviewees found themselves in (Chumash; Kumeyaay; Alabama-Coushatta, Caddo, Carrizo/ Comerco, Coahuiltecan, Comanche, Kickapoo, Lipan Apache, Tonkawa and Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo; the Three Fires Confederacy, Potawatomi, Odawa and Ojibwe Nations, Menominee, Ho-Chunk, Miami, Peoria, and Sac and Fox; and Tovaangar land), all interviews were conducted via Zoom. They all agreed for their online content to be shared using their social media name, though most chose to remain anonymous, and therefore I have removed their media or legal names.

To understand the notions and practices of Indigenous relationality that Indigenous Oaxacans in California practice, it is important to be aware of their unique experiences in Mexico. There are sixteen Indigenous languages spoken in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Of the state’s 570 municipalities, 419 of them govern through Indigenous customary law, more than any other state in Mexico. In many of these communities, as in the smaller pueblos surrounding municipalities, Indigenous customary law has been an autonomous self-governing practice since time immemorial. As one of three Mexican states with the largest Indigenous population, migration from Oaxaca to the United States has been largely Indigenous, making California the largest and primary settlement of Indigenous Oaxacans outside Mexico.

Oaxacans living in the Native Tongva/Gabrielino villages, where a large number of Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Chinantecs, and Mixes, including Maya from Guatemala, reside, are making life and community in Yaangna (Downtown Los Angeles), Geveronga (Pico-Union area), Apachianga (East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights), Huachongna (Culver City), Kuruvuunga (West Los Angeles, Brentwood, Sawtelle, and Westwood area), Jajamonga (near LA River), Kecheek (Santa Monica), Waachnga (near Santa Monica), Sa’Angna (Santa Monica, Venice, Playa del Rey, and Marina del Rey Bay and Baldwin Hills), Guashna
Pertenencia Mutua
(Playa Vista), Tajauta (Willowbrook, Watts, Inglewood area), Topanga (north of Santa Monica), to a lesser degree in Amapuniga (near Compton) and Huunga (near Watts/Compton)—all in Los Angeles County.\textsuperscript{25} Farther south they include the lands of the Acjachemem (Orange County and northern San Diego), Payómkawichum (Vista, northern Oceanside, Carlsbad, part of Temecula and Escondido). Toward central and northern California, these include Chumash and Micqanaqa’n (Malibu, Santa Ynez, Ventura, Santa Barbara, Cuyama, Oxnard, and Santa María), Fernandeño (San Fernando Valley), Chukchansi, Yokuts, Mono, Monache, Rumsen, Ohlone (Central Valley, includes Fresno and Madera), and Salinan (Salinas Valley) lands. Naming these villages by their Indigenous names is a practice of refusal of settler colonial references of landscapes. It is, however, also an expression of pertenencia mutua. Indigenous land recognition is a global process of contesting colonial cartographies and settler colonial grammar to refuse settler colonial legitimacy while expressing survivance and mutual belonging through what emerges as an Indigenous relational consciousness.

Indigenous Oaxacans on Social Media and Beyond

Though unequal access to the internet still largely affects communities of color, low-income communities, and the global south, it has become a place where marginalized groups engage in discourse of recognition.\textsuperscript{26} Technology has long been integral to Indigenous peoples’ survivance that has been used to contest and disrupt colonialism throughout Latin America across time.\textsuperscript{27} In my conversations with young Oaxacans, they described the many ways their communities are building connections with Natives as they come into recognition of being on stolen land in conversation with other Natives on university campuses and on social media. Using “pin-drops”—a GIS-like map to add one’s location—hashtags (“#”), a metadata tag that generates a digital archive that allows easy search, share, and engagement on a topic (e.g., #LandBack), posts, and “bios,” the latter being a limited-character description of one’s profile, Indigenous Oaxacan social media uniquely engages with other Indigenous and Native peoples to bring attention to global Indigenous struggles.

Of Instagram and X users, three Oaxacan youth used Oaxacalifornia as their pinned location, which they displayed as “Oaxacalifornia,” “Welcome to Oaxacalifornia,” or “Oaxacalifornian 9th Region.” These users had recently begun to engage with the term, and their use of it initially reflected the idea that the lands they are on in Los Angeles and San Diego are Oaxacalifornia, but the closer I observed, the more I was able to see that their use of pinning
their location as “Oaxacalifornia” reflected an Indigenous Oaxacan space that highlighted their difference from non-Indigenous mestizo Latinx and Chicanx people. This space was shaped by the ongoing communal stories of survival, organizing, self-determination, responsibility, and love for the pueblos and peoples they come from. Others used hashtags, like #Oaxacalifornia, to describe their transborder experience. Hashtags, generated by the pound or number symbol (#), allowed users to find and connect through conversations or images and so forth on a specific topic. Many more Oaxacans either pin or hashtag their pueblo’s name or the neighborhood they reside in California (e.g., Pico-Union).

In describing Oaxacalifornia, Flor, a constant social media user, stated, “I think of Oaxacalifornia as a state of mind, not necessarily a renaming of place here [California]. It becomes useful in placing our presence as Indigenous guests here. It complicates Latinidad and even Mexicanidad. I don’t really use it, but it’s more a sense of self than claiming a land that isn’t ours.” Flor’s sentiments were also shared by Reyna Chabeli, a Zapotec woman who tweeted: “#OaxaCalifornia is having two homes. It’s being with my community in the US and feeling like I’m in Oaxaca. It’s being in Oaxaca and knowing my family waits for me in the US. Oaxaqueños take a piece of Oaxaca wherever we go.” These social media users describe a strong ancestral connection to their homelands that allows them to make sense of who they are in relation to others and how they collectively make meaning to place in their prolonged displacement from their pueblos.

From their Indigenous place-based knowledge, new emerging Oaxacan youth engage in hemispheric struggles for land back and recognition that go beyond hashtags and social media. In doing so, they push and challenge physical borders and colonial grammar. Many of these mostly Zapotec, Chinantec, and Mixtec social media users also organize on the ground as part of several Indigenous Oaxacan-based groups, including hometown associations, cooperative mutual aid groups, study/reading groups, arts-based groups, therapy groups, and grassroots and nonprofit organizations. Oaxacalifornia is therefore a space that resists erasure, racialization, and all other forms of generational violence from settler colonialism. As Oaxacan social media users, not only do they engage in online activism, but it is their own involvement with their communities that allows them to understand their responsibility and respect for lands that are not ancestrally theirs. Their use of hashtags and pinning becomes cyber-spaced sites that transmit Indigenous knowledge and presence on Indigenous issues, events, Indigenous-owned clothing, and much more for self and community sufficiency.
From “#ThisIsIndianLand,” “#TongvaLand,” and “#LandBack,” Native land claims and recognition are not empty words or a trend. Like the No Dapl (#NODAPL), Nos Faltan 43 (#NOSFALTAN43), and the Black Lives Matter (#BLACKLIVESMATTER) hashtags, Indigenous hashtags garner attention and visibility to a larger, and often unaware public, that Indigenous peoples continue to exist and resist erasure in vast and creative ways. Indigenous cyberspace discussions are informed by one another’s struggles, where Indigenous youth are particularly at the center of carrying over and restructuring Indigenous place-making and knowledge as visitors. Using social media allows them to reach a larger audience outside university dialogues, which many Indigenous migrants from “Latin America” in the US do not have access to, reminding us that colonial geographies and “geopolitics of knowledge [of] the North has sustained and carried out episteme violence” on Indigenous landscapes globally. In this vein, Matlatzinca and P’urhépecha scholar Gabriela Spears-Rico demonstrates that hashtag activism, such as #NosFaltan43 and #CheranSeLevanta, during the ongoing “war on drugs” waged by the Mexican government, was instead inverted and used as a tool for Indigenous communities and allies to “encourage” and allow others to “witness” the atrocities being committed against them after the government and mainstream media censored their struggle from being televised.

Indigenous Oaxacan allyship in social media is informed by individual and collective experiences. For example, when asked about their choice of Native land pinning and hashtagging, one user replied, “As an Indigenous person that acknowledges that these are not my ancestral lands, when people are on my ancestral lands I want them to have that same type of respect, instead of [recognizing] ‘San Diego’ or these other colonial terms.” This Zapoteca Instagram and X user reflects on Native land recognition by contesting colonial grammar and geographies not only in the US but also in Mexico. She places respect as an embedded practice among Indigenous peoples when on other Native lands and refuses settler colonial grammar across Abya Yala. Take, for example, Aymara leader Takir Mamani’s international proposition to Indigenous leaders in 1975 that instead of using the terms America or Latin America, Abya Yala should be used, as “placing foreign names on our towns, cities and continents is tantamount to subjecting our identity to the will of our invaders, and their heirs.” Similarly, K’iche’ Maya scholar Emil Keme proposes that we must “reconfigure the map” to include not only Indigenous “names and parameters” but voices of Abya Yala to lead “transhemispheric Indigeneities” while also acknowledging its potential limitation to Anglophone colonial states.
A clear example of this cross-Indigenous acknowledgment and contestation to settler grammars is a young Mixteco social media user whose bio description reads, “INÎ was born Ñuù Savi; was raised on Chumash Nation lands. He walks on Abya Yala and Turtle Island with his pueblo.” During our conversation, INÎ explained his social media biography in the following way, “We live the ‘Mixtec route.’ We go to Veracruz, Sinaloa, Baja California and now here [California]. In a way, we are walking everywhere and together. I think it’s important because in a way we are all combating struggles and knowledges.” INÎ was born in his pueblo and brought as a kid to Ventura County, where during extreme summer heat he helped his parents pick strawberries and other crops alongside other mostly Mixtec farmworking children who were also helping their parents. Through relational presence as a Ñuù Savi Oaxacan, INÎ follows Indigenous knowledge systems of protocol and respect, which are based on his community’s own experience and their forced migration, while reinforcing Indigenous and specific pueblo community pride.

La Ruta Mixteca (The Mixtec Route)—a migrant stream that many Mixtecs from Oaxaca have been forced to make due to economic, political, and social policies, consistently migrating between multiple Mexican and US states following seasonal and low-paying harvesting jobs—was important in how INÎ made his connection and respect to Native peoples. He stated, “We know how to work with the land, tend to it, but we’re forced to migrate, to work on other lands not our own. It is similar to how Indigenous peoples here [the ‘US’] have become displaced and forced to work the land.” Relational connections are linked to what Lynn Stephen refers to as “Indigenous circuits of care” that are interconnected to the multiple Native geographies, settler borders that diasporic generations cross over time and rely on for survival for self, families, and the community as a whole.

As for on the ground organizing, Sofia, who identifies as Mixteca, shared that she first became aware of being on Native land as an undergraduate student when she was asked to open up an event for Indigenous students with a land acknowledgment: “It made me really think, what is your role when you’re on these Indigenous lands? As part of a Native student chapter, I would show up to events that were part of uplifting Mechoopda elders. And [my] last year we were part of fighting hard to open a tribal center.” Sofia, now a PhD student, explained that these activist spaces allowed her to rethink her role in groups she was rejoining upon her return to San Diego.

Sofia further explained that the Jardín Mixteco, which Sofia’s mom is a part of, recently began exchanging seeds with Kumeyaay elders and having conversations about Indigenous botanicals. Sofia, who has traveled to multiple
Native lands across the “US,” has been able to connect with Native peoples inside and outside institutional settings, most recently with the Sioux Nation to support its work in stopping the Dakota Access Pipeline. Sofia, her mom, and her community are directly engaging on multiple fronts with Native Nations. Sofia’s relationship to her own Mixtec community and that of multiple tribes in the US has reinforced her conviction that being a respectful visitor entails more than statements that have no serious actions or commitments. The Jardín Mixteco, which also recently began working with a Payómkawichum (Luiseño) nonprofit organization whose leadership consists of both Payómkawichum and Mixtec people, is further bridging cross-Indigenous relationships, as “plants know no borders.” These relationships have allowed Sofia to center diverse Native and Indigenous epistemologies and resistances to state and corporate violence. Therefore, this exchange and collaboration reciprocates a communal care for life of all Indigenous kin. In San Diego County, where there is an estimated population of 3.324 million people, and reportedly over 3,200 Kumeyaay living throughout the county, cross-tribal relationships are collective relationships that refuse the destruction of Indigenous lives and treating land as property. These efforts and teachings are being built by, with, and for Indigenous ongoing presence that future generations will inherit as they continue to build their relational belonging and consciousness from a pueblo- and/or land-specific standpoint. This Native/Indigenous-based knowledge is crucial to global contestations of settler colonial grammar.

Over the years, my own involvement and organizing with Native Nations and Indigenous peoples, particularly in the US, has allowed me to become aware of the deep and meaningful connections taking place among reservations, peoples, and pueblos across the continent, from North to South. Indigenous peoples from Central America, South America, Mexico, and the Caribbean have not simply taken up space or claimed place on Native land, but they have increasingly engaged socially, politically, culturally, artistically, in protest and in remapping their collective presence. Their actions are essential to understanding that Indigenous lives across the hemisphere were, as they continue to be, under direct colonial violence, invisibility, and death—though these are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

For example, in 2013 at the University of Arizona, representing the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations, I had the opportunity to partake in a symposium, “Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery,” on Tohono O’odham and Pascua Yaqui territory. Organized by Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples, Inc., Tonatierra, among others, Indigenous people from the Sierra Madre in Colombia, hundreds from throughout Abya Yala, including
Maya, Kichwa, Lenca, and Pipil diasporas, were actively present in strategizing ways to dismantle the doctrine of the so-called Americas. Following the symposium, Janet Martínez, another Zapotec former organizer of FIOB, along with FIOB’s Tequio Magazine photographer, Antonio Nava, and I, arrived to Hopi land as part of an ongoing cultural and food educational exchange between FIOB Los Angeles members and the Natwani Coalition, a project under The Hopi Foundation, to discuss and demonstrate how Hopi seeding and plants continue to be used for traditional medicinal and foodway purposes (fig. 2).

As we gathered around the kitchen table of an elder Hopi woman to help make Someviki, Hopi Blue Corn tamales, for a community gathering that afternoon, another group of women came with dishes and buckets full of ingredients. Once we were done completing the masa consistency from Hopi blue cornmeal, a woman placed a large bowl of moisturized dry corn husk at the center of the table; catching our reaction to our familiarity with the corn husk, the elder Hopi woman said that they “are similar to tamales. Do your families make tamales?”43 Both Janet and I affirmed and detailed how we have grown up seeing and helping our families make tamales from both corn husk

Figure 2.
and banana leaves for family events and community fundraisers. Sharing our stories made the other women feel comfortable with us, and an extensive conversation followed about sharing Native and Indigenous herbs, vegetables, and fruits to nourish our bodies. They were as interested as we were, to learn about how we continued using traditional foodways despite five centuries of ongoing colonialism and as Indigenous peoples thousands of miles away from our ancestral homelands. Later that day, as we sat together with the rest of the community to eat the Someviki, the knowledge exchange about their traditions and ours continued, realizing that what separated us from being in relation and conversation with one another were settler colonial borders, walls, surveillance, policies that confine us to space, movement, and place, as well as the racialized geographies that control and eliminate our presence as Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala.

Similarly, in April 2023 youth from the Tequio Youth Group in Ventura County were invited by the Santa Ynez Chumash Reservation to learn about the protection of Native plants, waterways, tomols/tomolos, and landscapes through “belonging, mastery, interdependence and generosity,” which further allowed youth to connect to nonhuman kin (fig. 3). These Chumash, Mixtec, and Zapotec-led efforts allowed them to connect to each other’s “knowledge, culture, and building a better future for our Indigenous communities,” as they walked through wetlands, learned about the significance of paddles and paddling and the production and art of the jicara (Crescentia Alata), a craft

Figure 3.
Tequio Youth Group visit to Santa Ynez Chumash Reservation, 2023. Photo credit: Tequio Youth Group and Mixteco Indígena Community Organizing Project.
also shared among Mesoamerican Natives.\textsuperscript{44} These connections allowed young Tequio members to be intentional about their responsibility and respect as visitors in ways that previously were not available for earlier generations.

Specifically, for Indigenous visitors from Latin America, nationhood and relationships with other Indigenous peoples, including Pacific Islanders, have been greatly demarcated by centuries of militarism and surveillance (i.e., police, highway patrol, border patrol, military bases, organized crime, the so-called war on drugs), imperial nationalist and immigration policies of (i)legality—all which are inextricably tied to settler colonial dispossession.\textsuperscript{45} To this point, Nancy, a Zapoteca from the Central Valleys in Oaxaca, shared, “My parents do not know about land acknowledgments. Honestly, they don’t even know that LA is the home of Indigenous peoples that still exist. That is a dialogue that only my generation is able to be aware of, if they go to college.”\textsuperscript{46} Like first-generation Zapotec migrants of the Mapping Indigenous Los Angeles project, Nancy’s parents, who are also the first to migrate, were unaware of the Native people of Los Angeles. However, although earlier generations may not have been aware of North American Native Nations, they are aware that respect and appreciation start with pueblo belonging, cultural and physical connections, and responsibilities that they continue to have back in their pueblos and with their migrant community in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{47} As Nancy further reflected, taking a step back, “I have mentioned it to them [parents]. And they think it’s pretty cool that they look like us. I think they are more interested to know where they’re at.”\textsuperscript{48} Cross-Indigenous recognition is therefore “both a cultural and political practice that [are] fundamentally tied to nationhood,” as they are about collective self-determination, and survival as extended relatives who have walked an ancestral territory, land, a place since time immemorial.\textsuperscript{49}

For Flor, a Zapoteca in her twenties who was raised on Chumash land, she shared that she first became aware of being on Kumeyaay land from a friend in college. However, becoming aware of being on Kumeyaay land also made Flor conscious about her identity, as previously she did not identify as Indigenous despite her family being Native Zapotec speakers and despite the fact that she was brought up with her pueblo’s traditions. She expressed that her family has always identified with their “specific pueblo” but that the term \textit{Indigenous}, like \textit{Zapotec}, was foreign to them until they left the pueblo. As is the case for many Oaxacans I have interviewed over the years, their identities are shaped by their intimate connection to their pueblos and not those that come from non-Indigenous and non-pueblo world grammars and worlds. Coming to consciousness about being “Indigenous Oaxacan, not just Oaxacan,” and living between Kumeyaay and Chumash land gave her a “sense of self” and led her to think about land acknowledgments as a form of mutual existence.\textsuperscript{50}
Being “unaware” of ongoing Native presence does not imply that Indigenous visitors claim the US as their home. Rather, starting from one’s ancestral homeland, Indigenous diasporas place Native land recognition in relationship to pertenencia mutua, identity, and mutual responsibility to their own ancestral land. In her work on YouTube travel videos and undocumented Zapotecs, Michelle Vasquez Ruiz describes the moment when her own father, unable to return to his pueblo for lack of documentation due to what she refers to as US and Mexico settler colonial structures that displaces Indigenous peoples while also denying their mobility, signals to cacti trees on a video footage as the entrance to their pueblo rather than the actual sign that she points to announcing the pueblo’s entrance where he rebuts, “No, when you see those trees, it means you arrived.”

Mapping and acknowledging Indigenous geographies and peoples involve a mutual recognition of self that is tied to the pueblo. It is about how many come to see, understand, and be with and in relationship to one’s own community. It is more than human kinship. Oftentimes it involves coming into full circle and consciousness about one’s identity and how one interacts and sees one’s relationship with Native peoples and lands, not as settlers, but as Indigenous (visitors). It is about an understanding of how as Indigenous peoples, despite being regulated by physical borders, policies, discriminatory actions, perceptions, and interactions with settler states and non-Indigenous people of color over five centennials across occupied Indigenous lands, they have remained.

Similarly, a former student organizer and social media user, MaZa, a Zapoteca and Maya woman in her early twenties, described coming to consciousness about being and respecting xučyun (Huichin) territory, the land of the Chochenyo-speaking Ohlone people, “as if I was in my pueblo.” MaZa stated that although her grandparents “are not necessarily aware of who the Native peoples of LA or Berkeley are,” their presence reflects “years, generations” (her own emphasis), of Indigenous survival “that we have lived this far into colonialism.” In 2020, MaZa met a fellow Zapotec student who lived in the same floor of her campus residence where they bonded over shared stories, identities, and cultural commonalities of their pueblos. Soon after, they decided to start a Oaxacan student organization at their university. They had met only two other Oaxacans on campus, but within the first few weeks of starting the organization, more than a dozen Oaxacan students showed up. MaZa and the other student were surprised to realize how many students with Indigenous Oaxacan identities and direct roots to their pueblos there were and how within the first weeks so many expressed common ways of doing and being in accordance with their pueblo traditions.
MaZa described that the new Oaxacan student organization provided a space for them “to be Indigenous and not just Latinx or Chicanx. We felt like those experiences weren’t necessarily ours. There were some similarities, but we really wanted to claim that Oaxacan and Indigenous space rooted in community. There are differences and we wanted to truly acknowledge that.”

She expressed that Oaxacalifornia became essential in how they named their organization, as most members were raised and living in California. However, she also expressed Indigenous space-making as being in relationship to the struggles of Ohlone people to be seen and recognized as the Native stewards of their lands, stating, “As Indigenous peoples ourselves, we also want others to take accountability for their privilege, bringing visibility to Native land, and really reminding people whose land this really is. When you see another Indigenous person make a land acknowledgment for another Indigenous community you know that feeling, you know what that place means to you and your ancestors. That is home. That is your home.”

Building home and claiming space often involve processes that obscure Native land and peoples. Building Oaxacalifornia spaces provides a sense of pertenencia mutua among Indigenous Oaxacans in diaspora, but it, too, allows pertenencia mutua with other Indigenous peoples, though it is not about claiming Native land as one’s own. Instead, it is about being in contestation with settler colonial grammars where diasporas come into dialogue about their collective identity and knowledge that is rooted in connection to land, pueblo, and the people using what resources one has. In “Indian Time,” Black-well articulates that “Indigenous ontologies/epistemologies” from knowledge systems of place inform Indigenous peoples’ connection and responsibility to their land even when not on the land and that it is also increasingly informing “their responsibilities as guests on other Indigenous homelands.”

Indigenizing space and place troubles racialized geographies, landscapes, names, and time that are created by multiple global colonialities. Indigenous space and place-making therefore refuse to be erased, as they refuse to let go of memory and of practice that ties people to nonhuman Indigenous kin and stories. After all, it was colonial orders who destroyed codices and other Indigenous grammars and records to assimilate and further give way to settler narratives of legitimacy to claim belonging.

Providing a contemporary critique of place naming as an act of elimination of Indigenous bodies, lands, and claims to Native land, Palestinian geographer and historian Nur Masalha looks at how the Israeli state has used the bible to foreground a narrative and panorama that appropriates and erases Palestinian presence, history, and thereby Indigenous claims to territory. Such nativist
narratives, intensified in the immediate aftermath of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, functioned to rename and replace Palestinian ancestral lands with Hebrew biblical names. Settler colonial grammar in Palestine has further become possible through state-sponsored agencies, universities, and narratives that form and function through a settler colonial structural agenda. Crucial to these global issues are grammar and how geographies and narratives become a tool of empire, control, and legitimacy by those who benefit from Indigenous death. Land acknowledgments made by emerging Indigenous diasporas outside (academic) institutions and beyond Latinidad and Anglophone studies of Indigeneity provide greater linkages to critically think about space and cartography that contest settler colonial grammar of place and relationality making. As my research highlights, these acknowledgements not only reveal an Indigenous relational consciousness but demonstrate how such a consciousness is enacted through practices of mutual belonging or pertenencia mutua.

Diasporas use Oaxacalifornia as a space that informs their identity and connection to one another to also contest racial violence from their non-Indigenous mestizo Mexican and Latinx counterparts. Maya Ch’orti’ literary scholar Gloria E. Chacón pushes us to think beyond US understandings of race and consider mestizaje differences in Latin America and the United States to understand how Latinidad, like Chicanaidad, romanticizes, consumes, and thereby erases Indigenous diasporas. That is, although many Mexicans in Mexico and the United States may not see themselves or use the term mestizo, they or their families benefit, or have benefited, from (Latinx and Mexican) whiteness for generations. Their long disconnection or absence of having a direct ancestral tie to an Indigenous community has often been used by some mestizos (mostly men) to racially discriminate against those with darker skin tone and those with “Indigenous” features. At other times, non-Indigenous mestizx Chicanxs and Latinxs have romanticized and reinforced a stereotypical Indigenous identity as physically dark-skin, having “Indigenous features,” dressing with traditional clothing, having braids, and even burning sage.

In a Mexican diasporic context, this intra-racial violence has most often been perpetrated toward Oaxacan immigrants and their children, leading many to deny being Indigenous or Oaxacan because they are made to feel ashamed of their origins, dark skin, short stature, and other stereotypes. In her work with Mixtec, Zapotec, and Nahua students, Gabriela Kovats Sánchez has found that students feel a much stronger relationship and “sense of belonging in Native American spaces on campus” than in Latinx/Hispanic spaces at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) due to “microaggressions,” racialization, and invisibility they often experience by the latter, urging HSIs and Latinx
centers to “establish relational ties with Native and Indigenous organizations on and off campus.” For the thousands of Oaxacans living off their ancestral lands, Oaxacalifornia, then, is a safe space not only from US white supremacist structures but also from Mexican and Latinx white supremacy ideologies and practices. I place Oaxacalifornia as a space that uplifts generations in diaspora and bridges ties with Natives in their struggle for land back and against the colonial and illegal occupation of all of Abya Yala. In acknowledging their unique position as Indigenous visitors on Native land, Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Triquis, Chinantecs, and many others are remapping and placing their mutual presence on the map to reject the settler grammars that eliminate Indigenous peoples “from the map.” In this work, young Indigenous visitors are disrupting Anglophone and Hispanophone geographies and grammars of belonging, nativism, and erasure by bridging Indigenous mutual existence and resistance digitally and on the ground.

Emerging generations of Indigenous youth whose educational opportunities differ from those of earlier migrants are differentiating how they see themselves from how they are racialized. Their experiences as migrant children or US-born children, many who in addition to attending school have worked with their parents in the fields, cleaning houses, and often baby-sit younger siblings or white middle/upper-class children to support their overworked, underpaid, often mixed-status households, are having an effect in how they navigate their identity and the world around them. Their work at home, at school, elsewhere and in organizing informs how they resist racialized and gendered geographies. Refusing to be erased takes place beyond cyber and temporal spaces and settler borders that recognizes a web of ongoing relational existence and futures, the right to migrate and to stay in one’s ancestral pueblos—the right for self-determination. Introductions are expressions “grounded by distinct ontological orderings of Indigenous life-worlds, rooted as they are in ancestral homelands, waterways” and ways of knowing and doing that are distinct from the West.

Remapping Indigenous Studies

Settler colonial grammar of place has become a framework in which critical Indigenous studies scholars remap Indigenous presence by recognizing and centering Indigenous knowledge as Indigenous educational curricula. Such work has contended that educational institutions have been complicit in erasing Indigenous pedagogy, presence, and relationship to land, even when these institutions have engaged in Native land acknowledgments, creating nationalist discourses that rest on understanding and essentially further legitimizing
whites as “Natives” and the land they continue to occupy as incontestably their “conquered legitimate” land. In the process, the renaming of land becomes unquestioned, taken for granted, and thus enables settler legitimacy and futurity. Therefore, the ongoing work of settler states in maintaining settler colonial presence through grammar has been crucial in the process of control and power throughout the continent. As many will contend, and rightfully so, centering Indigenous lives and presence is necessary to decolonize settler structures, but when Indigenous relatives in the Hispanicophone regions of Latin America are included in dialogues of (re)mapping presence and land recognition, then refusal of illegitimate colonial presence becomes an Indigenous transhemispheric and global struggle that goes beyond Anglo settler colonial empire.

Most recently, of course, the unmarked graves of thousands of Native children found in former residential boarding schools in Canada shows how these settler educational institutions, including the Catholic Church, not only were committing cultural genocide through assimilation but were committing physical genocide on children in hopes of ending Indigenous futurity. For example, in Mexico, like in Canada and the US, teaching of colonial languages, to wear Western clothing, and so on were ways in which the church, with the support of the state, assimilated children and adults. If Indigenous peoples defied orders, they were violently and physically punished. Settler colonists thus used their biblical scripture/grammar to manifest “modernization,” or their “God-given right” to westward expansion, “civilization,” and conquering of both Indigenous bodies and land. Therefore, settler grammar, in its multiple shapes and forms, creates and upholds settler structures of Indigenous death to both human and nonhuman life. Settler grammar has enabled colonial futures to prosper by further establishing settler presence over Native territory, declaring it “terra nullius,” “discovered,” and thereby “conquered,” “founded” as new land and renamed to fit a settler narrative—history—that makes colonization further possible, and for some “complete.”

Settler colonial ideologies and enforcement of hierarchies, power, and racial superiority are an inscription in everyday life, curriculum, geographies that move beyond the borders of settler states. So much as they are not new, they continue to be maintained, carried over by the West and further enforced by state elite actors around the globe. As much as racial superiority is blatantly, violently, and often publicly enforced by state actors in places like Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia, Peru—countries in the Hispanicophone region of the Americas with the largest Indigenous population—they are also reminders of foreign governments occupying Indigenous territory. As a Zapotec interviewee living on Esselen land put it, “Engaging in Native land and land back struggles is to
understand land outside of the state. It is to decenter power from the state and acknowledge that the Esselen have always been the stewards of these lands. From the way you live your life, the water, air you breathe, to the labor you perform—everything is about your relationship to land.” These relationships are what drives conversations of Indigenous relational existence forward and critically interrogates settler colonialism as a structure pertinent to Anglophone regions that centers land from an Indigenous perspective.

Representing a paradigm shift, the theorizing of settler colonialism has expanded to include non-Native peoples of color and Indigenous peoples from south of the US-Mexico border, and beyond Anglophone understandings of ongoing colonialism. It has crossed interdisciplinary fields, like ethnic studies, positing Black, Asian (American) and Pacific Islanders, and Indigenous Latin American diasporas and non-Indigenous Latinx/Chicana as guests, “arrivants,” and most recently visitors, while also being careful how non-Native people of color make claims to land and (re)name landscapes that leave Native people out of these geographies. Settler colonial grammar of place, however, has yet to be more fully considered across these fields, including area studies, and critical geography studies that make a serious commitment to Indigenous peoples and land.

The retheorizing of Oaxacalifornia expands by considering the spaces that Indigenous generations and transborder experiences transcend while helping to collectively uplift the community and bridge connections with other Indigenous peoples, including at schools and the workplace, where Indigenous peoples face incredible (in)visible forms of racial violence from their non-Indigenous mestizo Mexican and Latinx, Chicana peers—the latter mostly through romanticization and homogeneity of Indigenous ritual ceremonies, goddesses, and clothing. Combating (inter)racial violence therefore becomes a cross-Indigenous informed self-determination fight by, with, and for Indigenous livelihood transborderly and globally. Similar to “Puebla York,” which reflects the large diaspora from Puebla, Mexico, in New York, Oaxacalifornia is not about claiming land that is not ancestrally theirs. It is a space of resisting Anglo and Spanish settler colonialism that includes the refusal to be racialized, dispossessed, detached from the homeland that also includes healing, particularly for those who have directly experienced racial violence that is in itself an act of self-determination as pueblos originarios. Whereas some early migrant generations in California have indeed used Oaxacalifornia to refer to a place (e.g., “welcome to Oaxacalifornia”), it is not used to claim the Southwest or other territories they have settled on as their rightful homeland. As seen in the conversations above, for many Oaxacans, the homeland is based on the
pueblo their parents or they themselves originate from, as they have consistently maintained relationships and customs with the community.

As displaced Indigenous peoples with a direct knowledge and connection to one’s ancestral homelands, and for many, their direct ongoing involvement with the pueblo and the people, Oaxacalifornia is a collective space that is always in re-creation as much as it is always in movement informed by the ongoing migratory streams between the Pacific West, to parts of the Midwest, Baja California, Oaxaca, and other lands one is forced onto. This connection allows people to further draw on their pueblo or Indigenous group identity. It, too, is about building relational differences, as Indigenous peoples who do not easily fit into the categories and imagination of Mexicanidad, Latinidad, and Chicanidad, all of which are intricately connected to processes of assimilation. Finding self is much about being in connection to pueblo, to the ancestral homeland, as it is to the Native peoples’ lands others find themselves in as part of a diaspora.

For settler colonial states, control in grammar and mapping are part of the structure that makes elimination, dispossession, extraction, invisibility, and criminality possible. Indigenous peoples and lands have been subjected to settler narratives that rest on ongoing settler laws, constitutions, treaties, and policies that upheld theft of Indigenous land as legitimate—rightful. The irony of making nativist claims to stolen land or justifiably acquired through settler laws and treaties is as ironic as Indigenous peoples having to ask for settler governments permission to travel on Indigenous land or telling people from Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and elsewhere “do not come,” as Vice President Kamala Harris irrationally stated in her visit to Guatemala, when it has been US imperialism and empire that has created (civil) wars, coup d’états on democratically elected governments, and decades of unstable economies that have exacerbated forced migration and genocide of Indigenous peoples and others from these regions. Indigenous peoples have been made illegal, foreign, and alien, but they have never stopped resisting and demanding respect for their self-determination, sovereignty, and autonomy to live in dignified ways.

Settler colonialism requires us to further consider an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective, as it has increasingly expanded to be in dialogue with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of color of the world. Contesting settler colonial mapmaking is thus imperative to Indigenous land recognition and relational existence, as much as it is to Indigenous-based spatial formations like Oaxacalifornia that are created in response to settler colonial violence over bodies, territories, and all life. As Indigenous Oaxacans, Indigenous relational existence and land recognition are about maintaining
and building connections with other Indigenous peoples in California, and beyond, in stating that they are here as Indigenous peoples of the continent who have, too, consistently existed on these lands before settler colonial forms of containment. While much of the activities that Indigenous Oaxacans in California maintain and re-create continue in large part with other Oaxacan migrant pueblos and peoples, new dialogues of relationality and mutual existence on Native geographies are considering recognition and respect by Indigenous visitors on Native peoples’ land. In this process, land acknowledgments and understanding Indigenous visitors’ responsibility is central to how they see themselves in a web of relational differences.

Struggles for land back as Indigenous visitors on Native land is directly tied to relational understanding and experiences of forceful displacement and illegality. Indigenous Oaxacan visitors do so by placing Native presence and sovereignty alongside their own by organizing on the ground and by strategizing creative ways on social media to bring awareness of Native/Indigenous struggles and land recognition. While institutional (university) acknowledgments can perhaps be a significant step for structural recognition for Indigenous communities, Indigenous peoples who continue to be largely left out of these institutions are engaging in serious dialogues beyond the university. Emerging Indigenous generations strategically use social media and build large Indigenous and non-Indigenous ally followers to learn and actively engage each other’s communities’ demands and calls to action. Indigenous Oaxacan youth are remapping their own presence alongside Native peoples that allows us to see that land, like maintaining their identities, is a self-determination practice that contests multiple colonialities that dismantle doctrines of discovery and geographies.

At its core, Indigenous past, present, and emerging existences rooted in pertenencia mutua are not about land acknowledgments that fail to take action to demonstrate commitments to Native/Indigenous relatives but are a collective interdependence of peoples and all ancestral life that at every moment combats settler colonial violence. Rather than romanticize or create fantasies that homogenize hemispheric experiences, this essay calls attention to much-needed conversations that consider the experiences of Indigenous diasporas from “Latin America” in the “US.” The contestations of settler colonial grammar of place are a remapping of presences and futures for those yet to come. This remapping brings into conversation examples of displaced and diasporic Indigenous voices of the global south that are directly practicing and (re) imagining relational consciousness of self and territory to resist, refuse, and survive settler colonialisms.
Notes

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1. Though forcibly displaced, I use the term *immigrant* or *migrant* in the Indigenous way, reflecting that as Native peoples to Abya Yala, or the “Americas” (South and North), we have always been in movement before settler colonial fences, walls, and other colonial forms of bordering. I therefore use the term *visitors* to describe Indigenous Oaxacans’ position in the “US,” while also being critical that as visitors, many are conscious of where home is. Sapote, a Nahuatl word, is also spelled Zapote. Sapote is a tropical fruit found in areas, like Central America, northern South America, the Caribbean, and throughout Mexico. Tovaangar is the land of the Tongva and includes the Los Angeles Basin and South Channel Islands.

2. In “Beyond Land Acknowledgement in Settler Institutions,” Theresa Ambo-Stewart and K. Wayne Yang suggest “that settlers should view themselves as ‘visitors’,” as visit implies one’s own deceitfulness in colonialism and its detriment that denies claims to land. Ambo-Stewart and Yang center Kumeyaay land acknowledgments in relationship to other Native Californian land acknowledgments and ways of being with the land that go beyond settler institutions (mainly the university). They do so by relating land and settler experiences across tribal lines in the US and Canada, but they fail to consider how Indigenous peoples farther south of the US-Mexico border historically see themselves in relationship to Native peoples in the US. Therefore, I use *visitors* from Turtle Island to Abya Yala, all Indigenous land, while being careful to not homogenize experiences, romanticize collective struggles or actions, claim or erase specific ancestral territory to Natives and Indigenous peoples.

3. Abya Yala is the cosmogony of the Guna people of Panamá. Its meaning is land in full maturity and land in flourishment. It refers to the entirety (North and South) of what we colonially refer to as the Americas. In this process it recognizes that Abya Yala is not two continents but, rather, one. I use the word *Native* to refer to American Indians or Native Americans. I use *Indigenous* to refer to all Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala.

4. El Derecho a no Migrar is a stance and campaign by Mixtec, Triqui, Zapotec, and other Indigenous members of the Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binaconales (FIOB) that asserts their right to stay in their pueblos instead of being forced to migrate to the US to make a living.


una Madre, que nos pare, nos alimenta y nos recoge en sus entrañas. Nosotros pertenecemos a ella; por eso, nosotros no somos los propietarios de tierra alguna. Entre una Madre e hijos la relación no es en términos de propiedad, si no de pertenencia mutua. Nuestra Madre es sagrada, por ella somos sagrados nosotros.”

8. Many of Floriberto Díaz Gómez’s writings and conversations about communal life and mutual belonging (pertenencia mutua) did not become publicly available until the early 2000s, a few years after his death.


11. Robles Hernández and Cardoso Jiménez, *Floriberto Díaz*, 40. As foreign words, I do not italicize Spanish words because that would mean I would also have to italicize all English words.

12. In my conversations with Oaxacan migrants, similarities have often been made with Maya migrants from Guatemala. These are often based on both having traditional clothing, speaking their Native language aside from Spanish, and sharing “rostros similares” (facial resemblance).


16. Raymond B. Craib, “Cartography and Decolonization,” in *Decolonizing the Map: Cartography from Colony to Nation*, ed. James R. Akerman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 18. New Spain was the name used by the Spanish crown to refer to all Spanish controlled land in Latin America, including parts of the US.


23. See the UCLA Mapping Indigenous Los Angeles Project, “About Our Project” section. This digital storymap project is spearheaded by four principal investigators, Dr. Mishuana Goeman, Dr. Maylei Blackwell, Dr. Wendy Teeter, Dr. Juliann Anesi, and has received the support of many Indigenous communities and emerging scholars.
24. Respectively and colonially, these are Santa María, CA; San Diego, CA; Austin, TX; Chicago, IL; Los Angeles Basin.


30. @Reynachabeli, Twitter, 2017.

31. “Nos Faltan 43” is in response to the forty-three kidnapped Mixtec, Me’phaa, and Nahua male student-teachers from the Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School who went missing on September 2014 after a government-owned bus transporting them to a protest to honor the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre was forcibly stopped and the students were abducted by an armed group in Iguala, Guerrero. To this day, their whereabouts remain unknown.


34. Flor, pers. comm., August 26, 2021.


44. Tequoio YG (@tequoio_youth), “We want to thank @our_circle_of_hope for having Santa María Tequio Youth participate in GONA 2023,” Instagram post, April 14, 2023. Tequio Youth Group is part of the
before their visit to the Santa Ynez Reservation. Tequiò YG had previously engaged with the Chumash Reservation as invited guest to their annual Pow Wow. Tequiò YG continues to visit other local Native Reservations that are arranged between community members.


52. MaZa, pers. comm., May 22, 2022. MaZa is a short combination of her Maya and Zapotec roots and identity.


55. I think about time in relationship to how pueblos outside urban localities in Oaxaca, particularly in the Sierra Norte, use “hora normal” (normal hour) or “hora vieja” (old hour) to refer to their time, setting them apart from colonial time in cities. “Hora normal” here signals defiance to the colonial construct of (daylight savings) time, as it does of connecting to the land and people since time immemorial. Until recently, however, time change was enforced by the state in the Sierra Norte region, as it was in the Sierra Sur, though there is resistance by many.

56. As a Zapotec scholar, I take a critical stance on capitalizing scriptures historically used to indoctrinate and justify occupation, invasion, and all other forms of violence against Indigenous peoples. Therefore, I lowercase bible.


60. Susana Vargas Evaristo, Constelaciones narrativas de discriminación y resistencia: Jóvenes oaxaqueños en contextos migratorios (Mexico City: Casa Chata, 2021).


75. On Monday, June 7, 2021, Vice President Kamala Harris met with Guatemalan president Alejandro Giammattei to address the increasing “illegal” migration of Guatemalans to the US.