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THE RESISTANCE OF THE HONDUREÑA: BRIDGING LITERARY GRAVEYARDS
THROUGH A POSTCOLONIAL-ECOFEMINIST APPROACH

ANNA LINNEA ORTIZ

124 Pages

This thesis explores the socio-cultural aspects of two geo-political zones in Honduras; its northeast coastal areas, focusing on the Afro-Indigenous Garífuna women, and its mainland, focusing on Indigenous/mestizo women. These two areas will be explored as they pertain to themes of gender and ecology. This will be accomplished by pulling from Neelam Jabeen's Postcolonial-Ecofeminist lens. Through this lens, the focus of my research lies within the geopolitical zones of both coastal and mainland Honduras. The focus is placed on the relationship of women and the environments that surround them, which are placed in danger by neoliberal structures both domestically and internationally. The objective of this thesis is to understand the ways in which women are resisting these neoliberal structures and theorize that such a process of resistance can serve as a praxis of decoloniality.

While looking more in-depth at women's interrelation with nature, this thesis extrapolates how each individual relationship is one of complexity, as women's dependency on nature doesn't necessarily endear them to it. Despite this dependence, exploration of the ways in which women may be inclined to nature, either through their spirituality or their confidence and leniency towards it, especially as it is seen to provide healing and restoration via homeopathic treatment for women and their kin. Through this exploration of such correlations, this thesis seeks to examine the ways in which Honduran women are motivated to protect and defend the natural

environment around them. Thus, the project examines gender dynamics in relation to women's ownership and use of land in Honduras. It analyzes the ways in which women tend and care for the land as they count on it in some cases for survival, in addition to the profound spiritual, cultural and ancestral significance to them.

KEYWORDS: Postcolonial-Ecofeminism; Honduras; Literary Graveyards; Testimonio; Phenomenology; Berta Caceres

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THROUGH A POSTCOLONIAL-ECOFEMINIST APPROACH

ANNA LINNEA ORTIZ

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

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THROUGH A POSTCOLONIAL-ECOFEMINIST APPROACH

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A.L.O.

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INTRODUCTION

The Garífuna Women of Honduras

Roatan is an island off the eastern coast of Honduras. As one of the largest tourist attractions in Central America, it generates the biggest amount of revenue for the country. When my husband, son, and I went to visit in July 2021, we went to enjoy the sandy beaches of my husband's home country, but more importantly, I hoped to encounter Garífuna communities (Afro-Indigenous Latine¹ communities that exist in Central America) on the island. I had studied and read about Garífuna communities, and while I had visited them when I lived in Honduras, this time around I wanted to make deeper connections with Garífuna women and listen to the stories they chose to share about their life. Though we had no expectations once we arrived at the Garífuna community, some locals pointed us in the direction of the community cultural center, which should have information, or at least point us in the right direction of some women of the community who'd be willing to talk with me.

We arrived there on a Sunday, when most community members were heading to church in the morning. The dusty streets and sun-bleached buildings of the community resembled what most of the rest of Honduras looks like, with the addition of exquisite Afrocentric murals on most of the buildings, and the black, white, and yellow flags which represent the Garífuna people, flying proudly on a few houses. It was clear that the community kept proud, strong ties of their identity to their African roots. Shortly after we arrived, we were introduced to the cultural center's coordinator, Fey (renamed for anonymity). She showed us around the cultural center,

¹ The term "Latine" is a gender fluid term some Spanish speakers have adopted to refer to themselves, as it includes those who do not associate with a gender binary. As I am discussing folx from the Spanish speaking world, I will use this gender inclusive definition to be as inclusive as possible.

pointing out all the unique and sacred Garífuna artifacts located within the center's walls which included Garífuna drums, murals, clothing, and food. She said that she would love to sit and talk with me, but that she also wanted to introduce me to her dear friend, Alma. Alma (also renamed for anonymity) was an Indigenous and environmental activist and a member of OFRANHEH (Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras). Alma contacted Fey, and I was able to sit down with both in the Cultural Center and talk to them, while my husband entertained our toddler.

Alma shared stories of hardship that the women in the community faced: elementary-aged schoolgirls who were being sexually harassed on their walks home from school, as well as elders and leaders of their community in their eighties being thrown in jail for not wanting to sell their beachfront property to greedy corporate buyers. Fey shared about the Garífuna connection to their land, how the bones of their ancestors have been buried for centuries where they inhabit the island now. She shared how their land was an extension of themselves, like a body part. She also spoke about the sacred drums that Garífuna make from bone and animal skin, and that the drums are played in times of war, celebration, or ritual. The contact of the drum upon their sacred lands connects them with the spirits of their ancestors, who speak to them and guide them through life. She also explained how they build a holy temple or a *dugu* on their land, made completely from materials located on the land as a part of their sacred rituals.

Alma then told of the sacred food-making process and added that almost all traditional Garífuna food takes about three days to make. She described how the entire time the food is being made, rhythmic chanting is done to pray to their ancestors, while drums beat in the background to help connect to them. Both Alma and Fey spoke of their land being stolen from them by the government and expressed sadness at the amount of their community that left to go to the States to find work. "All of this community is almost empty," Fey enunciated, both her

hands in the air, gesturing to the land around her. “People can’t even afford to live on the land that is their birthright. It’s being taken away from us.” Sitting with these women; I felt that their strength, perseverance, and bravery astounded me. I told them I would be honored to include their stories in my master’s thesis. I knew I had to bear witness to the atrocities being committed in their communities, and that the use of my thesis would be the exact way in which I would do it. They both responded by saying that my timing in coming when I did wasn’t coincidental; as Alma was supposed to have been in a different part of the country but was here by chance as the event she was to attend was canceled. They both agreed that my presence was a sign of the ancestors that their stories indeed should be told. I couldn’t agree more. When we finished talking, I had the feeling that the chance encounter with two of the community’s strongest advocates couldn’t be a coincidence either, and that it would be an event that would change my life forever. On both accounts, I was right.

Postcolonial-Ecofeminism as a Theoretical Lens

In *Roots: Rejoining Natural and Social History*, Tiffany Lahar necessitates the need for an Ecofeminism focused on women in lower and middle-income countries, especially as the Global North “has rendered [non-hegemonic, indigenous women as] invisible or despicable, destroying [their] identities and cultures” (92). This process of neo/colonialism and the ruination of lives in the margins of the post-colony has thrived by robbing lower and middle-income women in the developing world of their voice and agency while taking away their livelihood, customs, culture, and religion. Simultaneously, they marginalize them by branding and defining them as subaltern, to borrow from Gayatri Spivak. As the Global North continues its process of extracting and silencing the lives and existence of women of the Global South, the literary field of ecofeminism

has been called upon to encompass the struggles women of post-colonial nations face as they develop a literary praxis of decoloniality.

Neelam Jabeen, in her *Women and the Environment*, urges the need for such terminology as “Postcolonial Ecofeminism” to highlight the ways in which women of the Global South specifically are “challenging mainstream ecofeminism, [as some Ecofeminist] texts highlight the need for a revised ecofeminism that encompasses the postcolonial perspective” (1). Thus, Jabeen makes a strong case for the utility of postcolonial ecofeminism as a useful theoretical tool to address the particular struggles and experiences of marginalized minority women, noting that as “colonized men are ‘feminized’ by the colonizers to justify their oppression... colonized women are further oppressed by their own men, hence ‘doubly colonized’”(1). This is the issue that Jabeen coins as the “double binding” of women of the Global South, likening them much to the subaltern.

Jabeen posits that between the bindings of state hegemony and patriarchy, women struggle to survive in their own environments. She notes that the lower and middle income women cannot concern themselves with fighting for the environment as women in the Western world do, for they do not have that privilege. Women of the Global South have a more material dependence on nature, as that is where the double bindings of their society have placed them. Through the Postcolonial Ecofeminist Framework, double-bound women can raise opposition against the androcentric societies that oppress them, while also applying a liberation “to the environment-where [androcentrism] is seen as harmful and suppressant of the female body that also encompasses nature. Both are smothered out in the dumpster fire that is male toxicity. Men pitted women and nature together, therefore suppressing both at the same time” (7).

As a result of such suppression, one can see postcolonial-ecofeminism take shape as a crossing of intersections, as “when postcolonial feminism and postcolonial ecocriticism converge, postcolonial ecofeminism takes shape”(1). Jabeen also claims that within postcolonial-ecofeminism, women draw on a material necessity to nature in many places of the Global South, as it is a factor in their connection with nature: “ecofeminism demands that the material conditions of the post colonized men and women also [need to] be considered”(p130). Because of this, many Hondureñas who may fight to protect nature not only do so because they are endeared to it, but as they need it for survival, as such will be represented in my findings. Women who protect nature do so by putting their lives in danger trying to dismantle machismo society and settler colonial forces that deem them subaltern. I use Jabeen’s definition of postcolonial-ecofeminism to ground my work, as it encompasses Hondureñas crusade to preserve nature, as I continue my analysis of the lives of Honduran women.

Chapter I : La Lucha de las Mujeres Garífuna

Chapter I begins by following the Garífuna ’s arrival to Honduras, following the forced deportation of the Garífuna from the Island of St. Vincent. Excerpts of Mark Anderson’s *Black and Indigenous* along with Jose Avlia’s *Power of Pride*, will be used to follow their journey to Honduras. Achille Mbembe’s theory on necropolitics will be used as a theoretical tool to better understand the British intent to exterminate the Garífuna people through this journey. Following Garífuna arrival to Honduras, I will explore the ways in which the white mestizo populations of Honduras exercised settler-colonial violence over the Garífuna , as can be analyzed in Christopher Loperena’s “Settler Violence: Race and Emergent Frontiers of Progress in Honduras”. Loperena breaks down how the Mestizo-dominated government of Honduras has utilized settler colonialism to suffocate the lives and living spaces of the Garífuna via the theoretical concept of the logic of

elimination. The logic of elimination, Loperena explains, is “expressed through legal arrangements that erode collective property rights and undermine black and indigenous sovereignty over the natural resources within their territories” (802).

Loperena also identifies how settler colonialism was furthered by the racist construct of mestizaje. Mestizaje was a caste system implemented by Spanish conquistadors that enforced the whiteness of a person’s skin to a strong, “pure” Spanish bloodline. The darker a mestizo’s skin was, the more “diluted” the Spanish bloodline, and therefore the lower on the caste system. Mestizaje also capitalized on the Indigenous ancestry of the mixed white-mestizo bloodline; this allowed them to claim the land that the Garífuna settled on as rightfully theirs, as their Mayan ancestors settled the land first. I will theorize how mestizaje, along with settler colonialism, has benefitted the white mestizos of Honduras, allowing them to wield biopower over the Garífuna and oppress them.

Jumping forward a few centuries, I will examine the mid to late nineteenth century as a time when the Honduran government first started showing interest in Garífuna land as a marketable source for foreign investment and income. I will then describe the escalating violence Garífuna has faced as they were forced off their land through unethical legislation passed by the Honduran government. By focusing on the Garífuna women’s connection to their ancestral land, I will make the argument that both are being slaughtered, cultivated, and reaped by the Honduran government; rendering both entities voiceless, colonized, and oppressed as a result. I will speculate that both the ancestral lands and Garífuna women struggle to survive within the confines of the nervous conditions that the Honduran government and the Global North have placed upon these women. I will use the theoretical work developed in *Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to further explore how the Global North seeks to control Honduran women through globalization and

neocolonial control. I will then seek to understand the relations between the global tourism industry and globalization, and then theorize how the links between these two entities have had devastating consequences on indigenous peoples such as the Garífuna , through Joseph Scarpaci's *Plazas and Barrios*.

Chapter II: Las Mujeres Garífuna, Su Tierra, y Su Testimonio

Following an analysis of how the Garífuna have faced criminal usurpation of their land, I will shift briefly to understanding how Garífuna women became primary caretakers and defenders of their land. Here, I cite Kari Brondo's text, *Roots, Rights, and Belonging: Garífuna Indigeneity and Land Rights on Honduras' North Coast*. Brondo emphasizes that through the shift of Garífuna societies becoming matrilineal (due to most of the communities' men leaving to find work in the United States) women who chose to stay behind were entrusted with ownership of house and land. Brondo's work establishes the methods used by women to make material use of the land to survive, working to sustain themselves and their families as inaugurated to them by the teachings of their ancestors. Brondo's work also entails how Garífuna women struggle to maintain ownership of land, as they are struggling to survive in the margins of society, with little to no social mobility.

Next, I will focus on Garífuna women's fight for justice as described in Christopher Loperena's *A Fragmented Paradise*, which entails the ways Garífuna women rebel against the government to keep their land, and also ways in which they struggle to sustain themselves, and their families. Loperena's work also discusses how Garífuna women initiate the need to protest for justice in their communities, where the land is being stolen from them and their fight to reclaim it. From here, I will spend some time reflecting on Brondo's studies which emphasize how much

women are willing to give up for their ancestral territories, working in any way possible in order to meet the government's increasing demands they need to meet to continue owning their lands.

Through these works, emphasis will be placed on how Garífuna women in these communities serve as both leaders in their societies and owners of the ancestral land which has been illegally usurped from them. To the best of my knowledge, Avila's work was the first contribution to Garífuna literature ever made by a person who identifies as Garífuna. This speaks to what I theorize are the silences that exists in the field of Central American literature. What I mean by this is the stark absence of Garifuna (and Hondureña) voices in canonical literary production. It is the colonial, neo colonial, empirical, and settler colonial ruination of Indigenous voices in its literary, social, historical, and cultural vestiges that have left nothing except for bones, debris, and ruins; amounting to only ashes and dust for ethnographers and contemporary Indigenous authors alike to piece together the cultural, historical, and political perspectives a strong and proud people. As a result of such literary ruination, I have relied upon the work of Anderson, Brondo, and Avila to take an ethnographic approach supporting and building upon Avila's work regarding women and nature, and to document the testimonios of indigenous and Garifuna women regarding their cultural, spiritual, historical, and political relationship to land and nature.

This translates to the oppressive forces that have formed metaphorical graveyards in the literature. By graveyard, I mean much more than the contemporary picture one might imagine when they think of a cemetery. Imagine approaching the precipice of a vast pit, one that is so deep that its depth can't possibly be fathomed. Along the edges of the pit are what appears to be ruins of civilization. The destruction that is detectable automatically reminds one of ravages of war. But this pit is one that is still currently being mined or dug. Lining the sides of the pit from what is

visible to the naked eye are bones of those that have been massacred, too great in number to count. Judging from how far the pit drives into the darkness of what one can't see, it's possible to assume the body count is in the hundreds of millions over time. This systematic genocide has apparently been going on for centuries. It's difficult to comprehend the evil that could commit such an atrocity of human life. The intentional erasure of not only millions of once breathing lives with names; but also stories, legends, mythologies, and tales that have been wiped from existence. The void of any living thing speaks for itself. The silence emanating from this pit is eerie, almost bone-chilling. This is what I illustrate is the literary graveyard that represents both Garífuna and Hondureña women at large. The slaying of Indigenous peoples mixed with the femicide that has been a result of the overt sexism and racism women from have faced for centuries do not lie.

The lack of literature from these areas stands as a stark reminder of what have been lost to a culturally rich, proud, and resilient people. Because of this, I will provide space in my thesis for the two Garífuna testimonios I wish to feature. I will conclude by mapping the graveyards in literature as a liminal space set for Garífuna women by the empire and the Honduran government and theorize how Garífuna women can work to bridge such graveyards by establishing a field of literary theory. I use the terminology "bridging" as a means of giving breathing literary representation into the bones of the dead lining the walls of the pit I have previously illustrated. Not only does bridging, or crossing, such a lifeless area works as a precursor to stop the continuing mutilation of Black and Brown women's bodies that would continue to line the ever-growing pit; a bridge here serves as a theoretical tool to cross over with ease what was constructed to be the downfall of women's voices into oblivion. One way of bridging such a liminal space being Garífuna testimonio, which emphasizes an authentic retelling of events as the narrator experienced them. As resistance literature, testimonio pushes back against the concept of a story needed to be

understood by outside criticism, and instead validates the voice of the speaker. This is essential bridging graveyards of literature, as it places validation on the narrator, without taking the voice of the colonizer into consideration.

Finally, I will use Dermot Moran's *Introduction to Phenomenology* to justify my use of testimonio as a basis for which to record Garífuna testimonio, followed by the inclusion of the women's testimonio in my chapter. Phenomenology also asserts the validation of the event or the phenomenon the speaker is relaying, as testimonio does. It also asserts that outside knowledge or criticism cannot attempt to understand the events being retold by a person; the only person who can unlock knowledge of what happened in a retold event is the person that experienced the event. By marrying testimonio along with phenomenology, a strong decolonial tool stands to be gained for the production of Garífuna culture. My work targets the voice of Garífuna women via the use of testimonio. Through the practice, watch these women restore life back into their culture through the stories they tell, as they stand to hold those who wronged them accountable, and bear witness to the vibrant potential that awaits the expansion of Garífuna literature. I hope by sharing women's testimonios through a lens of postcolonial-ecofeminism that this field may also expand for Garífuna women; and their work defending nature around them can be recorded and shared with the rest of the burgeoning literary culture of the Garífuna .

Chapter III: Hondureñas, Transnational Empires and Postcolonial Violence

In Chapter III, I describe my second intended area of focus, the Honduran mainland, which features the Indigenous/Mestiza ²women's defense of land and fight for justice. Here, I describe

² I use the term "mestiza/Indígena" as racial dynamics operate uniquely in Honduras. "Mestiza" or one who is of mixed Spanish and Indigenous background, make up almost all of Honduras' mainland except for some Afro-Latina communities such as the Garífuna. Within this construct, there are many mestiza women who are treated as lesser than others because of sex or skin pigmentation. It's a broad term that arguably encompasses all Honduran women. I

in brief an environmental activist I met while living in Copan, Esperanza, and how she inspired me to begin noticing eco-feminists such as herself within the postcolonial context. I will describe her role as a member of the Copán Environmental Coalition, and how her work is similar to that of slain Honduran Indigenous rights activist, Berta³ Caceres. From here, I will use Melissa Cardoza's *13 colors of the Honduran Resistance* to describe how both hegemonic and settler-colonial forces have worked together to stifle the voices of women in mainland Honduras. I focus a large portion of Chapter III on the life of Berta Caceres, and her fight against US militarism, the Honduran oligarchy, TNCs and globalism; as her fight embodies the majority of Hondurena activists' fights today and resound even more deeply with a majority of Honduran women who are fed up with being treated like second class citizens. Much of the information I gather from Berta's life, legacy, and assassination are collected from Nina Lakhani's *Who Killed Berta Caceres?*

Here, the theoretical work of phenomenology from Eric Matthew's *Merleau-Ponty: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2006), and Seppo Sajama and Matti Kamppinen, in *A Historical Introduction to Phenomenology* (1987) comes into play to contend these women's lived experiences, defining the validity and importance in the sharing of their testimonios. Matthew's work asserts the ways in which the perception of lived experience is to be validated in the use of testimonio, while Sajama and Kamppinen place importance on the perception of the event itself that takes place when a testimonio is discussed.

use the term "Indigena" or Indigenous to specify women who define themselves as of Indigenous background to refer to a specific kind of mestiza women, as their set of cultural beliefs is different, as well as the way they live their lives and use their land.

³ I refer to Indigenous rights activists/ leaders Berta Caceres and Xiomara Castro by their first names to respect the popular and Indigenous use of these women's first names as a place of gendered identity and power, which intentionally push away from the Western academic use of a person's last name.

I continue by focusing Cardoza's work, where I will illustrate the ways in which the military coup of Honduras in 2009 institutionalized the war upon women in Honduras through the formation of the Military Police. After this instance, I will describe the ways in which the instillation of the military dictatorship of the Honduran government has forced women into a space of oppression, by stifling their protests, forcing them from their ancestral land, cutting them off from natural water supplies, and killing the activists that represent them. Therefore, strengthening the misogynistic-machista society that works to keep women muzzled, chained to domestic labors, and at the bottom layer of society, with no chance of social mobility. After this, I will delve deeper to understand the Hondureña fight for justice through an analysis of both the oppressor and the oppressed that exist in Cardoza's work. I begin with the analysis of the oppressor, being the side of the Honduran Government, which is backed by oligarchs, and spearheaded by a military dictator, with aid from the empire in implementing its oppressive machinations. Here, I will work to demonstrate the way in which the oppressive systems of both hegemony and national military dictatorship operate in Cardoza's work. I will do so by drawing on inferences made both by Negri and Hardt's *Empire*, and Loperena's "Settler Colonialism", and come to the conclusion that the United States government is equally implicit in the ruination of women and nature as the Honduran government. Both works together to silence women and extract nature for their benefit, by any means necessary.

Chapter IV: Hondureñas and The Act of Shoaling: Resistance Through a Postcolonial-Ecofeminist Perspective

I begin chapter IV by understanding the oppressed folx⁴ represented in Cardoza's text, women and nature. I will analyze how Cardoza draws on women's bodies as places of confrontation and resistance to their oppressors by looking at women's acts of defiance through the act of shoaling, a decolonial practice implemented by Tiffany Lethabo King in *The Black Shoals*. In her novel, King constructs shoaling as a form of slowing down, pausing, and interrupting the machinations of the empire. In these critical points of rupture, King hopes to inspire new modes of Black/Indigenous futurism⁵ that can be represented in academia. I will work to include shoaling as a means of resistance, which can be found in ways Cardoza likewise depicts women decelerating or shoaling the movement of said oppressive forces in an effort to preserve both themselves and the environment. By analyzing women's actions as a form of shoaling, I will highlight how Cardoza parallels the destruction of women and nature; emphasizing that one cannot be freed without the other, and that both need to be liberated if Honduras is ever to move forward. Following this, I will share two Mestiza women's testimonios as they speak of their stories depicting their fights for both equality for women and nature. Following these testimonios, I will describe how Mestiza women might bridge and close the literary graveyards with the testimonio genre of writing. I will point to how women doing testimonio work in groups, as seen in Cardoza's work, can help keep them safe in larger numbers, and make a larger statement drawing on strength in unity.

⁴ I use the term "folx" as a gender inclusive take on the more traditional "folks" to include those that are non-binary identifying.

⁵ The term "futurism" is used as a term for academics and scholars that speculate about a different possible future and discuss it in the present tense, or as an altered future reality.

One final thing that needs to be clarified, is the recent change over of power in Honduras. On January 28th, 2022, President Xiomara Castro (wife of former president Mel Zelaya) became the first female president of Honduras. She, and her political party the Libre Party, won a majority of both legislative and judicial seats up for election this term. It is unprecedented that a party other than Juan Orlando's Nacional party have a strong representation in government. Xiomara has promised to end criminal land grabs the government has assisted in, along with honoring Garífuna and the land that is communally protected by the Garífuna . She has also promised the Honduran people to halt Juan Orlando's expansion of ZEDES. While many Hondurans are hopeful, many more are weary. They are all too familiar with a political candidate who promises things they can't deliver. Twelve years of a military narco-dictatorship cannot be undone quickly. So, I emphasize the all too recent past in this chapter that was still under Juan Orlando's control in this chapter, that point to the changes that can hopefully begin to be amended under Xiomara's presidency

CHAPTER I: LA LUCHA DE LAS MUJERES GARÍFUNA

Introduction to Postcolonial-Ecofeminism and Garífuna Women

Chapter One Overview

Honduras is a country that places a double bind on the lives of its women. The Honduran government limits feminine voices and ends their lives when it feels women have stepped out of line. This chapter focuses on the Indigenous Garífuna women of the Northern and Eastern coasts of Honduras, and their relationship to their ancestral land; a land which has been illegally usurped from them by the Honduran government.

I will first describe the complicated and painful history of the Garífuna, which entails their arrival and deportation by the British from the island of St. Vincent. This historical mapping will be done by drawing upon the work of Mark Anderson's *Black and Indigenous* (2009), and Jose Francisco Avila's *Pan-Garífuna Afro-Latino Power of Pride* (2021) to follow the Garífuna's journey. After tracing their arrival to Honduras, I will use Avila's and Anderson's work to emphasize the unending pressure and trauma the colonial machinations caused these communities. Using Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, I will demonstrate how the act of forcible colonial mobility places Garífuna into necropolitical zones or areas of enforced immobilization in which persons have their bodily autonomy stripped from them, leaving them neither alive nor dead. I will describe how this act by the British wasn't meant to only throw Garífuna into necropolitical zones, but also to exterminate them completely before they can reach the shores of Honduras, where they were sequestered.

The History of The Garífuna

Mark Anderson, in his book *Black and Indigenous*, explains that the Garífuna were originally tribes of kidnapped peoples who came from West African countries to the island of St.

Vincent as early as the 1600s. It is theorized that these people were survivors of shipwrecked slave vessels that washed up on the shores of St. Vincent, or fugitives from nearby Caribbean islands that were used as hubs for the slave trade. On St. Vincent, the Afro-Caribbean peoples soon became the first Garífuna . They lived there with freedom and autonomy until the British came to the island in 1763, as St. Vincent was ceded over to the English during the Treaty of Paris at the conclusion of the Seven Years War.

In his work, *Pan-Garífuna Afro-Latino Power of Pride*, Garífuna author Jose Francisco Avila shares that when St. Vincent was given to the British, “no notice was taken of the existence of the [Garífuna]” who inhabited the island (45). The Garífuna did not take the colonization of their people by the British lightly, and fought for their freedom from the British on St. Vincent for over thirty years. To emphasize the bravery and tenacity the Garífuna demonstrated in the process of resisting the English colonizers, Avila details that:

“From 1764 until 1795, the Garífuna nation fought the British Colonizers. The land issue was central to the popular native resistance to British colonization. Bit-by-bit, chunk-by-chunk, the British took the lands of the Garífuna [...] The British finally defeated the Garífuna people in 1795 and in subsequent skirmishes. On March 14, 1795, a British ambush and massacre of the Garífuna patriots occasioned the death of the Paramount Chief Joseph Chatoyer, leader of the Garífuna people” (494).

After the death of Chief Joseph Chatoyer, the Garífuna resistance quickly dwindled until there was little choice left but to surrender to the British forces, who captured the few remaining Garífuna, and held them captive . Following their capture, British officers petitioned to remove them, claiming that they had “usurped the customs and identity of the indigenous” peoples, and claimed they were “un-pure” (Anderson 3). Avila supports these findings by adding that “the British viewed the Black Caribs as “African Colonists” or Maroons and not as Indigenous” (45). These racist sentiments then “used Blackness as a weapon to deny Garífuna native status on the island

and deported them to Spanish territories,” and through this treacherous means, deported an entire people (Anderson 3). On St. Vincent, the British enforced apartheid on all the inhabitants of the island, “removing those who identified as ‘Black’, and leaving those behind who they identified as ‘yellow’” (Anderson 4). Those who were found to be “not native enough” found themselves forcibly removed from a land they called home, and “out of the 4,338 Garífuna captured in 1796, only 2,026 survived the journey to Central America in 1797” (3).

This passage of deportation that the British forced upon the Garífuna from the island of St. Vincent was a form of colonial violence that sought to weaponize colonial authority against the Garífuna. It is important to note that the ultimate goal of this process of deportation was not just to displace or immiserate the Garífuna, but to exterminate the populace in its entirety. This violation of human rights against the Garífuna is an example of necropolitics, a term coined by Achille Mbembe and used to describe the ways in which colonial power is able to dictate whether entire groups of people live or die. After the Garífuna were seized by the British, they lost all sovereignty and bodily autonomy over themselves, which at that moment, marked them already as victims of necropolitics before they physically died. This is because a social death was sentenced upon the Garífuna, which restricted their very existence, making them subaltern peoples neither fully dead nor alive, or what Mbembe terms as “the walking dead.” The members of the Garífuna community that did not face this social kind of death were killed brutally by the dangerous passage across the Caribbean. The British did not care about living conditions of the Garífuna at any point in their involvement with them. Thus, the British successfully exterminated more than ninety percent of the original Garífuna population from the time they touched the shores of St. Vincent, to the time the Garífuna touched the shores of Honduras.

In the context of the forced eviction of the Garífuna from St Vincent, the British can also be seen as exacting a force of biopower. Biopower is what Michal Foucault terms as a system enacted to protect the privileged portion of society, yet at the same time rejects and exterminates those seen as “othered” outside of those who are privileged. Biopower institutionalizes the preference of the privileged over the othered. This allows any place of biopower to function as a place where the privileged enact necropolitics over those it defines non-normative, subaltern, or lesser than. In this case, the British government, after claiming St. Vincent as their own, and defeating both French and Garífuna resistance, made the homeland of the Garífuna a location of biopower. This disempowered the Garífuna, and placed them in a necropolitical zone by deporting them from their homeland. Following this, the British inflicted a genocide upon the Garífuna, making the entire peoples the walking dead; so even the survivors of this atrocious passage would not remain wholly intact after suffering such an experience.

Arrival to The Coast of Honduras

The Garífuna who survived the difficult passage of deportation by the British settled on the coasts of Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize, and remain to this day. Anderson communicates that the mixtures of Afro-Caribbean people have suffered under persecution for the color of their skin. In the case of the Garífuna, Avila notes that upon arrival to Honduras in the 17th century:

“Spanish reports distinguished between Spaniards, Mestizos, Mulattos, and Black people, [eventually] the last three groups started to be classified as ladinos, thus erasing the heterogeneity of the country's racial castes, and marginalizing the particularity of the African diaspora in Honduras prior to the arrival of the Garífuna Peoples” (25).

The Garífuna once again found themselves struggling to maintain their autonomy as they were put into new necropolitical zones established now by other Indigenous and mixed countrymen, who sought nothing but the complete erasure of Garífuna existence on the coasts of Honduras.

Because of the biopower that the ladino/mestizo population used in subjugating Garífuna to the margins of society, Anderson looks at the cultural distinctions produced by Central American mestizos and the Garífuna . He analyzes what political-economic and social structures separate them, and what might make one “Indigenous” within the two aforementioned categories. Anderson calls attention to the inherent contradictions in the artificial distinctions being made between Blacks and Latinos, and what they both perceive their heritage to be through the politics and culture in Honduras.

The relationship between mestizos and Garífuna , as a result, has always been one of complication and tension. Much of the mestizo culture believe that Garífuna have no right to the land they claim, as they have not been there as long as some indigenous Mestizo groups, such as the Lenca, or the Maya-Chorti. Racist ideations such as these have been a long-held prejudice that the Honduran government, under the presidency of Juan Orlando, has held. This can be seen directly in the way that the Honduran state so aggressively tries to enact legislation to take ancestral land from Garífuna , even when they have land/property deeds or live on protected indigenous territories. The Honduran state has worked toward destroying the life and lands of the Garífuna people through different forms of biopower, and forcing them into necropolitical zones, just as the British did on the island of St. Vincent almost three hundred years earlier.

What can be observed, then, is a marginalized group that directs its limited power on another minority entity through a process of settler-colonialism. In a journal article entitled “Settler Violence: Race and Emergent Frontiers of Progress in Honduras,” Christopher Loperena breaks down how the Mestizo-dominated government of Honduras has long used settler colonialism to suffocate the lives and living spaces of the Garífuna via elimination. The logic of elimination, Loperena explains, is “expressed through legal arrangements that erode collective

property rights and undermine black and indigenous sovereignty over the natural resources within their territories” (802). This concept posits that the legislative and political endeavors to eviscerate both Afro-Indigenous bodies and spaces are little more than calculated attempts to destroy subaltern bodies. This is seen as a process of not only ending lives of Black and Indigenous folk but razing their homes to the ground; so that nothing that remains of them after they are gone. The logic of elimination viscerally demonstrates ways in which oppressors have Indigenous folk entire existence methodically erased.

One can witness such entrenched biopolitical process of elimination when Garífuna lands are stolen by the Honduran government. Loperena explains that the ideologies of elimination used to extract settler colonialism on the Garífuna stems from the centuries-old racist construct of mestizaje. Mestizaje was a colonial concept that stated the more Spanish blood a person of mixed race had, the “purer” they were. This concept quickly became associated with how a white person was perceived. The whiter, and therefore purer, a mestizo appeared, the more they were associated with being of noble lineage. Jose Avila gives an account of how mestizaje tore apart his own family, when interracial marrying in his family caused some members to suffer severe racist and ethnic discrimination. He speaks of the account pointedly when his grandmother, a Garífuna woman, married his grandfather, a white mestizo man. Avila’s paternal great-grandmother did not approve of the union, as she:

“was proud of her Spanish heritage, which placed her at the highest social status, did not like my grandmother, because she was of Indigenous descent. As an indigenous person, my grandmother belonged to an inferior social class, therefore, was not deserving of great-grandmother’s upper-class son, my grandfather” (Avila 30).

Avila notes that his grandparents tried to have a normal marriage and proceeded to have five children together, but his great-grandmother’s persecution and racism continued to grow over the years. It finally got so bad that his grandmother decided to leave her husband and children to be

free of her mother-in-law's abuse. The decision Avila's grandmother made is one Avila emphasized had an impact on the family for generations to come. Avila goes on to explain that after his grandmother abandoned her children, his grandfather re-married, and gave custody of all his children with Avila's grandmother to Avila's great-grandmother. Avila's great-grandmother, in response to this, only kept the children that resembled her son, that were "white skinned." She gave away the darker complected children to whatever neighbors or nearby family would take them. As a result, Avila's mother, and a few other siblings were raised by distant family or strangers. Avila's great-grandmother's racism resulted in the separation of an entire family. The hatred and deceitfulness caused by Alivia's great-grandmother festered generational wounds that took decades to reconcile for the rest of the extended family. Avila's story is just one concrete example of the ways in which mestizaje ruined and ravaged people's lives for centuries in Honduras.

Mestizaje also thrives on the idea that mestizos are descended from the idealized ancient Mayan and Aztec bloodlines, which allowed mestizos to argue that they came before the Garífuna and should be able to extract and profit from the land's natural resources. As Loperena notes "the [increase] of extractivist economic activities within black and indigenous territories asserts national sovereignty over the natural resources to which rural communities of color lay claim, and thereby buttresses white spatial imaginaries" (802). In other words, the recent rise in unethical land seizures of the Garífuna is permissible in the eyes of the government, as they believe that since their ancestors inhabited the land before the Garífuna, only they have proper claim to it to do with as they please. This logic of elimination also allows the government to mute the now subaltern Garífuna, and develop, extract, or sell the land as they see fit. Honduran national sovereignty

developed on the concept of mestizaje allows the proliferation of all lands in Honduras to be claimed for the white mestizo.

The coloniality of power also plays a great deal into how white-mestizos were able to place racial hierarchies between black and white Hondurenos. Anibal Quijano, in his “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America”, explains that Spanish conquistadors first exploited land and labor on the basis of skin color. Over time, settler colonizers repeated this process by placing the working class at the bottom of society which was premised on the basis of skin color “the [settler] colonizers codified the phenotypic trait of the colonized as color, and they assumed it as the emblematic characteristic of racial category”(534). Because the white skinned mestizo had the power of coloniality, they used it to subjugate Black persons to life with little to no chance of upward ability. Moreover, the white mestizo set up their country’s economy to depend on Black labor. Without it, the entire economy would crumble “There so-called Blacks were not only the most important exploited group, since the principal part of the economy rested on their labor; they were, above all, the most important colonized race, since Indians were not part of that colonial society. Why the dominant group calls itself “white” is a story related to racial classification” (534). The coloniality of power explains why Blacks are exploited and kept as subaltern bodies, while the people who have the power are White-Mestizos. Racist stereotypes like mestizaje have worked for hundreds of years to keep one race of people in power while the other are given enough autonomy to barely survive, trapped in the margins of society.

ZEDES: The Process of Unethical Land Usurpation

Before one can begin to understand the feelings of Garífuna women related to the unethical usurpation of their lands, one must examine how a criminal act such as this could happen in the first place. The government does this in several ways. One of the most obvious means of land usurpation, as Mark Anderson noted in a Garífuna community called Sambo Creek, was done by “police from La Ceiba force Garífuna to abandon their plots and borrow food from other communities” (51). This means people are being forcibly taken out of their homes, most likely at gunpoint, and driven off their land. Another means of usurpation is through the unethical purchase of Garífuna land by the government. The government can do this because with a scarce job market, it’s hard for many Garífuna to be able to afford their land. Though the Garífuna rightfully own this land, which was originally allotted to them by the Honduran government. The government on occasion will “buy back” this land. This process is another forcible technique. In these instances, the Garífuna are rarely allotted a compensation for their land. Once bought, the government illegally privatizes the land as it’s community-owned, and then sells it to the highest mestizo buyer. These buyers frequently sell the land for an even higher price, often to a lucrative international business.

Currently, the Garífuna are losing most of their land at rapid rates due to the development and installation of ZEDES. ZEDES (international economic zones of development) are an attempt by the government under Juan Orlando to further embed neoliberal structures into Honduras. This is done by luring international businesses to invest into Honduras and making an effort to own and develop international tourism on Garífuna land. ZEDES are projects that are funded and supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and private international

investors who wish to develop the land for resorts, hotel franchises, business headquarters, or industrial sites of production and labor.

The idea of a ZEDE for a TNC (transnational cooperation) is promising since they don't have to pay import or export taxes, can construct their own airports and banks, and even operate their own system of governance. All of this is done with no check and balance system by the government, which allows investing TNCs to implement any extractivist processes on land that rightly belongs to Garifuna communities. What this process of land usurpation and its reallocation to TNCs demonstrates is the complex ways in which very specific forms of biopolitics informed by local power dynamics are then hijacked and instrumentalized against an already marginalized group for the benefit of global finance capital. Not only are the Garífuna being threatened by the necropolitical machinations of the mestizo, but their very existence is also doubly threatened by the extractivist pursuits of multinational Corporations, who, driven by late-capitalist obsessions with handsome profit margins, are indifferent to the plight of a minority group being immiserated by indigenous forces.

Once the government has usurped the land, there are very few options for the Garífuna people to ask for reparation of their land. The manner of how the land is illegally usurped from the government can be theorized in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*. In their book, Hardt and Negri elucidate that the old imperial powers may have died out, but the machinations of the hegemony rage on via transnational corporations (TNC) that operate by establishing manufacturing facilities comprised of underpaid and overworked laborers in other countries, such as Honduras. Through this process, such companies control large swaths of foreign land, labor, and economy. In this way, TNC'S end up manipulating more of a country's infrastructure than the country's governing body does. Negri and Hardt assert that where colonial power in the past

was built upon the idea of one country having absolute imperial control over a country, now that power exists in the form of the new political order of globalization, or what they coin as the empire.

Negri and Hardt briefly explain how the empire seeks complete control of the Global South:

“The rule of Empire operates on all registers of the social order extending down to the depths of the social world. Empire not only manages a territory and a population but also creates the very world it inhabits. It not only regulates human interactions but also seeks directly to rule over human nature. The paradigmatic form of biopower” (xv).

In this way, one can easily see how both the empire and the settler-colonial government of Honduras work together to rob resource-rich lands from the Garífuna . Both forces place the Garífuna under their own shackles of biopower to gain control of people and their land. The empire sets up economic structures around the Garífuna (like sweatshops where they’ll have no chance of upward social mobility) that intentionally expunge any means of establishing independence outside of its clutches. In this way, the empire always maintains control of the Garífuna , which is merely one side effect of the empire maintaining social order over those it wishes to subjugate. The power of the empire is on full display, as they treat bodies of indigenous people and bodies of land the same way as exploitable and disposable entities, having no trouble exterminating either party when one proves to be in the way:

“Just as the land must be cleared of trees and rocks in order to farm it, so too must the terrain be cleared of its native inhabitants...they had to be excluded from the terrain to open it’s spaces to make expansion possible. If they had been recognized, there would have been no real frontier on the continent and no open spaces to fill” (source 170).

While Negri and Hardt are discussing the English colonizers with Native Americans in the United States, clear parallels can be seen with how the empire functions much in the same manner. By the removal and displacement of the Garífuna , who are seen, as Hardt and Negri note, of little more

importance than a rock or a stone to be hurled into oblivion; they are seen as trying to slow the progress of globalization. As maniacal as the settler colonial control over the Garífuna may seem, by taking their land and selling it to the highest bidder, this violation of rights nowhere near extends the long arm of insipid power that the empire displays by taking complete control and ownership of Garífuna land, once it's out of the hands of the Honduran State. The State is just a mere pawn, Negri and Hardt highlight, that has no real power in the end:

“The declining effectiveness of this [national] structure can be traced clearly through the evolution of a whole series of global juridico-economic bodies, such as GATT, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the IMF. The globalization of production and circulation, supported by this supranational juridical scaffolding, supersedes the effectiveness of national juridical structures” (336).

The involvement of invisible corporate entities in the usurpation of Garífuna lands sheds light on how the invisible empire uses globalization as a means to drive TNC's to control land of Indigenous folks. Thus, as it always has, and always will, as long as a decolonial praxis is not established to halt its machinations, the life of Indigenous people, and their land will always be deemed subaltern, valued little more than a stumbling block on the road of empiric domination and globalization. It is clear the complicated racial and class conflict as seen here are rooted in multiple moments and forms of both dispossession and displacement.

Globalization and Global Tourism

To further explore the process of land taken from the Garífuna , I turn to an interview that Human Rights activist, Karen Spring had with Christopher Loperena, on her podcast, *HondurasNow*. Loperena served as an expert witness in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on a case presented by a Garífuna community against the state of Honduras. Loperena explained that when a person or a community feels as though the national government has

trampled on their human rights, this person or group can take the issue up with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. This system, as Loperena explains, “is part of the Inter-American Human Rights system, which includes the court and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. It’s basically an international human rights body that falls under the umbrella of the Organization of American States” (Spring). In this way, it serves as an international means of checks and balances for the Americas, much like the United Nations does when they feel a certain country has violated human rights. Loperena was a witness for the Garífuna community of Triunfo de La Cruz, in their court case against Honduras. He explains:

When a community or an individual brings a case to the Commission, the commission [of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights] reviews it, and reviews what they consider to be the merits of the case and decides whether or not it should actually advance to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. And then once it advances to the court, a hearing is scheduled and then the judges decide on the case(Spring).

Loperena also clarifies that while he was involved with the hearing regarding Triunfo de La Cruz in 2014 and the judgment issued in 2015, the commission had been listening to claims regarding human rights violations from the community against the state of Honduras for over a decade. He continues by saying:

“What’s important to understand here is that the conflicts over land in Triunfo de la Cruz stem back several decades but really sort of intensified in around the 1990s with the advent of tourism as a really focused state development priority...state authorities and international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, sort of came together and said: Hey, [Honduras] you have this beautiful country, you have hundreds of miles of pristine white sand coastline on the Caribbean coast. This could be a really phenomenal place to develop tourism”(Spring).

Loperena identified the roles and machinations both the IMF and the World Bank played in putting international pressure on the Honduran government to begin the process of land usurpation from

the Garífuna people. He made it clear that the Honduran government wasn't alone in the culpable acts of ousting a group of people from their ancestral lands. When the country fell into an economic crisis, at the same time that the global tourism industry was booming, the Garífuna started finding themselves in a contestatory position with both the Honduran government and the empire, which they never had before.

Clear examples of this tension can be highlighted when Jose Francisco Avila retells one instance of a criminal government land grab in 2005 when he and other Garífuna demanded “an investigation into Garífuna participation in the Bahía de Tela Project, including the unethical sale of [Garífuna] land on behalf of third parties, by nonmembers of the Garífuna communities” (348). The Bahia de Tela Project was another instance of land usurpation from the Garífuna communities. At the time the project was in the process of being sold to the highest private bidder. The Garífuna , after hearing this, demanded some recompense for the land that was stolen from them, and also wanted representatives from the community to help aid in the decision process for which bid would be chosen to develop the land.

Avila, a retired accountant, served as the financial advisor to the Garífuna communities in this project. After the communities advocated their rights in protest, the government finally relented and decided to give a share of the profit of their sales from the land to the Garífuna communities. Avila notes that “after meetings [which included] multilateral agencies, the agreement [of] 7% of the Shares of Stock Los Micos Beach & Resort Tourism Project would be allotted to the Garífuna ”(348). The Garífuna communities only received compensation for seven percent of the total sale price of their own land. This recorded account by Avila is the only time in the history of Honduras that Garífuna were given reparations of any amount from the government. Here, the culpable parties are not only the Honduran state, but also the multilateral corporations

that allow such processes to happen, so they can profit off of the global tourism that will emerge from this area. The Tela Bay Project demonstrates the ways in which Garífuna are offered a pittance of what their land is worth, as globalization enables the Honduran state to throw Garífuna even deeper into necropolitical zones. The Honduran state is able to throw the Garífuna into a hole of subjugation and disenfranchisement, but it could not have submerged them as deeply as it has without the help of the empire, or globalization.

Transitioning from the Honduran state and globalization to the relation between global tourism and globalization, Christopher Loperena suggests that these two entities are interlinked, as globalization puts pressure on smaller countries, such as Honduras, to open their borders to global tourism. This allows large TNC's the opportunity to invest in an area as international tourists demand the creature comforts they are used to in their native countries. This process is what Joseph Scarpaci, author of *Plazas and Barrios*, calls disembedding. Disembedding is the process by which "international institutional arrangements enable people to cross national boundaries with the assurance that lifestyles can be maintained regardless of place" (127).

Along with disembedding, global tourism and globalization both play right into the hands of the empire as both work to weaken national sovereignty and strengthen the global economy. Scarpaci explains "whenever the global economy gains, the nation-state loses" (126). In this way, the empire feeds off the nation state via global tourism. When a country such as Honduras *tries* to keep up with global infrastructure, they devalue their own local heritage by shoving it aside for the sake of globalization. Global tourism, inadvertently, waters down authentic heritage as seen with the Garífuna by valuing universal commodities over those unique to the area. Scarpaci states that "the role of the nation-state as the catalyst of change has been theorized and recast into a secondary role. In its place are many actors ushering in globalization" (127).

Unfortunately, the nation-state of Honduras isn't even powerful enough to make any real changes- positive or negative- to provide any pressures that implement economic or societal change. At this point, the only entity with enough power to do that is the empire, which draws its strength from globalization and the global economy. The United Nations was aware of the demolition of authentic heritage as a process of globalization, and in 2000 a conference was held in Israel to present a "Revised Plan of Action for International Co-operation on Tourism Management in Heritage Cities"(28), which provided countries like Honduras recommendations regarding how to attempt heritage tourism more humanely. The United Nations noted that Indigenous communities were to be protected as they are a part of the cultural heritage of a country.

In response to the conference's findings, safe and sustainable practices regarding conserving the welfare and lifestyle of Indigenous groups were provided to large TNCs. The UN called upon "heritage specialists, curators, planners, and administrative and ancillary personnel...to share their knowledge [regarding safe, sustainable tourism] to private philanthropic (e.g., Shell, Getty, Ford), and funding agencies (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank)" (28). To this date, it has been twenty-two years since the recommendations of humane heritage tourism from the UN were provided to TNCs. Despite this, nothing has changed. Thus, the extraction of a land's natural resources and people, spurred by global tourism and globalization prove to have devastating consequences on Indigenous people, such as the Garífuna .

Globalization and global tourism assist the empire in taking control of profitable land, and Christopher Loperena, in his discussion to Karen Spring, discusses how such an amalgamation led to the forcible land grab of the Garífuna . He notes the effects of what happened to the land of the Garífuna as a result of the Honduran economy being poor, while global tourism was burgeoning:

“[The idea] of a robust kind of tourism industry in Honduras took off and that led to all sorts of complex claims over the lands within the Garífuna communities. Because again, the Garífuna communities lay claim to some of the most gorgeous and some of the most coveted stretches of coastal property in Honduras. Their lands were all of a sudden very much in kind of the purview of state developers or investors of international financial institutions” (Spring).

Based on what Loperena described, the Garífuna communities were soon forced to deal with not only the Honduran government forcing them out of their lands, but they also had to contend with the forces of the empire. These forces backed by the added pressure of global tourism, powered by TNC’s, which was eager to buy the land that the government was about to rob from them. This initiated the process of the usurpation of land from these communities. As a result, land continues to be stolen from people who have come to inhabit it for over two hundred years. When Garífuna Activists started speaking out against the land usurpation in Triunfo de La Cruz through the court case which Loperena previously discussed, Garífuna activists soon began disappearing. Soon, these forced disappearances, most likely caused by the Honduran government, began to make international headlines:

It’s been nearly 50 days since five Garífuna leaders were abducted in their homes in Triunfo de la Cruz, on Honduras’s Caribbean coast. On July 18 at 5:30 AM, men wearing police uniforms kidnapped the five leaders after forcefully invading their homes, breaking windows, tampering with locks, and forcing the Garífuna men—Alberth Centeno, Milton Martínez, Suami Mejía, Gerardo Róchez, and Junior Mejía—out of their homes. They have not been seen since (“Five Garífuna Leaders are Still Missing in Honduras”, The Nation).

Garífuna regard their ancestral land as a sacred living relic passed down from their ancestors. Garífuna depend on this land for sustenance, and without it, they can’t survive. When we see Garífuna fight for their land in courts, or on the streets in protest, some of their leaders quickly vanish. No one has been held accountable. In cases of land rights, the Honduran government sees

the Garífuna as “othered,” labeling them subaltern. By doing this, one can see a judicial system operating with total impunity that will never hold those accountable for ending the lives of a legally protected indigenous group. This process utilized by both the TNCs (the new empire) and the government of Honduras is wasting Garífuna lands and lives, and it is a definite example of how both parties demonstrate a force of biopower over the Garífuna and their land, subjugating them into the death worlds of necropolitics. Not only are the Garífuna facing collective social death through hostile state policies designed to stifle their growth and exterminate them, their leaders are literally being killed by the state, supported by the global political connections of TNCs. These deaths are concrete forms of ongoing necropolitics in Honduras.

From an ecocritical perspective, both human and non-human entities are being attacked by a modern postcolonial state determined to usurp the lands of Indigenous peoples for capitalist gains. The lands of the Garífuna hold their ancestor’s bones, as well as the bulk of their spiritual beliefs. With the help of the Honduran government, capitalist forces swept over these lands turning them into palm oil plantations, wind turbine farms, or zoning projects for large hotels. Capitalism drives these ancient burial sites to an end, churning up hallowed earth, and constructing it into something whose profit will solely exist for a foreigner in a different country. The land, as a result, is wasted; instead of being cultivated and protected as the Garífuna would otherwise do. The empire exercises unethical usurpation of land, not just with the Garífuna, but globally. Similar to the Garífuna, the Indigenous Mohawk of Oka, Canada, are still fighting for legislation to have their ancestral land transferred back to their community. “Oka Crises” published by The Canadian Encyclopedia, notes that “The Mohawk had been pressing for recognition of their right to the land since 1761” (The Canadian Encyclopedia).

Since 1761, the Mohawks have been fighting for legislation that will give their ancestral land in Kanesatake back to them. For most of the 17th and 18th centuries, the Mohawks had to fight with ownership of their land with white settler-colonists, called the Sulpicians. Many times, in court, the Mohawks tried to fight Sulpician settler-colonization of their land, but they were overturned in court. Eventually after the Sulpicians moved away from Kanesatake. After World War II, the Mohawks again tried to file legislation to prove that their ancestral lands that belonged to them. This time, their case went to Canada's highest juridical court. Yet, akin to what the Honduran government did to the Garífuna , the land claim was denied on the grounds that "they did not hold the land continuously from time immemorial. [So] their Aboriginal title was voided" (The Canadian Encyclopedia). Indigenous and non-indigenous tensions escalated when the government allowed a golf course to be built on the communal ancestral lands of the Mohawk. When the golf course developers wanted to expand by building over the ancient burial ground that was sacred to the Mohawk people, agitations came to a head. What resulted in the Mohawk defending their burial grounds from being desecrated was a "78-day standoff (11 July–26 September 1990) between Mohawk protesters, Quebec police, the RCMP and the Canadian Army" (Canadian Encyclopedia). This standoff resulted in a Royal commission being conducted to see what went wrong, and recommendations to be made in the future to avoid similar conflict. What the commission found was that major changes would have to be put into place, resulting in an essential re-drawing the Canadian constitution. Hardly any of the recommendations the commission gave were put into place. The government bought the land, halted construction on the golf course; and designated the land only for Mohawk use. Even after all this, the government still refused to sign the land back to the Mohawks. As it remains, the land still belongs to the

government. The Mohawk people are still deemed subaltern, and not worthy by the Canadian government to own their own ancestral land.

Many parallels can be drawn between how both national governments and empiric forces treated the Garífuna and the Mohawk communities. Both were deemed “unfit” to own their own ancestral land, with the excuse being that they hadn’t lived there long enough for it to rightly be theirs. In both cases, the Canadian and Honduran governments exercised racist logic and settler-colonial violence; using biopower to shove their indigenous peoples into zones of necropolitics. Thus, defining them as a subaltern species of human whose voice can not be represented or heard enough to be given land that is rightfully theirs. What can be seen under closer inspection, though, is how the empire maneuvers national sovereignty to its whim as seen in both cases. The real reason the Canadian government didn’t want to give the Mohawk back their own land was because globalization drove the empire to invest in the Mohawk land. Once the empiric forces encroached upon the Canadian government, it let the empire have its way. The empire would have, too, if it wasn’t for the pressure that the national and international press coverage caused to make the Canadian government put a halt on the construction. Even then, the Mohawk still did not receive land that rightfully belonged to their people. I believe that this is so the empire can try and take hold of the land again once more time has passed.

Part of the halting of the golf course development can be attributed to the fact that this standoff occurred in the global north, where more media attention is naturally focused. For that reason, at this point the cases of the Mohawk and Garífuna diverge. While the Oka crises was a human rights violation and represented hundreds of years of racist oppression and extermination of an Indigenous’ group’s way of life, the media coverage it garnered stopped development on Indigenous land. Garífuna on the other hand, as members of the Global South, live in a country

the Global North doesn't care to pay attention to, and don't emphasize the same kind of press coverage. With no international attention, and hardly any media coverage to expose the atrocities that are happening to the Garífuna and their land; the empire has no need to halt its continued expansion of development on sacred Garífuna land. The empire works in all cases to leverage national governments against their Indigenous people. It works to silence them, throwing them into death worlds where they have no self-autonomy. In Lower- and Middle-Income Countries, this happens two-fold. In this way, the land is thrust into a geopolitical zone of necropolitics along with the Garífuna. When both the Garífuna and their land are extracted and exploited, literally violated in such a way, the result is a wasting of life forces of both. The two parties are left not dead, but not fully alive either. They are wasted into little more than Mbembe's definition of the walking dead.

CHAPTER II: LAS MUJERES GARÍFUNA , SU TIERRA, Y SU TESTIMONIO

Garífuna Women and Ancestral Land

Garífuna women live within the confines that the government has placed upon them. They live within the context of the Honduran state forcing them to live in the margins of society, as well as the empire continuously convincing the Honduran state to rob Garífuna women of their land by building ZEDES over the burial sites of their ancestors. Understanding Garífuna women through a postcolonial-ecofeminist lens, it is pertinent to know the ways in which Indigenous women must use decolonial feminist strategies to fight against the coloniality of gender. Walter Mignolo, through his work, *On Decoloniality* elucidates that

“decolonial feminisms disrupt and transgress the white feminist universal as they pursue insurgencies, standpoints, and propositions of decoloniality and decolonization. Central here are interrogations of race, ethnicity, gender, and patriarchy, but also of the heteropatriarchal frameworks and norms that organize social structures and institutions, as well as most aspects of everyday life (Mignolo 39).

By finding ways to challenge the one-sided view of first-world white feminism, Garífuna women necessitate the expansion of the field of feminism to better encompass their need for change as they fight to be heard. They can't exist in a field designed by and for a person of privilege in the Global North, because their fight is a different one, shaped by their need to shut down the machinations of capitalism and globalization. Crucial to constructing a feminism whose aim is to tear down the coloniality of gender, Garífuna women not only aim to confront Machismo society, but also work at changing the racist constructs that exist and operate in the Honduran state. Mignolo asserts that one way to do this is by the mobilization of the community to make change by forming groups that challenge such institutions. For Garífuna women who have already been implementing these practices daily, it is the emphasis of invoking the feminist practices of

their ancestors, and prioritizing the communal customs and traditions of their communities; these can then be fused into a feminist decolonial approach to fight against patriarchy, hegemony, the nation-state, globalism and capitalism. This process of insurgency, as Mignolo would describe it, can be highlighted through the field of Postcolonial-Ecofeminism, as it is a feminism that is widened to highlight such struggles.

How Garífuna Societies Became Matrilineal

Garífuna women are limited in what little land they have, and their relationship with nature is defined by necessity. Women are more affected than anyone in the Garífuna community when land is usurped from them because it is mainly women who own the land. Keri Brondo, in her dissertation, *Roots, Rights, and Belonging*, highlights that “little is written on Garífuna inheritance patterns, but the information shared by Garífuna residents in [the Garífuna community of] Sambo Creek suggests that [the] use rights[are] historically passed through the matrilineal line”(27). Brondo also notes that Garífuna women have a more direct relationship with their land, as they are the ones who work directly with it. “The division of labor had historically been that men fish...while women work in agriculture...women who remain in communities traditionally maintained responsibility for agricultural production, using the products for subsistence and occasional sale”(26).

In these communities, women are the primary caretakers and cultivators of their land, which positions them in a material relationship with nature, one based on necessity. Although originally this relationship was established out of material necessity, I argue that Garífuna women defend and care for nature more than just for their need for it. I believe they have a profound interrelation with the land that is based on spiritual reverence, endearment, and a strong bond they feel with nature. I believe that this relationship helps both nature and women, and both parties

thrive and grow from this symbiosis. Through a Postcolonial-Ecofeminist lens, this relationship can be analyzed as a strengthening one for both parties; as Garífuna women draw upon their land as a source of inspiration to defend both parties in ways that can serve as a decolonial praxis that can, in turn, provide a restoration of life. Addressing this subject-matter more personally, I turn now to the comments from an interview with Maria Welchez (name changed for safety), a member of the Garífuna community, about her observations of Garífuna Women and their land. She notes:

“Women do have a closer relationship to the land than men do, it's true. We cultivate the land and use it to plant and harvest food. It has been harder than ever to cultivate the land, as there is so little of it left to use. While women work with the land, the men in our communities are more based on fishing. But as I said, due to the land loss we have suffered, our customs and, our culture along with it, are being lost due to our lack of ancestral land”(Personal Interview, 19 January 2022).

Maria's observations about Garífuna Women's relationships to their land mirror Brondo's. When a land loss occurs, as Maria noted, it affects women in the community the most. The Garífuna woman and her land are both mapped out as bodies, left open and vulnerable to both the Honduran government and Hegemonic forces, as “with the increased risks and uncertainties of the farming life [comes] an intensified desire to dominate. This domination of both natural forces and women [is] often sought through "divine intervention" (Lahar, p63).

It's important to know how women became the primary caretakers and owners of their ancestral land, and how their relationship with it grew. Brondo theorizes how the Garífuna community shifted to a more matriarchal system around the same time that “the migratory process [started] in which more men leave natal communities than women. [This] has strongly influenced Garífuna society and culture such that women play important roles in the local economy, subsistence activities, and religious practices (26). Brondo highlights a shift that took place in these communities when traditional jobs were no longer available for the men, they began to move to

bigger cities in Honduras, or even go as far as the US to make a livable income. This then left only women behind in the communities to take charge of their societies. Brondo further establishes how matrifocality in these communities works by noting that “Women are also responsible for teaching the language and cultural practices. Thus, many of the Garífuna homes consist of women and their children. The matrifocality of Garífuna homes and communities form the stable core of households and extended families”(24). Over half of today’s Garífuna population in Honduras currently reside in the US. The Garífuna community is largely a transmigratory one, and it is easier for the men in the communities to uproot themselves; whereas for women, the choice seems to be more difficult. Because of this, many women stay and consequently become leaders of their communities and households. Through this process, the women became the owners of the plots of Garífuna land, as they were the ones who were left to own it.

Brondo points out one more reason for the Matriarchal shift in the Garífuna communities, noting how the culture comes from the change of “the overall status of women in a society that they needed to fill”(25). She likens this case much to WWII. When the men went to fight, the women had to take their husband’s jobs, since the need was there. This is similar to what happened in the United States; when the men left, the expectation was for women to fill all the roles, and tend to the land so society could function properly. The mindset of the women behind this being: “There is nothing a man can do that a woman can’t do better”(25). Brondo noticed the men who did stay as a part of the Garífuna community respected women as leaders and encouraged them in town meetings, aiding in any way they could.

She Works Hard for Her Money

Since women are the ones who maintain their communities, they often have the need to find work in order to sustain both their land and families. This has been difficult though since

jobs have been getting harder for them to attain. Brondo summarizes the difficulty of this process: “some women continue to vend on a small-scale basis; others work in maquiladoras, [others work] as household help, or as kitchen and cleaning help in the local hotels. [E]conomic opportunities at the local level are few and far between” (23). As Brondo theorizes, some women move to bigger cities in Honduras and work at textile factories for long hours for very little pay. Others are maids and cleaners. Often this work is still not enough to make necessary money. Still other Garífuna women stay and do the traditional jobs, as they have been for centuries. I asked Maria to expand upon the working roles Garífuna women play both in terms of maintaining their ancestral land, and the need to find work outside of the Garífuna community. She asserts:

“Yes, that is the way they have been, women having to look outside of our communities for work. The number of women who get involved in planting is small. Because, like many problems we face to recover our lands, customs have been lost, some go to work on cruise ships and others wait for remittances, apart from the fact that today there is much prostitution of minors of legal age and single mothers, etc.”(Personal Interview. 19 January 2022).

As one can see, the loss of land is a rift that runs deep in Garífuna women. There has been so much land lost that women aren’t able to sustain themselves and their families, like they had in the past. Maria knows it’s not just a way of livelihood for these women, but when they lose their land, they lose their customs and culture, too. This accumulates into the need to search outside their communities for jobs. When they don’t make enough money in these jobs, Garífuna women are forced into sex work just to make sufficient money to survive. Maria explained that for Garífuna women, this is a normal way to find an income when there is no other way to do so. In a sense, the Honduran government, by extension, has forced women into compromised social positions where the only way of survival is by selling their bodies. Both Garífuna land and women have become bodies that the government has pillaged, raped, and cultivated for its own profit. Through a postcolonial-ecofeminist lens, one can see how settler-colonialism sets women and land onto

forced spheres of submission, in which they are doubly bound. One “where women are treated as land: their bodies are used to reproduce, and at times leased out to earn sustenance through prostitution” (Jabeen, piii).

Symbiosis, Interconnectivity, and Resistance

Though it is obvious that both Garífuna women and their land have been neglected and othered by the forces that double-bind them, these two parties seem to have a connection with one another that goes deeper than that of necessity. Christopher Loperena, in his dissertation, *A Fragmented Paradise*, explains the inner workings of this relationship more in-depth. He asserts that “the universal subjugation of women is due to the fact that women are viewed as closer to nature. Women...are closely allied with the natural order”(p144). For Garífuna Women, they feel a deep connection to the land, one in which they find a sense of themselves. In his observations of this relationship, Loperena noted that for these women: the risk of "losing one's culture" was exacerbated by land loss, because the land is the psycho-physical space through which culture and survival are lived on a day-to-day basis” for these women, “caring for the land, working for the community parallels notions of caring for children and working for survival” (p154). When land is usurped from these women, they feel as though they are losing a part of themselves, and a part of their ancestors. This symbiosis can best be described as women serving the land by being defenders of it, and cultivating and nourishing it through the promotion of the growth of the natural biodiversity. Nature reciprocates this by providing a space to celebrate the memory of their ancestors, and provides sustenance via fruits, vegetables, herbs, and spices. The Co-vid pandemic has only strengthened this bond. When I visited the Garífuna community of Punta Gorda this past summer, female leaders of the community partnered together with OFRANEH (Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras) to find homeopathic ways in which the community could mobilize to

stop the spread of Covid. One of the members of OFRANEH explained to me that the second the Garífuna communities were aware of the pandemic spread, and how it affected those in the Global South, they immediately started thinking of feasible solutions to fight the virus.

The leader went on to explain to me she knew the government would not even be motivated to help the wealthiest white mestizo population of Honduras, so the Garífuna communities would be left to fend for themselves. OFRANEH worked with women in the communities to develop a strong natural tea, based on a recipe passed down to them from their ancestors. I was told they used the ancestral recipe, and added more herbs from their community gardens to fashion a tea that would naturally boost immunity and provide health to help ward off the virus, until vaccines were provided to them.

Even with vaccines, the communities still continue to drink the tea to keep themselves healthy. The OFRENAH headquarters in Punta Gorda provides an eight-hour service to provide tea to the community, as well as supplying more remote nearby communities to make sure all persons have the tea made available to them. This instance of resolve, tenacity, and perseverance demonstrates one small way in which the Garífuna women mobilize communally as leaders and depend on nature to mobilize against the necropolitical zones that wouldn't care if the entire community wasted away from the ravages of the Coronavirus. Through their deep love and extensive knowledge of nature, these women were able to provide a means of making their community feel safer and more secure. Maria describes this relationship in greater detail when she states:

“Women in our communities are closer to the land. In regards specifically to our connection with nature, it is based on the great love and appreciation that we feel for our nature. For this reason, you see generations upon generations of women working closely with the land quite a bit. Thanks to our ancestors, many women also practice rituals of making and preparing food on our land, in specific ways that are sacred to our people. These practices are all done in giving thanks to the earth we work on” (Personal Interview. 19 January 2022).

For Garífuna women, their land is an extension of themselves, their ancestry, and the very fabric of their culture. It is clear to see why it’s worth fighting for them. Loperena adds that in the Garífuna communities when it comes to a land rights movement, women are usually the first people to call others to take action in their communities. They do this by laying out a positive vision of development for both the land and the community, one that “links the future livelihood to the maintenance of land...tied to this is the belief that one must ‘use the land in the ways of the ancestors’, cultivate it and reap its harvest for the collective wellbeing of the community and for future generations" (Loperena 130). In their communities, they serve as forebearers of hope, and visionaries of the future, which have especially been noticed in the difficult times of the pandemic. Their leadership and strength mobilize and inspire the rest of the community to rise up and take a stand against the impunity they are facing. In the Garífuna community, women serve as intersectional crossroads of making sense of nature, community, past, and future for the rest of their people. Garífuna women also have the responsibility of communicating the circumstances of their land struggles for the rest of their communities. To this end, they inspire

“a sense of belonging to the land, and vice versa, which has become the primary moral argument used to legitimate land recuperation efforts. In a sense, women are the leaders of the land rights movement; their bodies are on the frontline of the struggle to rescue expropriated communal lands...their leadership positions them as arbitration of local land politics” (Loperena 132).

In this sense, the Garífuna women’s bodies become more than just a subaltern object for the government to expunge at will. Loperena’s theory substantiates these bodies are not only a key to

erecting a decolonial praxis, but also a source of epistemological decoloniality for their people. The Garífuna women see protecting and providing for their land in such a way as part of their duty, as “the one that rescues the land loves their community”, as the land that their “ancestors left [them] is not for sale” (137). Loperena identified one reason why the government, mainly comprised of mestizo men, might wish to be rid of the Garífuna women lies in the fact that for them women in mestizo societies handle the private spheres of life, such as maintaining the house and raising children. The norm is for men to handle the public spheres of life. By Garífuna women both owning land and tending to it, they are thrust into the public sphere, where the government has deemed them in an inappropriate place to be. For Garífuna women, since they are black and indigenous, they have to confront these multiple structures of domination from both the government and Honduran societal/gender norms daily. By resisting these machinations on a day-to-day basis, what Garífuna women have done is essentially “established the parameters for community activism” which is directly connected to the preservation of the Garífuna land (144).

Bridging Garífuna Literary Graveyards with The Use of Testimonio and Phenomenology

The process of silencing, exterminating, and wasting Garífuna life started when the British government slowly killed off Garífuna populations through a thirty-year war, and then continued this process by deporting them on a slow passage of death across the Caribbean Sea to Honduras. When the British brandished biopower over the lives of the Garífuna, they were thrown into necropolitical zones and in the process they were stripped of their land, loved ones, identity, culture, and sovereignty. By the time they reached the shores of Honduras, they were already deemed subaltern, silenced -again, and resigned to be nothing more than the walking dead. The Garífuna saw this series of events repeat itself as the mixed descendants of Spanish conquistadors and Indigenous folx of Honduras repeated the similar tactics as the British.

After more than two-hundred years of being established on Honduran soil, feeling comfortable on land that held the stories and hardships in the bones of their ancestors, and resisting extinction from Colonizers, and Settler-colonizers, the eyes of globalization roved over Garífuna land, forcing these communities in the limelight once again. The newly brought attention to the pristine ancestral beaches soon had globalization and global tourism pressuring the Honduran state to force Garífuna to give up their land, and members of the community started dying as they tried to defend what was theirs. On top of everything they faced so far, now Garífuna had to contend with the neocolonialism of the empire, attempting to disembed their land and culture to make it more appealing to a global market.

The journey following the Garífuna from the island of St. Vincent to where they reside today shows one common denominator of all their oppressors - the desire of all those who implement biopower over the Garífuna to silence them. This forced silence in the nearly four hundred years of oppression created graveyards in representation and culture that communities of Garífuna will never have, except what was passed down orally. This lack of representation is what I theorize are graveyards in literature that represent what has been lost over the centuries. Voices, stories, mythologies, legends, songs, and folklore that all cultures have, which have been exterminated from the Garífuna communities. These graveyards in literature can be seen today, for while there are Garífuna authors, like Jose Fransisco Avila, I argue that there will never be enough Garífuna curators of culture to make up what has been lost. This is especially true for the literary field of postcolonial-ecofeminism. Currently, there is little to no literature representing what Garífuna women feel as water and land defenders of their communities, or as women who have to contend with the androcentric society of Honduras. While there are plenty of outside ethnographies that feature Garífuna women as objects of someone else's work, there doesn't

exist an account that is written by a Garífuna woman depicting her own account of her experience of that and her people and their fight for freedom against their oppressors.

These graveyards in literature, or literary graveyards, can be theorized as liminal spaces. The literary graveyards left those who oppressed the Garífuna created a space of liminality much like a black whole, or mass grave. In each cycle of oppression more history, culture, and art were thrown into this space, until there was little left in the way of representing an entire community of people. This is especially true for women, who for so long have constituted the bottom layer of Honduran society with no room for upward social mobility or representation in literature. I argue one of the best ways to fight the empire and the Honduran state is by finding ways to bridge these literary graveyards. This happens by facilitating a space where Garífuna women can be represented in the literary field of postcolonial-ecofeminism by telling their own stories and representing their people and land. In this way, they become the subject of their own work, using their own voices to bridge the literary graveyards that have been instilled to marginalize and silence them. By bridging these literary graveyards, I argue that Garífuna women can establish a praxis of decoloniality for both their communities and their land, which can then harken to a larger global audience the need for change to the injustices going on for both Garífuna women, and their land.

Garífuna Testimonio

One of the most efficient ways I theorize the literary graveyards surrounding Garífuna women is via the written genre of testimonio. John Beverly, in his *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, explains that testimonio is:

“A novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a “life or significant life experience. Testimonio may include:[...]oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novela testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or ‘factographic literature’” (Beverly 31).

For Garífuna women who are trying to expand the field of postcolonial-ecofeminism, testimonio exists as a great genre to accurately depict the feelings of trauma, loss, hardship, and tenacity wrought from defending their land and livelihood. As most Garífuna women lack sufficient time to produce a piece of written work, testimonio is a genre which allows them to bear witness to another, via a consented interview or confession, and have that person collect their story and produce it for them. Thus, the Garífuna testimonio becomes a fast and efficient way to rapidly bridge the literary graveyards that have surrounded these women for so long.

Beverly posits that testimonio was forged from the combination of written word and communal oral storytelling common to many ancient tribes of Indigenous people in the Global South. When this form of Indigenous story-telling finally formed with written word, Beverly notes that “for practical purposes [...] testimonio coalesced as a new narrative genre in the 1960s and further developed in close relation to the movements for national liberation and the generalized cultural radicalism of that decade. Testimonio is implicitly [...] ‘resistance literature’” (Beverly 31).

As testimonio was founded and developed on the principles of resistance and liberation of a people, it serves as a more than fitting tool of decoloniality for Garífuna women.

Testimonio as a genre also works “not only to inspire the world, but to change it” (xvi). As a genre of resistance literature, testimonio often has a persuasive element to the story or message being conveyed, advocating for the rights and freedoms of the group of

subaltern/oppressed/marginalized persons who are conveying their experiences. The purpose of testimonio is to convey “an urgency to communicate a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, [which are] implicated in the narration itself” (Beverly 32). Garífuna women, through testimonio, can call out the oppressors who have wronged them for centuries, while necessitating a need for things to change, so the cyclical abuse of oppression they have faced can be broken.

Beverly maintains that one of the biggest distinctions to be made about the genre of testimonio is that the genre is primarily concerned “with sincerity rather than literariness” (32). When those sharing a testimonio are talking about a life-changing event, they are often recounting an event that was traumatic for them. Thus, there is plausibility for a person to retell an authentic testimonio as they perceived it, yet not as the events actually happened. Because of this, historically, works of testimonio have been viewed with skepticism and criticism by Western academia. Beverly warns academics against critiquing testimonios as they would a novel, because they are two very different works. A testimonio is primarily concerned with the authenticity of the story that is being told as it was perceived by the storyteller, and it is of utmost importance that testimonios are understood as the speaker told them. This is because it gives precedence to the voice of the speaker and his or her experience. For Indigenous groups, like the Garífuna , it allows the precedence of their truth and experience to supersede anything else, eliminating any chance of subalternity threatening to demean their experiences.

Anchoring Garífuna Testimonio Through Phenomenology

The significance of a narrator giving a testimonio based on an event as they perceived it is also validated by the theoretical work of phenomenology. Dermot Moran, in his work, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000) uses phenomenology to assert the lived experiences of

the one who is recounting a series of lived events. Phenomenology seeks to validate what the “experiencer” of such events interprets as reality, and not a thing to be analyzed or scrutinized by the harsh gaze of criticism, but rather serve as a way for the person who is telling the story to discover truths about themselves in the process. This interlinks well with bracing the point which testimonio makes in emphasizing the importance of the authenticity of the story as the narrator/experience encountered the situation they are recounting. Morgan notes that the experience, or phenomenon that is being retold “in the broadest sense [is] whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer” (Morgan 4). In other words, the emphasis in phenomenology is placed on reality as the experiencer perceives it.

Like Beverly, Morgan argues that a phenomenological experience is not to be analyzed with harsh outside criticisms whether that be religion, science, or critical analysis to debunk or invalidate the event that as understood by the experiencer “explanations are not to be imposed before the phenomena have been understood from within” (Morgan 4). Morgan asserts that an experiencer cannot have their experience debunked from an outsider, with an outsider’s understanding of what happened. The only person who has the power to do this is the experiencer themselves, with an understanding of the events that they must unlock within themselves. Phenomenology, thus, substantiates the importance of the experiencer over that of one who may be trying to disprove the claims that the experiencer makes. In this way, phenomenology anchors the use of testimonio as resistance literature. An example is when a testimonio is told from one who has been the victim of subalternity, empiric forces quickly sweep in to silence the testimonio by employing an outside understanding or criticism. This process deems the event/testimonio as invalid because it is coming from one who they long

deemed “invalid” as well. Phenomenology works alongside the work testimonio is doing as resistance/decolonial literature by pushing back against the forces that work to label the testimonio as subaltern.

By adding the theoretical work of phenomenology to boost the use of Garífuna testimonio, I believe the urgency to bridge the literary graveyards caused by cyclical, life-wasting forces can begin to be adequately bridged. Both testimonio and phenomenology work to restore life to Garífuna women, by giving them the validity of their voices and experiences, while also calling out those who did them harm. This is of utmost importance in the process of developing a way to bridge these literary graveyards and giving the voice back to the oppressed and marginalized Garífuna , especially highlighting the women’s stories as pinnacle in reforging the Garífuna field of literary production. By choosing to “carefully describe things as they appear to consciousness [...] problems, things, and events are approached [by] taking their manner of appearance to consciousness into consideration”(Morgan 6). This process involves recording events as the experiencer encounters them to the conscious, which is a vital process in conducting a testimonio.

Bridging the graveyards of literature that surround Garífuna women in the literary field of postcolonial-ecofeminism can be accomplished with the use of testimonio- as a way of establishing a decolonial praxis while implementing the use of resistance literature - which allows women to speak about the wrongs done to their people and land in a communal way. This grants them the right to speak on behalf of their community as a whole, while encompassing the traditional means of oral storytelling to incorporate practices passed down to them from their ancestors. Testimonio, when coupled with phenomenology, validates the experiences of the Garífuna women, while prohibiting outside disturbances to denounce, belittle, or silence the

truth they are trying to speak. By allowing Garífuna women to share their testimonios, it not only works as a method used to disentangle the infringement of biopower placed over them, but it is the very act of restoring life itself. Giving a story, voice, and validation for Garífuna women not only takes them out of necropolitical zones, but allows them to plant seeds of life into their communities and land. The hope is that these testimonios can both work to bridge graveyards caused by cyclical implementations of biopower, and draw a larger audience to listen to their story to help inspire a change for both the women and land of the Garífuna women of Honduras.

As I have now established the need and necessity of Garífuna testimonio, I give space in this chapter for these women to share their stories. The emphasis is on their voices, their stories, their plight, and their strength as they tell their testimonios through a postcolonial-ecofeminist perspective. For the sake of anonymity, their names, and any personal identifiers in their stories have been changed. However, the message they convey will remain the same. It's time to take a step towards the restoration of life for Garífuna women.

Los Testimonios De La Mujeres Garífuna

El Testimonio de Fey

Fey (renamed for anonymity) is a member of the Garífuna community who grew up in the States when her parents moved there from Honduras. She decided to move back to Honduras with her Garífuna husband. I met her on my last trip to Honduras in July 2021 when my husband, son, and I were visiting a few Garífuna communities. She is a village leader, a business owner, cultural preserver of her community. She now shares her story on her experiences and her reflections of women, the community, the government, and nature around her. I met Fey during my trip to Honduras in July of 2021. As she is bilingual, our conversation was spoken in English and took place via Zoom.

I was born and raised in New York. My parents weren't the most traditional Garífuna parents, so for that reason, our family never really connected that much with nature. For many Garífuna, having a very spiritual relationship with nature, and a medicinal dependency on it is natural. That is what my parents didn't teach us. I didn't get into nature or learn about how to use it as

remedies, or anything else, until I met my Garífuna husband. He's from Honduras, and he knows everything about nature, one hundred percent.

My husband was raised by his grandmother, who, as an elder in the community taught him everything about nature. When I started spending more time here in Honduras with him, I started reaching out and speaking more to the elders here, so that's how I started learning more about natural remedies.

I am not dependent on nature alone, but my husband and I are dependent on it together. We are planning to live more off of the land in the future. We have to. We're planning to build our house on the land we own. We're renting right now to save money to start constructing the house. When we build our house, we're going to make sure to have a huge yard for a garden and for animals. This is because we do want to depend more on the land in the future. With renting, it's harder to facilitate that kind of dependence on nature.

Now we have a small little garden, so a lot of the herbs that we use are peppers or lemongrass. We just include small things now that we like to grow. Whenever we're about to make the soup we just go to the yard and get the spices. Whenever the kids are sick we get one of the herbs and make a tea out of it to remedy their ailments.

When it comes to meditating and clearing my head, nature has played a major role in me being able to calm down my anxiety, because I just go sit and watch the ocean. All of a sudden this sudden sense of calmness comes, and then I'm in my thoughts and able to process. When I was living in the States, I didn't even realize why I was so stressed. No one said anything to me, or did anything to me, but I'd always feel so stressed. There, it's like you do what you have to do to calm yourself down. I feel like that's why a lot of time people get into different types of vices, like becoming a shopaholic, and those types of coping mechanisms for stress are normal as pastimes in The States.

So now, for me here living in Honduras, I just look outside, or go outside and sit down in my backyard. I don't need to spend all that money buying stuff to be distracted. Now, I am able to envelop myself in nature around me, and it's priceless. In the United States, you're presented with all kinds of decisions you need to make in life, then five years pass you by, and you wonder why you're still not ahead. Well, that's because for five years you've been coping with anxiety by drinking, partying, or shopping. There are so many things to distract you. Here, as opposed to there, you are forced to do the work, and face head-on whatever is troubling you. And that's what living in Honduras makes you do.

When it comes to innately having the knowledge and the bond with nature, I know many women who have those connections, but I'm not one of them. That's simply because I am a city girl and grew up in the city. I'm still balancing my life as a mom, a business owner, and a wife. My mind is not there right now, but my husband who grew up with this land is the one who has more of a bond with it because that's just him. So, I'm learning from him.

I have definitely seen a connection with the mistreatment of Garífuna women and nature. It's not so much where I am, but I'm very knowledgeable of what women are going through in other areas of Honduras. I was actually at a conference with OFRANEH last week that was

discussing this very thing, the mistreatment of women and nature by the government, that was led by a local female environmental activist and Garífuna elder.

So in that conference, they served meals to buy as a fundraiser to financially aid people who were defending their land rights. This one guy who was there still spitting up blood because the police beat him up because he refused to give up his home. There was also a woman in her 70s, who was put in jail for protecting her land. This was the first time in my life I really came face to face with victims of this sort of crime that was committed against them.

There is a huge connection between the Garífuna having less land. As a result, we can't use the land the same way our grandparents used to use it, because it's all being taken away from them now. Like, how we are supposed to harvest all of the crops we used to eat. How are we supposed to practice our spirituality, when one of the biggest aspects of our spirituality is our land use? One of the biggest aspects of our spirituality is the construction of a temple for a ceremony we do. The temple is called a *dugu*. And, with that ceremony, we have to build this temple, made of only natural resources from the land. But, if we don't have a huge piece of land, how are we supposed to do that? There is definitely a connection between our spirituality and the land.

So, there is undoubtedly an urgency being felt right now for the Garífuna to protect their land. I know a lot of people in my current generation that are being a lot more intentional with making sure that their land documentation is correct, whereas back in the day before the land grab, folks didn't have to worry so much about having documentation. Then, everything was done by word of mouth. When an elder was setting aside his will, he simply verbally says "this land is for uncle A, B, C, or D." Or, parents leaving things would say, "okay this is for my child 1, 2, or 3", and that's how it was. But now with modernization and now the Honduran government wanting to develop our land and moving closer, there are now way more eyes on our land. Who knew that 200 years ago that the Garífuna would be on prime real estate, with our communities on this oceanfront? But we settled it because that was the way we knew to live. We survived off the land and the sea because that's what we knew, not thinking it was going to be profitable 200 years later. All those things back then, we just didn't know. There is a lot more awareness that our land is being taken away from us. That is why, now there are more people paying attention to the documentation of the land to protect it.

Where I live, there isn't a lot of talk about the ZEDES, but I have heard there are a lot of people protesting the development of them. Within the last six months of the election of our new president, though, things have been really quiet. So I don't know if people will still continue to protest. What ZEDES are promising is land development, higher jobs, and better education if they build on Garífuna land. When it comes to where I live, I would be pro-development to give the locals a more balanced playing field. I feel now the foreigners that lived here have an opportunity to try and make it here, but your average local/Garífuna doesn't. If you are a local, you don't have access to free English education. If the minimum wage for Hondurans wasn't 400 dollars a month, we should be able to accomplish more or be able to be more competitive with the foreigners, so I'm not against the development at all.

The thing with ZEDES that everyone is questioning is the fact that they would be charter cities. They wouldn't have to respond to the Honduran government. These charter cities will

have their own government and be a city within a city. Locals are saying lands will be taken away from them, but the land developers are saying they bought it fair and square. Locals in my community have been protesting this and against it, but with the hope of a change in government, things have been more or less quiet lately. So, who knows what will happen. Right now, it kind of feels like the calm before the storm.

El Testimonio de Alma

Alma, renamed for her anonymity, was born and raised in a coastal Garífuna community. She now is a coordinator and works for OFRENAH, the largest organizes social justice group for Indigenous persons in Central America. I met her on the same trip where I met Fey. Alma, along with working for OFRANEH, is a community leader, and works to make medicinal ailments for her community, such as tea as a way to fight covid. She uses nature as her inspiration to fight the destruction being wrought, and looks to give life back to what has been lost to her people. Our conversation took place in Spanish via Zoom.

The generation of our parents left the communities to settle in other places, then they began to forget and leave behind the customs we have always been part of. But yes, most of our lives, my generation of Garífuna has depended on the land; as we have depended on the sea. These are things that are currently being violated because we (Garífuna) are no longer able to have the right to go fishing in our own territory, we are losing them every day, so unquestionably we have always depended on the lands and waters.

Right now with the pandemic we have had to return to our ancestral roots, as we lived before. We know that many times we do not need to go to the doctor because we have herbs. We survive now as our grandparents survived then. Just as they healed those who were our parents, we now heal our community. Due to the pandemic the process of depending on nature as a source of restoration has once again returned the a source of healing we now rely on, as our grandparents and ancestors did. If we depend on the land, it is because we plant our medicines in the land.

The problem we have in the country again is exploitation of our land and racism of our people. Also, the problem of the defense of the territories and the fear of constantly wondering if the government will take away our land. When this happens, how are we going to be able to survive? We are not going to have a way to grow our herbs.

We can prepare the lands for ourselves and protect our land and our people. I want to shine for the people here because it is very, very important. Yes, it is a connection to the land that we have had to return to. We in the Garífuna communities do not have health centers, we do not have hospitals. For example, the community where I live does not have a health center. The closest hospital is extremely far away. We have to drive 1 hour and 20 minutes away to get to the hospital. So, imagine dealing with this issue when the pandemic happened. We did not know what we were going to do. Reasons like this are why OFRANEH was created. It was built to support the vision of creating these centers that we call communal health houses. In some communities, these houses are already built that are going to become health centers for us. Garífuna people established this for our people. Because of OFRANEH and our

communities, any town can have them. My community as of now not only serves the Garífunas, but we serve all the people who come. We have set out to create inclusivity to safeguard our lives. We also do this through what is a natural medicine, because imagine what was coming for our communities. It was a catastrophe of death if we did not have hospitals and then these centers help us to return to our roots. It has made us recover our culture, our autonomy, and be able to safeguard the lives of ourselves and other peoples.

The land is not only for our culture, that is to say, the cultivation of medicines and the cultivation of our food. We also depend a lot on the land and the connection that is spiritual for us Garífuna people. It is a connection because, through the land, we can feed ourselves spiritually. This is an energy, it is something that does not transmit the same to us as maybe it did for our ancestors. But how we treat the land is with an emphasis on ancestral respect. We also depend on it a lot, we have to pay homage to our ancestors through the land. So, it is also a very big problem that our government is taking it from us illegally. Excuse me for mentioning it so much, but it is a hard situation that we are going through. In defense of the territories, we fight for our spirituality. We fight for our food. We do this to safeguard our lives and fight to continue the struggle. We do it for these young people, because tomorrow they will not have land due to the oppression that we experience with the government. Our young people have to emigrate to the United States, risking their lives that may fall by the wayside. These struggles that we endure here as leaders and defenders of the territories are to maintain our autonomy as Garífunas, our customs, and our traditions. All this focuses and connects us through what are the lands.

Personally, I have a unique connection with the land. I recovered it while fighting to protect a recently endangered piece of land threatened by the government. This land they wanted to develop was a strange land. In this place when you arrive, you can feel a positive energy that is being transmitted. You do not want to live apart from this land because you feel a connection like this is your place. For me as a young person, there were many of these feelings I could not explain spiritually because I did not yet have the means to understand them. I grew up in a modern society, with parents who also have a mixture of ancestral and modern ways of living. When things are mixed up like that they change a community's belief system. Because if a father believes in ancestral teaching and the mother does not believe in it, confusion can be created for the child. So when I went back to help recover this land, I realized what my roots were. The connections to nature that I have, for me, has been a process and a unique and special time. I now have a connection through the understanding that our very autonomy has land and water; just like the land around us.

Look, right now we are experiencing a lot of mistreatment as women, for defending the lands because we have been victims of threats. We have been victims of rape and racism that still exists even if you don't want to see it. We are in the 21st century, but there is still racism against Garífuna women fighters. We went through a process in the community where there was an invasion of the military wanting to take away part of what are our lands. The government does not understand that we *are* our ancestral lands. It was a very hard fight, knowing that if we lost the land that was ours, we would lose everything. We would be nothing without our land. But despite all we have gone through and are going through in defending our land, I believe that the fight is worth it. We are also going through a similar process in another community, that, despite having been recovered, is still living in this state of constant fear. Fear that our government will come and try and take away again land that was recently restored to us. We also have a deep fear

that our Garífuna elders will be kidnapped. Everyone knows our enemy is the government. We have enemies. We know who they are.

Thanks to our spirituality, we who are connected with the land can understand that the government could not kill our leaders in this place. That is because our land is extremely sacred to us as the Garífuna people. The biggest concern coming from all of this violence from the government is that once our land is taken away; our spiritual connection with it will be lost. This connection between our land, our nature is unique to women, as we are the land and the sea.

I once dreamed that I would have the opportunity to work with our community leader. When I found out I would finally have that chance to work with her in OFRENAH, I cried. I said “My God!” I screamed. So it's not destiny, it's the connection of the ancestors, which guides you towards these people. It's the ancestors who know that we are part of these processes of struggle; that we are still seeking justice for these disappeared and murdered Garífuna. We know that they have already arrested one Garífuna activist as of now. We know that the Government still bears responsibility for Berta Caceres' death for defending the rivers and land due connection between us and these elements of nature. This connection is very important to us.

Being a woman in Honduras is very dangerous. When a woman wants to defend the environment, it is more dangerous. All the changes being made with our new president Xiomara Castro are for the better. But, if there is still a lot of danger for women. And we are waiting, we know as defenders from our field that we can't be getting involved in politics too much for safety concerns. But we are don't have much confidence right now that the government will change that much. We know just as much that it is not going to be easy for Ms. Xiomara to change the 12 years of Juan Orlando's government. During his time, there was so much deterioration of life he caused, and she is not going to change it with a magic wand, true. But we are going to continue fighting for the same fight because we are going to demand that if the government is not advancing legislation and policies that we women want, we will keep fighting. We do this so that we are no longer being violated. We already see ourselves being mistreated. We see ourselves persecuted. We do not want to be kidnapped because we are defending our territories, but we will keep fighting as we know we must. Garífuna will demand that Xiomara will fulfill her promise to stop the ZEDES from taking our land. She is a person who believes that every day we live in a country exposed by corruption. As a female president, the first in the history of Honduras, we Garífuna know that the old government of Juan Orland is still there and will play a lot with her, wanting her to disappear just as now we are already a little more fully involved with her. In this way, we share her problem.

The government has done a lot of damage to us. Several presidents of the Board of Trustees at OFRANEH have disappeared as well as others in Triunfo de la Cruz. There are four disappeared, among them is my brother. The government says that the boys are drug traffickers when we know that the biggest drug trafficker is Juan Orlando. There are many struggles that we have as leaders of each community. We know that there is a lot of corruption and violation of the Garífuna people. We also knew when the island's communities were divided up between the Government and England. That is the reason why we arrived in Honduras. We are talking about the first Hispanic community that expanded because we could not live on St. Vincent. We we did not want to live in slavery.

The government is killing and disappearing our people because they want to recover these lands for the big businessmen from other countries who come to invest in transnational corporations. Here, on these beaches, they do this without caring about our lives. Here, where there is still racism against the Garifuna people. This is a humiliation against our people. This violence. But we are going to continue denouncing the government. We are going to continue raising our voices despite the fact that we know that we are at risk of being disappeared at any moment for raising our voices against all these problems. There are people who want to silence ourselves and disappear us as the Garifuna people, but We are not going to shut up. We are going to be here every day to be able to defend ourselves because it is the only way solution we have. We, as the Garifuna people do not use weapons. It has been noted that when we demonstrate, we only use drums, those are our voices. Our voices and our drums of war sound, but they come to evict us with weapons, they kill our people.

I think that every day we wake up with the idea of protecting our territories, because we depend on it, because of our customs, our traditions, our autonomy. We as an organization (OFRANEH) personally are aware of what we have. We are aware that we have to fight for our territories because if they take away our lands, like the sea, for example, we no longer have access to go fishing due to government laws that have been established here In the community. We have other colleagues who have disappeared when we passed through another territory. It is obvious that the government has come up with laws to prevent us from going to the sea when it has been part of our life's customs. It is a part of the autonomy of life for the Garifuna people. If you go fishing for salmon, you have to take out part of it for the cassava (ancestral soup dish.) You then come back from the sea, and you already have the cassava, then you have fish and make your lunch. But now all of that is being taken from us. So this gives us the strength to continue fighting because if we don't fight, the government will force our culture to disappear. It is going to take everything away from us, despite the difficult situation we have when we fight in the country. But we have to keep fighting.

As for the ZEDES, we are against the project and we are going to maintain that position. We are going to maintain that fight until we die. The idea is that the government has sold our land. That is why many of our people have been confused saying that they are projects to generate employment. But these are projects for the destruction of life. They are projects to remove the trees from the land. Without trees, we do not have water. ZEDES are projects that invade because a decree from the government tells them what they can do. They come and offer a certain amount of money. Whether you want and if not, you have to leave your land. Then ZEDES are making expropriations of our territories, and so we are going to do without land. We have to make our people very aware, a ZEDE project only comes to harm, since we know that poor people are not included in that project ZEDE. If it comes to changing our lifestyle here in the communities, to take away our lands to damage the ecology, the environment in which we live, then it is not a project that is going to benefit Garifuna . It is extremely untrue many of our people have been confused because they have been brainwashed by the ZEDES who are saying that coming to improve life. But if you need to create a charter city within another country then this is impossible. This can benefit drug traffickers where criminals like the president can go to be kept and no one will be able to go and get it out of there because it has its own laws.

As an organization (OFRANEH) we remain in the position that we do not support ZEDES. We are going to fight permanently until these decrees can be repealed, as well as

the false promises of the Government coming to our people. We poor people consider that they are harmful and destructive projects, projects of death. There is a community where Garífuna was evicted with weapons. We as Hondurans, for example, cannot cross a certain line because they are already privatized the beaches. It is because this government is selling everything to foreigners and they want to come and invade our communities, so what is going to happen to us, the poor? If they tell me that I can't go to that place when I am 100 percent Honduran, with all my rights; when it is my ancestral territory, then things are very, very difficult, very hard. These projects are utterly harmful, they are projects of death, projects of the destruction of the environment. They are going to drill the forests and that is one of the struggles that we are going through in the territory I discussed feeling a strong connection with, as there is a study that says there is oil there. The Government wants to enter the lands for them to be destroyed. We are fighting to the death, because they are protected lands, they are part of our autonomy, our culture, our survival. This sacred place will be consumed. Everything that is planted will be consumed. It is an ecological place we do not have to put anything outside. I think that a Garífuna University for the Garífuna people will start very soon, we are fighting with the committees to establish one to begin educating our people in the ancestral ways of our ancestors. To give back life to what has been destroyed.

Conclusion

Garífuna women and their Ancestral land are dependent on one another, as they have perfected a relationship of symbiosis to help one another thrive and prosper. Garífuna women serve as advocates for the land, protecting it by whatever means necessary; even using their own bodies as devices to keep their land, safeguarding it from the Honduran government, and foreign investors who care only to demolish it for extractivist purposes. The land, in turn, provides the Garífuna women with a means to sustain themselves through an agrarian setting and gives them a connective sense to their ancestors. It provides them with a space in which they can carry on their practices for the future of their kin. Garífuna women feel a deep sense of unity with their land, and the bond can be deemed as sacred.

This bond, however, is put at risk every day by both the settler-colonial violence of the Honduran state, and empiric powers who brandish globalization as a means of biopower to extract life and land from the Garífuna , and use it as a means to make a cheap profit. By looking at the History of the Garífuna people themselves, one can see that they have always had a complex relationship with the Honduran government since they arrived from the Island of St. Vincent. The

Honduran government has never considered them a part of their country, which is evident in how they placed the Garífuna into necropolitical zones and enforced usurpations of the land which forced Garífuna from their homes. This force of biopower is tangible in a material way, as the continued forced disappearances and murders of Garífuna activists who are trying to protect their lands continues to grow daily. By analyzing these events through a Postcolonial Ecofeminist lens, one can understand how in order for the Garífuna community as a whole to thrive, both women and their ancestral lands must be liberated.

Through this framework, Garífuna women can be seen, thrown between “patriarchy and imperialism” and as a result “the figure of woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (Jabeen, 306). I contest that until the Honduran government and the Inter-American courts take Garífuna women seriously, their land, and their plight for justice, Honduras will continue to function as a country governed by total impunity, sacrificing its people as a means to an end of wealth that it will never achieve or attain.

Garífuna have been cyclically suppressed over the four-hundred years that they have tried to settle in a space to call their own in the western hemisphere, but they are repeatedly placed in necropolitical zones that have worked to erase their life, history, and culture. It is evident that in trying to suppress Garífuna, one of the steps that colonial, neo-colonial, and settler-colonial forces took to take life away from Garífuna was to suppress their written and oral culture. I argue that these forced erasures can be theorized as liminal zones that represent graveyards in life, culture, and literature.

While some Garífuna have been able to begin a field of cultural production, I argue that there isn't nearly enough literature in current existence to get a sense of how Garífuna feel about

their experiences. This is especially so for Garífuna women within the field of postcolonial-ecofeminism. I argue that one of the best ways for Garífuna women to bridge this literary graveyards is by producing testimonios. Testimonios function as resistance literature that allow a person to tell their story authentically as they experienced it, while urging others to look upon their plea for social justice. The theoretical work of phenomenology asserts the experiences of those who give their testimonio by not letting it be slighted or altered by others who may wish to question its credibility.

By giving space in this chapter to allow women to speak for themselves about their experiences, they themselves implement a praxis of decolonality which serves to restore life of the Garífuna that has been subjugated and tortured for so long. By giving their testimonios through a postcolonial-ecofeminist framework, these women hold those responsible who have wronged them, while also shedding light on the important work they have been doing defending their lands and waters. Garífuna testimonios, if expanded upon, will be an essential decolonial tool which can begin to bridge and eventually close the literary graveyards that have existed for centuries as a zone of death and destruction for the Garífuna. By closing these graveyards, they replace death with life, and silence with representation.

CHAPTER III: HONDUREÑAS AND THE ACT OF SHOALING: RESISTANCE THROUGH A POSTCOLONIAL-ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Introduction: Moving from the Coast to the Mainland

Moving from the Garífuna women of the Northern and Eastern coasts of Honduras westward to Mainland Honduras, and the mestiza/Indígena women who live there, one can notice that the landscape changes, along with the fight for equality of women and nature. With Garífuna women, their aim is directed at stopping the Honduran state from acting arbitrarily in producing legislation that allows the erosion of Garífuna rights to their Indigenous lands. But I would argue that their main fight is moreover against the neocolonial/empiric forces, powered by globalism and global tourism, to extract land as a life-giving source that the Garífuna both revere and depend on in order to thrive in their communities. The main culprit using biopower as a means of placing Garífuna in a necropolitical zone are the neo-colonizers.

In mainland Honduras, women are not surrounded by beachfront real estate, but rivers, mountains, and forests. This changes what their fight for justice looks like. While empiric and neo-colonial control are still prevalent forces that aim to destroy land and culture of the mestiza/Indígena woman, the main pushback by women in mainland Honduras is against the state of Honduras itself. Here, I posit that the government is less like a middleman selling land to interested third party foreign investors, as is the case with the Garífuna. The Honduran government is a force that is directly seeking control to enforce measures that can compete with “first world” countries by implementing severe activities of transnational corporations which pollute local communities and the surrounding environment. Here, the force of the Honduran state is backed more concretely by the United States and even Canadian government. Women in mainland Honduras are not part of the global tourism industry driving the unchecked extraction

of land. Instead, what can be observed is a lateral movement of military control, spurred by the Honduran state to enact neoliberal structures that work to decimate all living things in its wake. But as one leaves one geopolitical zone and enters another, one enters a new social zone of contestation characterized by a new voice that seeks to be heard as well, that of the mestiza and Indígena Hondureñas.

New imperial processes act via domestic and international companies which often partner to take land from Indígena/mestiza women. One tangible way in which this can be seen is with the development of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam, which will be discussed at length in this chapter. This dam, located on the Gualcarque River, was funded by the Honduran electric company DESA (Desarrollos Energético). DESA is notoriously owned by the Atala's, one of Honduras' most prominent oligarchical families. DESA creates energy via the use of dams, then sells the power privately to the highest international bidder. Along with DESA, the dam was also initially funded by the Chinese company Sinohydro, the Dutch development bank FMO (Netherlands Development Finance Company), and the Finnish development bank FinnFund (Finnish Fund for Industrial Cooperation Ltd). These Chinese and European countries hoped, like DESA, to make money off the electricity being produced by the dam in competitive international markets. None of the energy being generated would be aiding the Honduran people, let alone the Indigenous Lenca who depend on the water for their survival. The hydroelectric dam was strategically placed in a way that cut off the Lenca from access to Gualcarque. The Lenca revere the Gualcarque River similarly to how the Hindu revere the Ganges River that flows throughout India. To cut one off from the other is like stripping away a vital piece of one's spirituality, religion, and culture. The Lenca also depend on the water from the water for drinking, without access to it, entire communities of people would die from dehydration.

As the land and fight of the Honduran women change, so too does their existing field of cultural expression. I have found that while there still isn't enough literature produced by mestiza/Indígena women to get a sense of how they feel about their oppression, there is a wider variety of authors who place the Hondureñas experience and voice at the center of their novels. As a result, there is more cultural representation in literature for mestiza/Indígena women than there is for Garífuna women. Therefore, this chapter will draw from literary texts about Garífuna women (with works like Brando and Anderson) instead of ethnographic ones as Chapter One did. By placing an emphasis on women's defense of nature and themselves as seen in representations of literary texts, I analyze the struggle that women in mainland Honduras face through a postcolonial-ecofeminist lens. Along with the theoretical approach of postcolonial ecofeminism, I also adopt a materialist approach tied to cultural analysis that combines phenomenology with literary interpretation. I find this method most useful for understanding the positionality of Hondureñas in this literature as it emphasizes women's material necessity for nature from a post-colonial perspective. Establishing the symbiosis of women and nature in this geopolitical zone highlights the constraints placed on women when the nature around them suffers. Analyzing their relationship through a materialist standpoint also proves that women's dependence on nature is what drives them to form a unique connection with nature in the first place; one that contributes to their endearment and defense of it, in the face of its extinction. Through this materialist approach, I will engage with literature of Hondureñas throughout this chapter as I examine how forces that constrain nature usually constrain women that depend on nature as well.

Adopting a phenomenological approach that grounds the literary in palpable material social conditions, I place the literature centered around Hondureñas as valid indigenous textual

practice that marks their stories as an authentic decolonial discourse that seeks to address the oppression they have suffered. To this extent, I draw from Eric Matthews's *Merleau-Ponty: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2006), in which he posits that the way one perceives a lived experience as it is recounted based on their witness of it is what authenticates the event itself. By drawing on Merleau Ponty's understanding of phenomenology, Matthews expounds upon the key role perception plays in relaying a series of lived events. By placing perception of the experiencer over outside criticisms, phenomenology in turn substantiates the truth of a more intimate experience of one who lived through an event over one that did not have such experiences. Matthews establishes that any learned information to be gleaned from an event should be pulled from the experiencer, and the inward truths that they discover from living through the event.

Seppo Sajama and Matti Kamppinen, in *A Historical Introduction to Phenomenology* (1987) assert that emphasis placed not only on the perception of the event, but also what can be understood about the event itself based on said perceptions. Utility, they argue, is placed on one or more first-hand perspectives of an event, which can lead to a different understanding of how an unfolding of accounts occurred. The works of Matthews, Sajama, and Kamppinen seek to authenticate the stories that Honduran women share, as well as the events they have experienced and discuss with the aid of testimonio as a means to share their experiences.

Much of this chapter will focus on both Nina Lakhani's *Who Killed Berta Caceres*, and *The Thirteen Colors of the Honduran Resistance* by Melissa Cardoza. Lakhani's work focuses on the life and legacy of murdered Indigenous rights activist Berta Caceres, while emphasizing the corrupt domestic and global powers that would wish to silence an activist like Berta. Lakhani also takes a bigger look at the state of Honduras, by demonstrating the ways in which both women and nature were always at risk under a corrupt government. Cardoza's work recounts

thirteen accounts of women resisting militant, dictatorial, and patriarchal forces that wish to silence and kill them. Cardoza emphasizes these women's strength, which is not easily achieved in a country that has some of the highest rates of femicide in the world. By analyzing Cardoza's work through a lens of postcolonial-ecofeminism, I draw out the voices of activism and resistance in the novel to the insurgent movements I had witnessed when I lived in Honduras from 2016-2020. I emphasize the urgency for more works like Cardoza's by highlighting the literary graveyards that still surround the experiences and struggles of Honduran women. By demonstrating how Cardoza's work has already started to bridge this graveyards by making the Hondureñas voice known, I theorize that the use of testimonio might further aid in bridging this gap, as it did with Garífuna women. I argue that having mestiza/Indígena testimonio alongside works like Cardoza's can more adequately give voice to the fight for feminism and environmentalism that Honduran women have embarked upon through their own words. Following this, I share two mestiza/Indígena stories that follow their paths of activism, which work to deepen the understanding of the specific challenges and aspirations of mainland Indígena/mestiza women.

Las voces de la Resistencia

In *13 Colors of the Honduran Resistance*, Melissa Cardoza chronicles thirteen communal stories of Hondureña acts of resistance to the Neo-colonial and Settler colonial forces that ensnare them. The *13 Colors of The Honduran Resistance* defines what it means to be a feminist from Honduras through thirteen stories that portray women defying the heteropatriarchal society that domineers them. The stories highlight the ways in which women combat violent sexism which subsume their marriages, workplaces, communities, and freedoms of speech. Cardoza tells the stories of trans, Black, and elderly women- challenging the heteronormative definition of

what it means to be a woman; while calling out the singular violence that they all face. Whether these women take action by mobilizing protests, creating feminist advocacy groups, leaving abusive partners, walking out of their places of work to join the resistance movements, or hold up a Bible in the face of corrupt law enforcement; Cardoza maps these women's stories and actions as points of resistance to the corrupt military dictatorship of Juan Orlando Hernandez. Cardoza emphasizes women's resolution and resistance to the torture, murder, and persecution they face for merely existing.

I delve deeper to understand the Hondureña fight for justice by analyzing the text through the two opposing forces that exist in Cardoza's work; i.e., the government, on the one hand, and the women and nature, on the other. First, the side of the Honduran government, backed by oligarchs, and spearheaded by a military dictator with aid from the Anglo-American empire in implementing its oppressive machinations. Here, I work to navigate the way in which the oppressive systems of both hegemony and national military dictatorship operate in Cardoza's work. I do so by drawing on the critical insights about the nature and structure on the new empire offered by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in *Empire*, Christopher Loperena in "Settler Violence", as well as Nina Lakhani in *Who Killed Berta Caceres* to conclude that the United States military and government are equally implicit in the ongoing ruination of women's lives and nature by the Honduran government.

The second opposition in Cardoza's work is that of women and nature. I analyze how Cardoza draws on women's bodies as places of confrontation and resistance to their oppressors by looking at women's acts of defiance through the act of shoaling, a decolonial practice theorized by Tiffany Lethabo King in *The Black Shoals*. I work to find ways in which Cardoza depicts women slowing, stopping, or shoaling the movement of said oppressive forces in an

effort to preserve both themselves and the environment. By analyzing women's actions as a form of shoaling, I demonstrate how Indígena/mestiza women utilize shoaling as a method of resistance and posit how shoaling might function in the text as a tool of feminist protest and insurgency.

I ground my analysis of the text within the framework of Postcolonial-Ecofeminism, using Neelam Jabeen's *Women and The Environment*. Women's connection to the environment exists well within the intersections of feminism and ecocriticism. Jabeen's addition of *postcolonial* to ecofeminism more accurately portrays the struggle that women in the global south go through as they fight to free themselves both from neo-colonial oppression and coming to terms with their complex relationship with nature. Postcolonial-ecofeminism also more accurately captures the mestiza/Indígena resistance against the militant /oligarchical forces that wish to control and extract the natural resources which people depend upon for survival. Cardoza's work notes direct instances of this, as she depicts communities of women carrying rocks in their purses to defend themselves, as the institutions set up to defend women failed them. At any moment, Hondureñas are seen as ready to take up the mantle of defense and protect themselves and their families. Viewing women's insurgency through this intersectional framework also reinforces the need to expand upon what Hondureña authors like Cardoza have reiterated, which is the demand for Hondureña voices to be heard, shared, and widely distributed. I hope to aid in this global publicity of Hondurena struggles by theorizing the use of testimonio functions as resistance literature to aid women in establishing a praxis of decoloniality.

Para Esperanza y Berta

When I first started teaching in Copán Ruinas, Honduras, beginning in January 2016, I lived in a bubble. I was expected to only speak English with my students, enforcing them to

strengthen their second language through immersion. Early in my teaching career most of my friends predominantly spoke English as well, so sequestered in my bubble of English, I was not able to learn much about the culture in which I was surrounded. Some time passed, and I realized the ignorance of my ways. I did not want to further the stigma of the inept expatriate who could not speak the language of the culture in which they were immersed.

Because of this discovery, I began intensive classes with my Spanish instructor, Esperanza. While Esperanza taught me Spanish, she also taught me about what being a feminist in Honduras means. “It’s not only about caring for the advancement of women,” she noted. “For Honduran women, it’s also about caring for all the surrounding nature that we depend on to thrive. Without one, the other cannot survive. We are two parts of the same whole. Women depend on the land they work to survive. The land, in turn, needs activists that will defend it against our corrupt government. That is why I am out in the rural mountains teaching people the ways in which they can stand up against the government. If our people are not united, no change will be made. Copán is far too divided. Revolution has not been made possible because the community is too ignorant. It is this ignorance I am trying to break, but it is hard.”

I hardly noticed my fluency in Spanish growing as I was in awe listening to the community activist and leader to whom I was speaking, Esperanza, a member of the CAC, or the *Coalición Ambientalista Copán*, (The Copán Environmental Coalition). As part of the CAC, Esperanza regularly taught classes in community centers around Copan, educating folks about ways in which the government would try to take advantage of them and their land. I would regularly see her posts on social media about the conferences and protests she spoke at; she was calling out the government for allowing foreign financial investors to implement extractivist processes that would ruin the local environment. Her courageousness, bravery, and sense of

doing what was right were equally compelling. Being a feminist and an environmental activist is one of the deadliest professions in Honduras, as Honduras has the highest number of slain environmental activists in the world. Esperanza feels the risk is worth it though, for women in Honduras there are usually two options: risk of murder for speaking out in corruption, or risk of dying at the hands of a military dictatorship that sees women as expendable material, to be used and cast aside on a whim.

Esperanza's efforts to preserve and protect both women and wilderness around her remind me of Berta Caceres, a fellow Hondureña activist, who was assassinated for her efforts in protecting the environment. The life and activism of Berta Caceres is central to Cardoza's work. To better understand Melissa Cardoza's work, one must first understand the context behind why Cardoza felt compelled to write her book to begin with, urged by the strength she witnessed of Hondureñas coupled by the injustices she knew they faced. Understanding the life of Berta Caceres is key in understanding the struggles women faced, as she represented many women who fight for the betterment of themselves and nature, and are killed for it by the government in response. As I interpret Berta's life, work, and assassination, I will analyze how both national and hegemonic factors aided and abetted her murder and explore the ways in which women still continue her fight today.

Life and Legacy of Berta Caceres

Berta Isabel Caceres Flores was murdered in the early morning hours of March 2nd, 2016, at just 44 years old. The few months before her assassination entailed rising tensions with DESA, a Honduran energy company who was trying to get a hydroelectric dam built on the Gualcarque River, and Berta's community protests and attempts to stop the project from moving forward. At this point, Berta had drawn enough international attention to the Indigenous Lenca people who

would be put at risk if development of the dam were to move forward, which resulted in European and Chinese financial developers from pulling out of the project. As a result of this, Berta had strong suspicion to believe the Atala family who owned DESA might hire a hitman to try and kill her. She believed as much and expressed these fears to her close friends and family. This included her dear friend, Gusavo Castro, a Mexican environmental activist, who was with her on the night she was murdered. Berta lived in a gated community in the city of La Esperanza. Coincidentally the night she died, there was no police monitoring the gate where she lived, which was normally never left unguarded. Berta also had no idea where Juan Carlos Juarez, the policeman assigned to protect her, was. One of the last text messages she sent inquired his whereabouts. Cases of police involvement, or intentional non-involvement, aren't even unique, as most activists that disappear or are murdered have similar eyewitness accounts connecting the government to permitting such crimes to happen in the first place.

Around 11:40 pm Castro heard someone break in and fire three gunshots in the room where Berta was located. Castro came into find a bloodied and beat-up Berta, with three bullet wounds to her legs. The gunman, not anticipating Castro's presence, fired a shot at him, which grazed Castro's head, before fleeing the scene. Castro tried to apply pressures to Berta's wounds, but she died shortly after telling Castro to contact her ex-husband, Salvador, for help. David Castillo, a graduate of West Point, and manager of DESA at the time, was eventually tried and convicted for co-authoring the assassination of Berta in July of 2021. Berta left behind her four children Olivia, Berta, Laura and Salvador; two grandchildren, and her patria to grieve her loss, which is still felt by many to this day.

During the time of Berta's assassination, I was in my first year of teaching when the news of her death hit my classroom. It was all anyone could talk about for days. It upset a lot of

people, and there were protests and riots in the streets soon after her death made headlines. In a story for the online magazine Remezcla, “Remembering Slain Indigenous Rights Activist Berta Cáceres”, Yara Simon noted “Just one day shy of her 43rd birthday, Honduran indigenous rights activist Berta Cáceres was murdered. NPR reports that in the past, she successfully stopped the building of the Agua Zarca Dam that would have cut off her community, the Lenca indigenous group, from water and food” (Yara Simon). The article also notes that “Her next challenge was stopping a company from building a hydroelectric dam on the Gualcarque River. The dam would affect the lives of the Rio Blanco community, which is why Cáceres continued to fight, despite having received death threats”(Yara Simon). Cáceres knew her life was likely in danger, and in a 2013 interview with Al Jazeera magazine, she noted that :

The army has an assassination list of 18 wanted human rights fighters with my name at the top. I want to live, there are many things I still want to do in this world but I have never once considered giving-up fighting for our territory, for a life with dignity, because our fight is legitimate. I take lots of care but in the end, in this country where there is total impunity, I am vulnerable... when they want to kill me, they will do it. (*Al Jazeera*, 24 December 2013).

Nina Lakhani, author of *Who killed Berta Cáceres*, talked to Berta’s best friend and Garífuna Leader, Miriam Miranda, who notes that Berta’s assassination goes beyond the slaying of an Indigenous leader or land rights activist, and had more to do with the fact that she was a woman in a machista society; “they killed a woman who dared speak out against a patriarchal system, that’s why I call it a political femicide”(Lakhani 148). This points to the bigger picture of Berta’s assassination- to understand the persecution of the mestizo/Indígena woman is synonymous with understanding Berta. Her life sets a precedent for how the majority of women in the country are treated as “[one] woman is murdered every fifteen hours,” women are thrown in zones of subalternity as they are pitted “between deadly violence and casual machismo. [Honduras] is a hard place to be a woman” (Lakhani, 147).

The Honduran Oligarchs

Melissa Cardoza also condemns Berta's assassins, noting that they have "handed over the land she loved to the giants of capital, to the military, the imperial powers, the revolting international ultra-right and the banal but insidious ruling class that dominates [Honduras] and traffics people, influence, ideas, products, and souls" (Cardoza 11). Honduras, at the time of Berta's assassination, was a combination of an oligarchy and military narco-dictatorship. Ten of the wealthiest families owned most of the banks, TV channels, soccer teams, processing factories, and fish hatcheries in the country. Lakhani notes that the Honduran oligarchy is a "group of transnational families whose vast wealth and political power allow them to influence, some would say dictate, public policies to benefit their economic interests... These ten or so families [kept] Honduras subservient to the US capital and geopolitical objectives" (58).

These oligarchs have manipulated Honduran economy, media, and economic infrastructure since the first half of the twentieth century. These families also have some of the highest seats in political power, as they are willing to bribe the country's most recent dictator, Juan Orlando Hernandez, so they can more easily pass laws that will support their corrupt legislation. One example of this is when they choose to show prominent soccer matches of the year at the same time when corrupt legislation. The most recent example of this can be seen when a virtual session of the National Congress that took place during Honduras' holy week (Easter), which is technically illegal since the session presided during a national holiday. The National Congress passed legislation to "reform" articles 2, 26, 29, 30 and 47 of the Honduran Constitution. These articles detail the prosecution process involving money laundering, the Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code, and the Political Parties Oversight Law. These newly passed reformatations

essentially weakened these bills, which mandated that little to no criminal prosecution could be charged for those who could be charged and found guilty for laundering money; while in turn making it possible to criminally prosecute someone for being involved in a social protest. This meeting coincidentally happened during the 2022 FIFA World Cup Honduras vs. Costa Rica qualifying game. After the game, later on in the news, media coverage focused on the match instead of the political events that took place.

Another example of such manipulation and control can be seen with the oligarchical Atala family, who owns Banco Atlántida, the primary sponsor for the building of the Agua Zarca dam. The Atala family also operates and heads DESA, with Daniel Atala Midence, being the chief financial officer of the company at the time of Berta's assassination. This dam, as I explained earlier was proposed by DESA to other private international developers to create and sell the energy it produced at top dollar to other countries. None of the energy used would be made to benefit the Lenca, the local Indigenous group who lived where the development was to take place. Investors situated the dam in a way that directly cut off Lenca from use of the dam. The Lenca depend on the river for drinking water. Without it, they cannot survive. DESA knew this fact and was willing to exterminate an entire community of people for a quick buck.

It wasn't until international attention drawn by the influence of Berta Caceres that development on the dam stopped. The Atala family have been tied through various court-case documents for co-authoring her murder, yet have not been charged or convicted, and likely never will be. The military dictatorship that overthrew President Manuel Zelaya in 2009, which is headed by Juan Orlando Hernandez, often partnered with influential, powerful oligarchs like the Atala family. Juan Orlando would give certain members of powerful families, like the Atalas,

seats in the supreme court, and political clout, in exchange for aiding his political career with the money and power they had at their disposal. .

For these reasons, they are all too eager to partner with outside foreign investors, who promise them exorbitant amounts of wealth to mine the natural riches of Honduras. These oligarchs have been key in drawing the attention of large transnational corporations (TNCs) to areas of mainland Honduras by “positioning themselves as the bridge between international investors and new transitional elites” (Lakhani 60). According to the US Department of State, there are currently two-hundred US owned and operated companies located in Honduras. You can hardly drive a mile without seeing Pepsi-Cola or big pharma iconography plastered on the sides of pulperias, buildings, and signs. Every decent sized city has their own McDonalds, Subway, and Texaco gas station. Current Honduran legislation has weakened indigenous land that is communally owned land (a process which I explain further in Chapter II) which makes it some of the most vulnerable land up for grabs in the country. These TNCs are quick to invest in Indigenous property, and then fight Indigenous ownership of the land in courts. Because of vast wealth TNCs have, unlike Indigenous folk, they usually end up winning the cases, and keeping the land.

One such example of this can be seen in Chapter I’s account of Jose Avila’s account of the land grab of the Indura Beach and Golf Course from the Garífuna people in the city of Tela. While the rapacious TNC backed- arm of globalization is all too eager to try and invest in the ruination of native Indigenous folks and their land, it is pertinent to realize that the process of globalization was enacted by the Honduran oligarchy. This oligarchy is one that flaunts biopower over its countrymen, forcing mestiza/Indigenous locals into necropolitical zones for their own betterment. For the Honduran oligarchs, Indigenous people and their land were “considered

living fossils, the stuff of history and folklore, not an ancestral community with rights” (Lakhani 39).

The government partnering with TNC involvement, and the effects of such entanglements for women of Honduras, are weaved throughout *13 Colors of The Honduran Resistance*. Cardoza often paints what both sprawling nature and thriving Indigenous communities looked like before international corporate businesses started buying and controlling areas in Honduras. The differences of such images are striking in Cardoza’s work. Take for example her retelling of the town of Choloma, before US sweatshops took hold of the community. Cardoza notes that the community was:

“ancient and small, somewhat dusty and crossed by a river, seemed to be what it always was: an old indigenous territory with broad green and beautiful rural areas. There was no horizon of cement rooms and metal roofs, enormous industrial ships and noise of buses all day like there is today, much less would anyone say what everyone knows today, that it is one of the most violent cities in the Northern area of the country” (Cardoza 59).

What once was idyllic, peaceful, and sacred for Indigenous people, soon became a place for TNC control. One can easily see the shift that takes place in the land, and for the people. Indigenous communities are torn apart as their once traditional ways of life are now destroyed, and most women are forced to go work at the sweatshops, where they make barely enough income to survive, with no option for upwards social mobility. The land, too, is destroyed, as the exhaust from the large factories contaminates the air, water, and decreases quality of life. With many families barely surviving in the ten-to-fifteen-hour days many members of the family are forced to work; it’s no wonder why many turn to crime as a fast way to make money to survive.

Seeing crime rise in an area where communities of people are intentionally set up to fail is no surprise. Cardoza’s work highlights the strength of these women, who are the bulk of sweatshop employees, providing for their families. Direct parallels of governmental, oligarchical, and TNC

involvement can be drawn directly to the demise brought down on the head of Indigenous women, and their land in such instances. Indigenous women, in this way, suffer directly from their oppressors. They are shoved into necropolitical zones; never seeing the fruition of their labor. They likely know the more they work for such companies the deeper they dig themselves into such zones, while realizing they have little agency to do anything about it.

Empiric Involvement

Berta Cáceres knew she would likely be murdered. She was acutely aware of such a possibility years before her death yet she was willing to give up her life to fight for the environment. Cardoza laments the aftermath of Cáceres' assassination as she continues:

“Nonetheless, this is what we are left with, this loving and radical gesture of calling upon the memory of the unrelenting feminist Indigenous anti-imperialist always and in every action. Berta hated all oppressive powers and always denounced the US regime for its historical affinity for dominating people, assassinating cultures, massacring life. But she always loved the rebellions unleashed in that nameless country, she would find the most beautiful insurrectionary flowers amidst the empire's putrid neoliberal filth”(Cardoza 13).

Cardoza, like Berta, was conscious of The United States' influence on Honduras and was very wary of how neoliberal and neocolonial machinations controlled almost everything in Honduras. Negri and Hardt charged The United States as being “the ultimate authority that rules over the processes of globalization[...] repeating the practices of the old European imperialists” (*Empire*, xiii). In this chapter, then, I will analyze the United States' role as the driving force that facilitates empiric entrance to Honduras. I show how both the United States and the new transnational corporate empire seek to control, privatize, and utilize the land of Honduras. Here, I define the new empire as a contingency of transnational hegemonic corporations in Central America that are usually driven by the political powers of the Global North, specifically the United States and Canada. While the United States and Canada may at times work closely with

empiric forces, I argue that they are also separate entities; the new empire is driven by economic globalization, while separate national entities that yet as of now exist operate as independent political-economic interests usually motivated by the need to control and extract global natural resources for their own betterment. I find that one usually drives the other, as the United States can be seen using transnational corporations as tools to globalize its economy, while it more easily looks to headquarter its military within Third World national borders.

Though at times it is difficult to discern where one begins and the other ends, I will try to separate the two entities. As Lakhani notes, the United States, thus, is culpable of driving the helm of empiric forces that began “running Honduras like a collection of private fiefdoms [while] ‘counselling’ presidents, ambassadors, and the military” (Lakhani 59). Globalization has also allowed the empire to work in ways that are destructive to women, too. Many large factories located in Honduras’ two biggest manufacturing cities, San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, are US owned. They hire the vast majority of women, and have them work under minimum wage, which is set at 350 dollars a month. These women have to work ten-hour days, and if they ask for even a sick day, they are fired. Cardoza points out that this treatment of women only perpetuates “cycles of unyielding exploitation that generate enormous wealth for transnational textile companies or from foreign [hegemonic] technology” (61).

This has been exacerbated by COVID. When women began testing positive for the virus in early 2020, factories still mandated that women show up to work, regardless of if they had COVID. Quickly, working communities contracted the disease, and it spread to the women’s families. Entire villages were wiped out, and the death toll began to rise as a result of such policies; policies that were made by international corporations owned and located in the United States. This leaves us with the question of “Why is the empire, driven by the United States, so

involved with Honduran policies?” Perhaps, the question should instead be rephrased to “Why does Honduras let the United States, or empiric forces, become so involved in its economic and political development when the track record for helping other countries is marked with bodies and blood of citizens of the Global South?” As Cardoza had exhaustively pointed out, the Honduran government is aware of this, yet is implementing neoliberal structures anyway. I propose that maybe this toxic relationship between the US and Honduras exists, as Honduras believes that it can only benefit itself from a close relationship with an empiric superpower- despite the evidence that has been presented by Cardoza. Following this train of thought, Negri and Hardt detail that:

“Countries who's economic production is not presently at the level of the dominant countries are thus seen as developing countries, with the ideas that if they continue on the path followed previously by the dominant countries [...] they will eventually enjoy an analogous position or stage. The developmental view fails to recognize, however, that the economies of the so-called developed countries are defined not only by certain quantitative factors or by their internal structures, but also and more important by their dominant position in the global system”(*Empire*, 282).

The empire, in turn, has defined such countries like Honduras through its own filter of domination. It hasn't taken into account (nor will it) its oppression of a lower and middle income country when they are the ones who get to measure what “developing” means. As Negri and Hardt infer, it is somewhat irrelevant to think that the laws of economic development will somehow change from the caste system from which it has historically been augmented, to allow a lower- and middle-income country to thrive in the space it needs, to be seen as something other than subaltern on the world stage.

Globalization works to keep countries like Honduras stuck where it is, so that the empire can continue to thrive off the riches extracted from it. This is why the empire will never cease to

meddle in ways that are detrimental to Honduran women or nature, because quite simply, it doesn't care. It is also the same reason that the Honduran government, which thrives on impunity, doesn't care. If Honduras gets funds from the United States, military training and weaponry from the United States, and governmental backing that allows it to thrive as a prosperous military dictatorship- the government does not care about the land or lives of women that are lost to keep such relations afloat.

Following the empirical system of destruction in Honduras, it was also empiric forces that pressured the Honduran state to try and loosen legislation that protected Indigenous land of mainland Honduras:

“The hard-won government pledges on ancestral land rights were at odds with the aggressive development programs being pushed across Latin America by international financiers like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and US treasury. Honduras, like many other countries, was pressured to introduce market -based land reforms, which included allowing the sale and mortgage of ejido (collectively owned) land for the first time. This, it was claimed would unlock the wealth of the poor as the capital raised could be invested to make the land more productive” (Lakhani 42).

This implementation of biopower for the empire was facilitated specifically towards the ruination Indigenous folx, who are the only groups of people in Honduras likely to own land communally. By using the Indigenous beliefs of how land should be used as a means to dismantle the resource-rich areas by Indigenous people, the empire became implicit along with international financiers who use the guise of neoliberal structures to propel only themselves, while both Native land and people suffer. The false claim that wealth would be unlocked through the use of land use was just as false- as such an extractivist process needed to reap the land ruin the land's natural biodiversity. No money or profit of any internationally financed project has ever gone into the hands of the locals from whom the lands were taken. Indigenous leaders like Berta knew

this, as well as any interest from the empire was in essence a death sentence to the Indigenous people living in the area of interest.

Women, like the land, were also abused in a similar way. Cardoza, like Lakhani, notes that Indigenous women were drawn away from their traditional ways of life in the countryside, with the false promise of opportunity, which really was just “wage exploitation in a sweatshop, due to the lack of income in the increasingly impoverished countryside” (61). Cardoza notes that the women who left for such work, “with energy and excitement” were in fact little more than cogs in a machine that was an “unyielding exploitation [of the women to] generate enormous wealth for transnational textile companies or from foreign technology”(61). In this way, TNCs and international developers partner to remove women from their land with the flimsy promise of more money and success, while simultaneously passing legislation to make the land claims such women have on their land weak and invalid. In effect, women are taken from their land, while it is in turn stolen from them. In the end, developers, the government, and TNCs all benefit from such a ruse, and those that are made to suffer can do little about it, as they have nothing left.

As a result of all of the destruction of life Berta and COPINH (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras) witnessed, they helped “more than 200 Lenca communities acquire land titles across five departments” in Honduras (Lakhani 41). Getting proper updated documentation as proof of land ownership is usually very difficult for Indigenous groups, such as the Lenca. This is usually because the elders of the communities may not be literate to sign documents certifying ownership. They may not even speak Spanish to understand what the government is trying to communicate about their land. Having updated land ownership documentation is usually obtainable by the wealthy, as the government makes it near impossible for Indigenous folx to even attain paperwork to prove that the land is theirs. Berta and COPINH

helping two-hundred Lenca communities prove their ownership is a process that begins to restore life by giving representation and voice to those who have been otherwise deemed subaltern.

The Culpability of The United States

The United States has been a guilty party in aiding corrupt narco-dictators (like Juan Orlando) rise to power. The dictators, in return, turn a blind eye to the explicit control of most of Central America by the United States. This strange partnership has survived for the last century and a half due in part to governmental, military, and economic sources that function well for all heads of state involved. The United States is able to implement extractivist processes in these countries that either drain life or natural resources from countries in Central America including the following: sweatshops, palm oil plantations, wind farms, international commercial investments, and hydroelectric dams. They also get added benefits like inserting military bases to train their armed forces wherever they desire. In exchange, the United States helps support whatever “war” these dictators wish to pursue in their respective countries, mostly with their own poor Indigenous/native constituents. For this reason, Berta Caceres grew up watching the United States get involved in armed squabbles of Central American dictators time and time again. Lakhani notes this unequivocally as she parallels Indigenous death with US military involvement:

“In Guatemala, more than 200,000 mostly poor Indigenous campesinos were killed in the thirty-six-year war, 93 percent of them by US-backed forces. The decade long Contra war in Nicaragua cost 50,000 lives. But no matter how many US tax dollars were funneled to military dictatorship after military dictatorship, no matter how many weapons and planes America sent, there wasn’t a single victory... Berta... came home certain of one thing: the armed struggle was not the way forward... Whatever [she] did in Honduras, it would be without guns” (Lakhani 35).

As Berta was growing up, she was witnessing the slaughtering and torture of her Indigenous kin, and seeing the US involvement in such instances of extermination as can be seen in Guatemala

and Nicaragua are what lead her to believe the only way make progress with undoing the damage done to her people in Honduras was without the use of guns. The process of restoring life to Indigenous and native peoples in Honduras had to avoid bloodshed, and instead work to preserve life instead of demolishing it.

The United States, as Cardoza also notes, has been a guilty party in many actions inflicted upon the Honduran public. Berta was a decolonial force that worked to uproot the ploys from the US that would seek to harm her people and her land. She was one of the original co-founders of COPINH. COPINH was, and still is, “an organization whose struggle identified with the anti-globalization movement opposed to the neo-liberal economic model” (Lakhani 57). COPINH also “worked to develop a deeper, more structural understanding of the role of international financial institutions and free trade agreements in local land struggles, forced migration, biodiversity, and natural resources” with Berta at its helm (57). As a result, Berta and COPINH worked to hold the governments of both the US and Honduras accountable for the nefarious acts that it committed against the Native/Indigenous people. Many of these acts included stopping the neocolonial/oligarchical forces that would seek to hurt the environment around where such people lived.

Berta understood the ways in which the United States fed off of Honduras in order to maintain its continuation of neo-liberal and empiric structures it had set up there. Much of what has caused this unrest in Honduras is not only due to national political corruption, but also the corruption caused in part by the US. Honduras is a country “whose military the US government trains and finances” (Cardoza 23). Much of Berta’s frustration lay with the United States government for aiding the military dictatorship of Juan Orlando. In an act of protest, once Berta led a march to the US military base, Soto Canto, in Palmerola and painted “anti-imperial murals

on the walls of the US airbase...[as] Militarization and repression, Berta explained... go hand in hand with neo-liberalism...because it is an economic and political model which must destroy some of us in order to thrive” (Lakhani 41). Currently, Soto Canto is the only US airbase for all Central and South America. All Latin American military operations that take place by the US are headquartered in Honduras. Cardoza, like Lakhani, also briefly mentions the importance of the Soto Canto US military base positioned in Comayagua. Along with the two countries having close military ties, the US government also sponsors the Honduran state with guns and weapons that are mainly used by the public. Cardoza notes the irony of bullets that say “MADE IN THE USA” being used to kill Hondurans, as it highlights the influence the US has over the Honduran government.

In exchange for Honduras’ compliance with this set-up, the United States works more closely with the Honduran army, military, and military police than any other Latin American country. Most Honduran armed forces are trained directly by the United States, which allows the US to have almost direct control of the Honduran state. It also more easily allowed economic control of the country, mass production and shipment of US weapons into the Honduran military, and ease of empiric control by way of economic developers and foreign investors to establish financial ties in the country. This was also the “launching pad for CIA operations to thwart neighboring revolutions" (Cardoza, 23). As Berta noted, implementation of neoliberal structures backed by a military dictatorship and supported by the US military almost assure a death warrant for Indigenous peoples, whose land is seen as ripe for the taking.

In her 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize Acceptance Speech, Caceres noted why the land was endeared to her people, and worthy of every effort to protect:

“[W]e are beings [of] the Earth, from the water and from the corn. The Lenca people are ancestral guardians of the rivers, in turn, protected by the spirits of young girls, who teach us that giving our lives in various ways for the protection of the rivers is giving our lives for the well-being of humanity and of this planet. COPINH, [is] walking alongside people struggling for their emancipation, [and] validates this commitment to continue protecting our [...]nature[...], as well as our rights as a people. Let us wake up! [...] We’re out of time. We must shake our conscience free of the rapacious capitalism, racism, and patriarchy that will only assure our own self-destruction” (*Ecocultural Reader*, 334).

Caceres’ postcolonial-ecofeminist standpoint on liberating both humans and non-humans from the hands of hegemony demonstrated her capacity to understand the ways in which one is able to organize and unite people against the cruel injustices enacted upon them. COPINH still functions today as a defense mechanism against the Honduran government, suing them for wrongs enacted to Indigenous persons and bringing international attention to such needed issues.

While Berta, now an international icon as both an environmental activist and feminist, is just one of many brave women in Honduras who continue working, despite the death threats, kidnappings, and sexual harassment they face. Women like Berta and Esperanza continue to do what they do, as there is great need. Mestiza/Indígena women can be seen placing themselves between their land and the forces that wish to control it. Through a postcolonial-ecofeminist lens, one can easily see that women depend on nature for survival in many rural mountain villages in Honduras. When one is neglected, the other is neglected, too. Climate change only exacerbates these issues; when an increasing number of hurricanes destroy houses, it usually ravages the poor mountainside villages the worst. This decimates both the mountainside and its inhabitants, many of whom are single mothers or grandmothers providing and living with children.

Mestiza/Indígena Land Use

Global warming is making it exceedingly harder to grow Honduras' main export, coffee, as the coffee plant cannot seem to thrive in the ever-increasingly hotter conditions where it is being planted. The bulk of those who benefit from the profit of coffee are women, who use the steady income to pour straight into the needs of their families. This is only worsened by globalization and domestic economic inequality. As Lakhani notes:

“Rural poverty generated by land inequality has been compounded by climate change and natural disasters like Hurricane Mitch in 1998; rising food prices; systematic land grabs by agribusiness and tourism developers; and shocking levels of violence perpetrated by state security services and private militias contracted by organized criminal gangs, corrupt politicians and seemingly reputable businesses, at times all working together” (Lakhani 60).

Women who live in local mountain villages are still contending with culminated losses caused by two hurricanes that occurred within two weeks of one another in 2020, Eta and Iota. These hurricanes caused massive landslides that rocked down from the tops of mountains, wiping out entire homes of families, coffee plantations on the side of the mountain, and even roads used to access these remote areas. My husband and I saw the devastation when we went to visit his home village of Sesesmil in July of 2021. We went hiking in the mountains to tour some of his coffee plantations, and whole sides of mountains were gone with nothing left but exposed bedrock. I asked my husband if machines mining for rock did this damage, as they sometimes do, but he assured me that this devastation was the result of the hurricanes. He pointed to the top of the mountain and explained that just a year ago, a young couple and their two-year-old had lived in a house on top of the mountain.

The damage done by the hurricanes was so severe their bodies couldn't even be found and recovered for burial. With a materialistic approach, one can see that women's physical need for nature constitutes their actions to protect what maintains their life and livelihood. When

nature is constrained by natural disasters or human destruction with the use of terraforming, women suffer because they depend upon nature to thrive to enable them to thrive along with it. This symbiosis establishes that both parties need to survive, as they are dependent on one another. Lenca women use water from the Gualcarque River for cleansing and nourishment, and in return they defend it from being dammed, which would destroy the biodiversity around it. Women who grow and maintain coffee farms do so in the ways of their ancestors, which does not harm or intrude upon the nature surrounding the mountainside. The coffee they produce and harvest provide for them financially. In exchange, they work to keep out large companies that want to mine the mountainside for earth and minerals. The material use of the land is what shapes mestiza/Indigena protection of their land.

While protecting the land and dealing with large natural disasters that ruin their houses and coffee plantations, women must also contend with trying to be heard by a government that doesn't wish to hear or see them. When big agro-investors wish to buy large swaths of land owned by poor campesinas, they are offered a small sum of money and forced off of their land, much like was witnessed with Garífuna women. Usually, Lakhani notes, organized gangs are also a peril women have to face in rural mountain villages. The more remote an area, the harder it is for police to access it. Gangs know this, so households with only women in it are usually hit first and hardest by criminal activity.

Women are raped and murdered, and it's usually weeks before police hear of such happenings. Rarely do these culprits get caught. This is how one of my husband's female neighbors in his village was murdered. It's a common tale. If these women live on land that is wanted by private investors or the government, it is normal for the police to look the other way when such crimes are committed. The only way these criminals are brought to justice in such

areas is when local villages assemble a vigilante justice system, which they normally do, as no governmental body usually steps in to protect the lives of women in villages such as these. To the government, women thrust within their zones of subalternity, are not worth saving.

Despite the dangers that women face in cultivating and caring for nature, they continue to depend on it for survival. Other than planting and harvesting coffee, women also use the streams running through the mountains to bathe their children and wash dishes and clothes. In more remote villages, women use water running from the streams to drink. If the water is contaminated, whole households get sick, and infections or wounds cannot be properly cleaned since many people don't have funds to purchase antibiotics. Because of this, most women have a deep and natural understanding of homeopathic remedies for herbs.

In such villages, for every ailment, there is a cure. My mother-in-law and sisters-in-law applied many natural salves to sunburns and bug bites, poultices to bruises and infections, and juices full of various roots, seeds, and plant skins for stomach aches, parasites, and bacterial infections. As an example, I have personally experienced these treatments and been taken care of by Mother Earth. Pregnant women bathe in hot water that has been soaked in roots in the belief that it will help give nutrients to mother and baby. Newborns are given herbal medicine to help them pass gas in lieu of burping. While some might interpret this as a mere dependence on nature, some, like Berta, acknowledge Hondureñas closer connection to nature. This material connection, therefore, instills a need in the women to try to defend what they are dependent on, since it is an object of endearment.

Esperanza explains it simply, as she acknowledges that she is a part of the circle of life and feels the need to give back to that which helped nurture her. "It's pretty common sense," she would say, matter-of-factly. "I need nature, and it needs me. Most men don't have respect for

anything around here, in part to the sexist culture that thrives in Honduras. If women don't stand up for themselves, and for nature, who will?" It is for this straightforward reason that many women pick up the mantle of revolution, as they are sick of having their way of life being taken away from them. Analyzed from a postcolonial-ecofeminist standpoint, such exasperated sentiments many Hondureñas have started to make sense. The anger and frustration of dealing with both domestic and foreign powers that barely acknowledge their existence as anything other than subaltern mixed with the fury of seeing themselves and their nature being reaped, only build up the powers that work to destroy them, is more than cause for the resistance and insurgency as a cry for justice. Berta and Esperanza's straightforwardness and mobilization to stop such forces are testament enough that mestiza/Indígena women are ready to be listened to, understood, and represented as powerful forces.

Once one is more acquainted with how oligarchical and political corruption functions within Honduras, one can better understand the Mestiza/ Indígena women who work to dismantle such corruption to benefit both themselves and the non-human beings that surround them. Let us now turn towards a deeper understanding into how Cardoza's work nurtures such rebellions against the hegemonic, patriarchal, and settler colonial forces that bind women and nature and how the text might be interpreted through a postcolonial-ecofeminist lens. A deeper understanding of Cardoza's work lends to a more intimate sense of the obstacles Hondureñas face as they fight to slow neocolonial and settler colonial machinations.

13 Colores de la Resistencia Hondureña

Melissa Cardoza's *13 Colors of The Honduran Resistance* focuses on thirteen women's voices that sought to disrupt the systematic violence of the Honduran government. I will analyze the text through two main concepts which are presented by Cardoza. The first being the invasive

forces of both the empire and national regimes which seek to silence the voices of women and extract much of Honduras' most marketable natural resources. Along with information Cardoza provides, these themes will further explore settler colonialism functions in Honduras to limit women's voices by putting economic infrastructure, natural resources, and indigenous groups at risk. The second concept I will discuss is how women are seen as defensively and proactively responding to these invasive forces. I will use Tiffany Lethabo King's term "shoaling" as the framework for how I conceive women protecting both themselves and nature with their bodies. I will then explore the ways in which mestiza/Indigena actions of insurgency can be formulated as a decolonial praxis for future generations of Hondureñas to come.

US Involvement in the Military Coup

Cardoza notes the women's stories she chose to share are the aftermath of "generations of colonialism, resistance, independence struggles, imperialist interventions, stolen resources, imposed austerity measures, and popular uprisings" that have happened in Honduras (23). In recent history, one of the biggest events in Honduras was the 2009 military coup, which Cardoza discusses in her work and blames it for permanently changing the face of Honduras. Though the involvement of the United States military and neoliberal influence in Honduras has been exhausted in this chapter while discussing the life of Berta Caceres, it is imperative that US involvement in the military coup be mentioned. This is because without the aid of the United States, Honduran oligarchs would not have been able to depose a democratically elected liberal president, and enforce the reign of a military dictator. In Honduras, people mark time mainly as "before the coup" and "after the coup." So, in understanding how political upheaval occurred, one needs to understand why and how it happened.

In 2009, President Manuel Zelaya was passing laws that would protect Indigenous people's land and rights as protected citizens. He was also trying to pass legislation that would allow for the antiquated, racist, and oppressive Honduran constitution to be rewritten. This new constitution was proposed to have preventative measures to serve as a system of checks and balances that would limit control over governmental authority- to stop dictatorships from controlling the country. Zelaya was about to enact a referendum that would allow people to vote whether they wanted such a constitution when the military coup took place. Cardoza states that the oligarchical-controlled media started laying the groundwork for this coup to be possible, as "they launched an all-out media assault on Zelaya, calling him a tool of Hugo Chavez, a communist, accusing him of trying to stay in power forever" (19). The United States was implicit in this act, as:

"A program officer from the International Republican Institute 'joked' three months before the coup at a briefing in Washington, D.C. about the situation that 'coups' are supposed to be so three decades ago until now. [Then] Honduran General Romeo Vasquez, trained in the US School of the Americas[...] carried out the first coup of the 21st century in Central America" (19).

After this, the oligarchy and government put up an interim government that quickly did away with all legislation Zelaya had passed, including the protection of Indigenous people and their lands. This included the Rio Blanco community, which opened it up for developments like the Agua Zarca Dam to be commenced in the near future. Recently, the history of US involvement in Honduras reflects the indirect criminal activity that has been put in force by the American government. Cardoza illustrates that they are one of the evils that work to extract nature for their benefit. The impunity can be seen by the United States initiating such extractivist processes in Honduras that are not even attempted in the United States, for fear of environmental/health hazards.

Cardoza continues to illustrate the ways in which the United States is secretly involved with Honduras' dictatorship, as she doesn't "tell" of the involvement, but rather "shows" by giving first-hand accounts as proof of the relationship. She describes her first-hand experience of what it was like to be a Honduran woman while the military coup took place, while knowing full well the United States had a hand in the unethical usurpation of her democratic government. Her compilation of collected women's voices bears witness of the evils exercised by the United States. Through the lens of postcolonial ecofeminism, her stories serve as evidence of how Neo-colonial control still seeks to subvert and control both women and nature. Cardoza draws clear connections to this, as she ascribes the US trained Honduran Police force as one of the main parties responsible for killing Berta Caceres. Cardoza implies with such examples that while they are not directly responsible for the mass slaughter of women and extraction of nature taking place, they have easily enabled such occurrences to happen, by acting with disregard to human rights.

Settler-Colonial Involvement in the Military Coup

Settler-colonial forces that work to subjugate those it deems subaltern are just as an important factor in the suppression of women and nature. Since the 2009 coup, *La Partida Nacional*, or The National Party, has been in control of the country. The National Party worked with the oligarchy, the United States, and the military to steal the government. From June 28th, 2009, to January 28th, 2022, the National Party was seated in power, leading Honduras as an illegally appointed governing body with Juan Orlando at its helm. Cardoza notes that since the coup, the makeup of Honduras has changed, and will likely never be the same again. While Berta Caceres was alive, she agreed with the sentiments of Cardoza, and many Hondurans, by noting an ever-present feeling of constraint similar to that of when the coup started. Their national

sovereignty was taken away from them, and since then both the life and nature of Honduras has only suffered as a result. Berta expands on this notion by stating in a 2014 interview that:

“We’re still living [in] the coup. All the power and machinery of the coup remains intact, not only that, but it’s also been consolidated by the oligarchy and transnational powers through the expansion of grand capital in megaprojects. There’s been a total surrender of sovereignty, and a level of political cynicism that we’ve never seen before” (Lakhani 161).

Berta notes the momentous differences that were employed by the new government under the coup. Neoliberal structures were put in place that allowed the empire to establish and invest in large swaths of land Indigenous people needed for survival. This process was only encouraged by the Honduran oligarchy, who promised to help develop these projects with the use of the big-chain national banks they owned, to financially support such projects. The money that was used from the banks went straight from Honduran tax dollars, into such projects that would help to eviscerate their local economy, while building up the global economy instead. Because of the coup, Honduras became a part of a cyclical pattern that continually endangered all citizens, but ravaged what it branded its bottom layers of society the most, its mestiza/Indígena women.

One of the most striking features of the coup was the installation of the military police. The military police is a “governing body” that works directly for the Honduran president, separate from the police or military, and whose presence is made known in almost every town and city in Honduras. Though they run adjacent to the police, they often also have conflicts with them; squabbling about who has higher authority in certain jurisdictions in municipalities. When I first came to Honduras, I was petrified of the fully armed men carrying AK-47’s, wearing military camouflage and ski masks, and riding in the back of a military truck circling around

Central Park like vultures. I quickly became accustomed to them as part of the background of the town, as in all my years living in Copán, I never actually saw them *do* anything.

To me, imagining Honduras was not always like this is quite shocking. Cardoza notes that the installment of the Military Police in almost every town was a ploy by the National Party after the coup to help keep protestors under check and at bay. This was also, in part, because of the mass outcry of protesting that the country saw after the military coup. Order had to be kept; no matter what the cost. Military Police were sent by the government as a hostile warning to not act out. Cardoza paints the picture of what one such protest looked like shortly after the coup:

“[The Military Police] had deployed to the streets with all of their tools of war. They took out their weapons, bought with the people’s money, to use against the people. They set up machine guns, drove around in tanks, showed off new cars and helicopters [...]they happily brought them out to show off, to intimidate, to kill[...] The national bourgeoisie did the same it [...] had donated the dowels from the shovel handles [...] to beat protestors” (37).

The imagery Cardoza presents is a government that functions with total impunity to control and suppress its people. This is especially true if you are an environmental activist or feminist. The government under Juan Orlando was notorious for unlawfully arresting such protestors in the streets and convicting them on trumped-up charges, such as treason, for which they must serve time in Honduras’ maximum-security prison. Years of those convicted have ranged anywhere from 2-15 years. The likelihood of surviving such a sentence is not high, as prisoners often report to their family of being starved or tortured.

The representation of the Honduran government functioning as a settler-colonization body exists as an undiluted presence in Cardoza’s work and is broken down and analyzed by Christopher Loperena, in his article “Settler Violence”. In the article, Loperena echoes Cardoza’s written experiences as he explains that the Honduran government (which is mainly set up of white-mestizos) uses the logic of elimination to expel Black and/or Indigenous bodies from

Honduras, by way of: “removal and elimination [that] is epitomized by the targeted repression and killing of key indigenous social movement activists, including the March 2016 assassination of Goldman Environmental Prize winner Berta Cáceres” (801). As both Cardoza and Loperena highlight, one of the biggest ways the Honduran government enforces settler-colonialism on its subaltern bodies is by systematically slaying the key social/environmental activists that represent an Indigenous/social group of people. By exterminating the progenitor of a movement, the government is trying to kill the movement itself, as with Berta and the building of the Agua Zarca Dam.

The process of settler-colonialism can also be seen by the Honduran government taking protected land from indigenous groups by means of criminal legislation, and selling it to foreign investors. Lakhani gives a specific example of this when she discusses how the World Bank funded “modernization programs” in large parts of Honduras. At the time, palm tree oil was seen as a global fast cash crop that would be seen as a “fix all” for governments who were financially struggling. The World Bank would sponsor local and Indigenous campesinos by aiding them with a supply of palm trees and machinery necessary to extract the oil from the trees, in exchange for use of campesino land. The catch was that the campesinos had to abandon whatever they were used to farming for survival. Palm trees are also an invasive species, so introducing it to different environments killed off much of the native biodiversity in the process. Once many campesinos had invested in this program and began planting palm trees, government officials and international developers soon told the campesinos that the trees were “too tall” for local farmers to extract the oil with their current tools, and the World Bank didn’t have the funds to continue to invest in the machinery needed to aid in the extraction process. Because of this,

farmers couldn't maintain their palm tree plantations, or afford to continue owning their ancestral lands.

From the beginning, the plan was for the farmers to fail so the government could illegally sell the Indigenous land that already had the palm trees they wanted planted on it. Indigenous leaders were forced into signing over their land as rich, white, oligarchical mestizos who “made alliances with local politicians to convince [campesinos] that there was no hope of competing with modernization, and to move on” (62). Indigenous landowners that still refused to give up their failing plantations were “tortured, abducted and killed...thousands of campesino families were evicted...they went from being landowners to pawns on their own land—a starting gun for a protracted bloody struggle that has yet to end” (63). In this way, foreign investors profited off Indigenous land from projects these people had started. In fact, the very people they were trying to help were the same people they were trying to exterminate and utilize their land. Such developmental projects have always been a gilded ploy of globalization marketed by the empire to make money from the slaughter of whole communities of Indigenous people and their land. Consequently, the Honduran government couples with the empire to force native peoples off their land, at whatever the cost. When Indigenous women try to fight or bring attention to such issues, the result is much the same as what happened to Berta.

White mestizos, like Juan Orlando, justify their actions of settler colonialism, due in part to mestizaje. This idea is forwarded by the glorification of national heroes, such as Francisco Morazan, who is represented as white; while the Afro-Indigenous heroes that fought along Morazan for Honduran independence from Spain, are conveniently left out, forgotten, and erased from history. The racist concept of mestizaje that promotes the idea of white-mestizos as being of “purer origin and ethnicity”, is an ideal many governmental leaders of Honduras still truly

believe. It's also their excuse for taking the lands of Indigenous coastal peoples, like the Garífuna , with their excuse being that the land cannot truly be theirs, since they originated from Africa, and therefore, are not truly indigenous to Honduras.

Analyzing settler-colonial concepts of Honduras through a postcolonial-ecofeminist lens highlights the connections of the extraction, robbing, and stealing of bodies of the land kin to the kidnap, murder, and sexual assault of bodies of women. Both women and nature are shown as equally shackled in oppression by a government that deems both parties as expandable resources, and subaltern. What can be seen through this scope of analysis, is that women of mainland Honduras are not only brutalized by the state forces, but slowly killed by corporations, which draws from Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence. Nixon defines slow violence as the notable connection between TNCs; the resources and labor of such companies that change the land of a place; and the communities of people that are caught between the TNCs and their investments. Nixon often notes that these people, in this case Honduran women, that are reaped by TNCs are often neglected, forgotten, and deemed subaltern.

The whole point of slow violence is that it occurs so subliminally, it is often hidden from the naked eye. TNCs enact measures which make it look as though no harm is happening to Indígena/mestiza women, meanwhile they are suffering immense danger, pain, and physical harm of such implementations. These effects are often hidden because they are delayed. Such examples are working conditions getting gradually and progressively worse for women who work in sweatshops, as their wages are steadily cut to keep up with the demand of a higher quantity of fabric to be produced at a less quality. Or, one could easily point to the mining and terraforming happening in the mountains, as Indigenous land is being bought by the government and sold to TNC's. As they mine and excavate the mountainside, they ruin the coffee plantations

and natural biodiversity there in the process. This quickly changes climate conditions in the mountains, making living there impossible. When communities are driven from their local villages to big cities, and sent to work in sweatshops, as a result; what Cardoza notes as a “cyclical and unyielding exploitation” of both land and women can be exposed- and these oppressive forces can be seen for the life-destroying sources that they are.

CHAPTER IV: SHOALING AS POSTCOLONIAL ECO-FEMINIST RESISTANCE TO SLOW VIOLENCE

Introduction: The Shoaling of Hondureña Bodies

Tiffany Lethabo King, in *The Black Shoals: The Offshore Formation of Black and Indigenous Studies*, tries to come to terms with understanding the slavery her ancestors suffered, and the colonization her Native counterparts have endured. In trying to trace the aftermath of these systemic forms of genocide and oppression, King acknowledges the way she feels is in no way unique, but one that is shared, and reaches across the American diaspora:

“To share the hemisphere with Indigenous people also experiencing the day-to-day terror of conquest molds the form of your own experience with conquest as slavery...Slavery and genocide linger in places we do not expect and cannot yet see or define. Their touch can arrive in an illness, a ‘not feeling right,’ [t]heir presence can feel like not being able to fully expand your lungs. In a more profound sense, it and they are a haunt” (King x).

For King, sitting in this feeling was like accepting defeat. To move forward and fight back, she developed the decolonial praxis called shoaling, which is a way that Black and Brown bodies can use to take the narrative back from settler-colonizers, slave owners and conquistadors who tried to deem the Native/Indigenous existence as subaltern. Much like a shoal serves as a geographic feature that serves to stop the flow of water, King defines shoaling as a way to:

“[M]ap and trace this geological, geographic, and oceanic place called the shoal.[...] I posit that Black [and Indigenous] thought, study, aesthetics, and expression function as a shoal that interrupts the course and momentum of the flow of critical theories about genocide, slavery, and humanity in the Western Hemisphere. More specifically, [to] intervene in contemporary discourses and theories of colonialism and settler colonialism [that] approaches the territory and social relations of Indigenous genocide, slavery, settlement, place making, and contemporary extension of the bloody project of conquest”(xii).

King constructs shoaling as a form of slowing down, pausing, and interrupting the machinations of the empire. In these critical points of rupture, King hopes to inspire new modes of Black/Indigenous futurism that can be represented in academia. A shoal is a space in water that can't be mapped as it is constantly changing. As it exists between the land and greater depths of the ocean, sailors are wary of it because it can run their ship aground. As a physical space, it serves to interrupt and stop a vessel's voyage to shore. For King, black shoals serve as a liminal space, a space that is neither here nor there, and a space of resistance and rupture. One of the most poignant ways that King paints the act of shoaling is using Black/Indigenous bodies as physical points of shoals themselves, lined as a defense mechanism, and as a point of resistance. By making the Black shoal representative of the Black/Indigenous body, King places the subaltern within the liminal space created for confrontation and resistance. In this very act, what comes as a result is keeping the ships and boats of conquistadors and colonizers in the waters from which they came, unable to reach land, for fear their ship might run aground. By giving this illustration, King emphasizes that neither the colonizer nor the conquistador can exist in the unchartable, liminal space where Black and Indigenous bodies thrive. As King notes, in this very simple act, "the boat could not come to the land"(1).

I use King's definition of shoaling as it pertains to Black/Indigenous bodies serving as points of confrontation and resistance, as I analyze women in *The 13 Colors of The Honduran Resistance*. Throughout the text, Cardoza repeatedly used women's bodies as points to demonstrate protest, frustration, and anger that they feel as they try to be heard. Hondureñas put themselves into the liminal space that King envisions, positioning their bodies between their

land, keeping the forces that would invade, kill, and destroy, far from touching the shores of their sacred hills, valleys, and mountains. In Homi K. Bhabha's *Location of Culture*, he defines a space of liminality kin to a place where passage takes place. Here, he makes his illustration with the usage of a stairwell:

“The stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness. The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell. the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha, 3).

Much as Bhabha establishes, King also defines the body of water as such a liminal space. A space where ideologies and identities become blurred. Here, the difference between a group of people becomes undefined, unwritten. Those who have been confined to a space of liminality, as Bhabha notes, often have trouble establishing their own ideologies, as the stirring forces of the liminal space don't often allow one to settle into their true identities. The oppressor knows this all too well, as subaltern groups who don't know who they are can't fight for their rights and rebel. Therefore, oppressors who operate biopower place subaltern into liminal spaces. When this process happens, Bhabha argues that cultural hybridity occurs for the subaltern body, as they are not allowed to have any one fixed identity. This, not knowing oneself, leaves one in such a space where they think they are lesser for not having a permanence of identity.

This can be seen in such instances when the dominating oligarchical and dictatorial bodies of the state of Honduras thrust their mestiza/Indigena women into such liminal places. The hope is that they forget their identity, where they came from, and who they are. When this happens, the oppressor hopes these women think less of themselves, as they can't see themselves

belonging anywhere. They have their identity stripped from them. However, as King proposes, and as I also argue, I believe the liminal space where these women were sent to suffer, over the span of centuries, has become a space they have learned to conquer, transforming themselves in the process. The ever-changing currents in liminal spaces can make it difficult for one to ascertain who they are, but I argue that Hondureñas learned to swim through these fast-changing waters long ago. Hondureñas have changed the place of liminality that was meant to cage them by conquering it. They are familiar with the dangers that cultural hybridity presents. I believe that communally Hondureñas were able to remind each other who they were by finding their voices and naming themselves and their oppressors. In doing this, they retained their ideologies, even in the transitional spaces of liminality. Forging ahead, they now control the space meant to confine them.

King argues that this liminal space is one where women can now take a stand- strong and solid in these turbulent waters. Positioning themselves at the water's edge between land and sea, they have learned to thrive. The oppressor, on the other hand, has had no such need to adapt over the centuries. When the colonizer and the settler-colonizer now try to approach the land, they are stopped by this liminal space, and these women transcend liminality. The oppressors, in this process, are kept in their boats, far at sea, and away from the water's edge. The women's bodies have been strengthened against the currents of the tempestuous water. Bruises that once covered them from falling due to fast-paced motion are now healing. Mouths that have been stitched closed in silence now move, speaking the truth about those who tried to silence them. These women have taught their bodies to remain unwavering, unmoving lines of defense for which they will protect their lands and their people. Cardoza illustrates such instances in her work, displaying women using their bodies as decolonial defense mechanisms. Women who establish

they know who they are, even amid oppressive forces trying to place them into zones of subalternity, have now become stronger than the spaces of liminality. Now, they are ready to restore life and healing, where the oppressor has only brought death and destruction.

In this case, one is not wondering if the subaltern can speak, as they are not concerned with engaging with lesser colonizer mediaries below them. They are done trying to speak. They are ready to “be a part of the Resistance with their feminist discourse and bodies, these women with so much experience in resisting the patriarchal order in all realms of their lives” (Cardoza, 61). Here, the mestiza and Indigenous Hondureña stand in strong resilience, heads held above the water with their position of defiance speaking for them. One does not need to hear their words to note the strong, steely expression in their eyes, the firm defensive stance of their bodies, or the curve of their smile turned upwards daring someone to test them. Daring them to understand the message they are trying to convey. Their actions and bodies convey their message.

Cardoza paints a scene of one such voice (one of the thirteen) when a meeting of CODEMUH (Honduran Women’s Collective) was taking place. She says the meeting was full of women who worked in sweatshops from the big cities. They were there wondering how to continue the struggle, as they needed organizational allies to unify with in resistance, but all the “allied” organizations around them did not listen to their thoughts, opinions, or objectives, as CODEMUH was a collective of women. During these conversations, a member from a rural mountain village raised her voice, speaking plainly, yet astutely. She drew on a metaphor in which the women of CODEMUH were David, from the Hebrew Bible. She said that Goliath, in this case, was the Honduran government, the Empire, and Machismo society all in one. She said that in order to feel this giant, it didn’t take a massive force, but a single rock. She noted though, that the rock had to be the “right” rock. It had to be the perfect size, shape, and texture. But, she

added, if it was aimed at just the right angle, at just the right time, it could fell the giant in one swoop. No need for large united forces lined in rebellion; no need for the blood and bodies of Honduran women lining the streets.

While reflecting on the thought of an easy, strategized win, the women were contemplative of the battles that they had won or lost in the past, and all that they had given up. “The memories of persecutions, collective voices, colors and thousands of people in the streets again passed through their bodies, bodies that know much about memory” (Cardoza 63). Their bodies held the scars and marks of beatings they had endured, and their skin held the remnants of emotional scars that no longer showed. At this moment, another woman, “with a body overflowing with rolls of flesh like those that defy all medical prognosis,” asked if she could add on to what the woman before her said (65). She then added that the “Honduran people already found not just the slingshot but the rock”; by way of emphasizing what she meant, she pulled out a rock from her purse, which she carried with her at all times, as a means of defense (65). Other women started whooping with laughter, pulling out the rocks they had in their purses, too. The women came to realize that their bodies were the very slingshots that would be capable of throwing such a rock, that could indeed fell a giant.

Cardoza draws strong parallels to the Hondureña body, implying that their bodies represent a liminal space as not only a memory of trauma, but also the weapon that is meant to fire the stone that kills the giant. The women’s bodies have always served this purpose, which can be represented by the way of always carrying such stones. They are aware that their bodies are a mechanism which exacts revenge on those that have wronged them. Their bodies in this instance serve to confront and resist their Goliath. They are seen shoaling their opposition. They find themselves reborn in the subversive space in which they have been resigned. In the act of

becoming shoals to the oncoming Goliath, they become untouchable, untraceable, and unchartable. The Goliath cannot seek this body of women out, as they exist partially submerged under the waves, invisible to the monster's naked eye. If the Goliath tried to navigate swimming the liminal spaces where these bodies flourish, it would drown, or be run aground. If the dictatorship of Juan Orlando tried likewise silencing this movement of women, his efforts would be in vain as their outcry for justice and change will only grow louder and stronger.

Cardoza continues this thread of Hondureña bodies as points of resistance when she speaks of another communal voice being raised in action against the government. This instance happens when Xiomara Castro, the current president of Honduras, and then wife of disgraced ex-president Mel Zelaya, was to issue a formal complaint in the Honduran Court System against the wrongs enacted against her husband and family. As this was a highly anticipated event, groups of Hondureña protestors came to support Xiomara, and ridicule the government. The government sent many threats to Xiomara if she went through with this act, so in the end she did not come to the courthouse. As the women who were still joining in number realized this, they decided to defy the government's will by taking over the courthouse building. The government, predicting this would happen, sent armed military police to surround the women. In this instance, the military police symbolized the governing body of the patriarchy, fueled by the strength of the empire; it was the Goliath. The women, not deterred by this one bit, continued marching:

“With their bodies, the feminists in resistance marched all over the map of Tegucigalpa in a different way, reclaiming the notion of territory and making explicit their own creative, power and non-violent movement logic, *because if we were violent imagine how many men would be dead, ha! Even some of the leaders in the resistance would be in the cemetery*, they said, laughing but serious” (157).

The women's actions serve to shoal the oncoming military police. They physically place themselves between the settler-colonizer, and the symbol of justice in their country, refusing to

let the military touch what is rightfully theirs. They make a stand, in essence stating *I take my body and put it in the fray. I take my body and blockade you, the settler-colonizer, from entering the halls of justice, or my land. My body, which is beaten, bruised, by your hands, now serves as an emblem of freedom to my people.* Cardoza represents every instance of settler-colonizer violence being met with instances of defiance and rebellion, from the voices of women they couldn't silence.

Cardoza notes the continual connection of women's bodies representing these acts of defiance as she notes that a country cannot be reinvented on a false fabric of justice, while continuing to trample women "whose bodies are objectified, who besides their salaried labor for the boss have [are] captive to that universal obligation that degrades women's time, appearance, and creations in the name of love"(151). She reiterates that without women, and the value of women, a country cannot stand as a sovereign state, while it fails to include "working women and peasant women, those whose bodies are objectified" (151). The consistent repetition of the government only seeing women as points of objectification, as subaltern beings, is in essence what transforms such bodies into black shoals. The thing which the government cast aside like a loose stone can also later be the same stone that they trip over, causing them to lose their balance and fall.

When these instances are inferred through a postcolonial-ecofeminist lens, the parallels of women's connections with nature are drawn in clear lines. Women become part of the land they are trying to protect through the act of shoaling nature. The curves of the female body become the curves of the land. The scars, bruises, acts of rape, and insults women have suffered becomes the same damage which has been inflicted on the land. The only way to free one is by freeing both. This can only be done if the neocolonial/settler-colonial forces which seek to bind them are

lifted. Hondureñas have demonstrated that they are beyond caring if others deem them able to speak. Therefore, they exist and move in the liminal space which is not easily mapped by those that do not wish to hear them. As Hondureñas themselves emphasize, “I was born into the struggle the [usurpers] are screwed” (9).

When considering the limitations of *The 13 Colors of Honduran Resistance* through a postcolonial-ecofeminist lens, one might consider the ways in which this text is missing the emphasis on the ways in which the land suffers. Highlighted throughout the text are stories of women and their fight to preserve both themselves and nature. Clear parallels are even made between bodies of nature and bodies of women as both suffer in such similar ways. Though the text offers ways in which women can defy and resist both the empire and the Honduran government, more explicit connections of the loss of nature at the hands of the same evils is seen missing from the text. Questions to be asked, that if answered, might create an equal balance of nature in the text are: *How might this text, in turn, engage with the land while conveying what has been lost from its resources, similar to how women have lost so much? How might a representation of both parts equally demonstrate a greater need for change? How might this loss emphasize a need for changes in legislation to give both human and non-human parts the protected laws that they deserve?* I argue that until these questions are answered, Cardoza’s text will have a very persuasive, yet imbalanced representation of the fight that women like Berta and Esperanza worked so hard to protect.

Literary Graveyards, Phenomenology, and Testimonio

Graveyards in literature, as stated in Chapter One, exist as a liminal space that has worked to subsume the literary voice of both Garífuna and mestiza/Indígena women in Honduras for centuries. For mestiza/Indígena women this started first with Spanish

conquistadors, then continued with neo-colonizers, and the settler-colonizers that currently control Honduras. These powers all worked to deem women subaltern-othered, voiceless, and nameless. The conquistadors prohibited oral storytelling that Indigenous peoples used as a means of erasing their history, their culture, and their indigeneity. Centuries later, settler-colonizers in Honduras use the sexist narrative of machismo to tell women that their place is at home, maintaining a house and children. Hondureñas are told that the best matriarchs of society are seen, and not heard, as they are only meant to support and provide for their husbands. For them to speak publicly about their experiences or produce literature exposing their suffering could very well mean a death sentence. Neo-colonizers enforce this idea, as they work to keep machista heads of state in power, furthering women from being able to speak or represent themselves. These graveyards represent the absence of oral stories, narratives, and works of literature for mestiza/Indígena women in Honduras. They represent the death, torture, violence, and intended ruination of Honduran women to keep them from talking, writing, and forming a field of literature that reflects their lives, histories, and legacies.

These graveyards serve as a liminal space meant to tear apart and destroy, ripping one's identity from them. Instead, what can be noticed is mestiza/Indígena women not only surviving, but also thriving in the liminal spaces meant to silence them. They have made great strides in creating works of literature to represent themselves, as can be seen with Cardoza. They have also lived lives that have inspired other women to ally with them and tell their stories that represent them in fair and accurate ways, as Nina Lakhani did for Berta Cáceres. Mestiza/Indígena Honduran women have already started to bridge the literary graveyards created for them. Despite the dangers they face, they are making their voices and stories known on a global level. My intention is to aid the important work that Honduran women have already started, by theorizing

that the addition of testimonio, as defined in Chapter One, can aid in closing this gap, and develop a strong field of literary representation for mestiza/Indígena women of Honduras.

I theorize testimonios can best be utilized as a form of expanding mestiza/Indígena literature, as they focalize on the authenticity of the one who is telling the story, and their call for social justice. The use of testimonio disregards the critical gaze of those trying to use outside information to disprove or discredit the story that is being told, as it is primarily concerned with the narrator telling their story as it happened to them. Eric Matthews, author of *Merleau-Ponty: A Guide for The Perplexed*, asserts that those who seek to understand phenomenology are “not primarily concerned with our relation to the world as knowers” but rather experiencers (Matthews 22). Those seeking out “the most basic kind of evidence [who] claim to know certain things about the world” are missing the point of phenomenology entirely (Matthews 22).

This is why testimonio has thrived as resistance and decolonial literature, as it works against the critical Western gaze. This is also done by the narrator of the testimonio speaking communally, by representing the people or society in which they belong. This channels indigenous communal storytelling, and fuses indigeneity of the global south with literature, turning traditional storytelling on its head. The use of testimonio placing the authenticity of the narrator as they experienced it over outside critical interpretations is cemented by the use of phenomenology. Phenomenology posits that the way the narrator of a testimonio perceives their story is correct. Matthews emphasizes the importance of perception when it comes to phenomenology when he states that if we “attempt to clarify the meaning of the concepts we use by getting back to the sources of meaning, then perception must be primary, because it is in perception that these sources are to be found” (Matthews 21). Thus, the value of perception is key for both the testimonio and phenomenological emphasis in Hondureña literature. Matthew

suggests that with phenomenology, the key in understanding what one has perceived is by abandoning critical assessment of someone else's story. He continues to assert that the aim of phenomenology is "to put out of action the assumptions we normally make about ourselves and the world for scientific and practical purposes, and to get back to the world as we directly experience it in pre-reflective perception. [We] 'lay bare' the world of perception" (135).

I establish phenomenology with my use of testimonio and share two mestiza/Indígena women's stories here. My aim is to help support the work that Honduran women have already started and established, and work as an ally in providing a space here for women to share in their own words, their stories about their experiences from a postcolonial-ecofeminist perspective.

Los Testimonios de Esperanza y Aracely

El Testimonio de Aracely

Aracely is a psychologist who works for the UN, and an academic studying to get her master's degree in the field of psychology, on the topic of gender-based violence. As a mestiza woman from Honduras, she speaks upon her experiences of connections with nature, and how her degree works to help women. Her named was changed for anonymity. Aracely is a dear friend of mine, with whom I have had a close relationship with since my move to Honduras in 2016. She generously agreed to sit down with me and chat via zoom. As she is bilingual, our conversation was conducted in English.

Growing up, I wasn't too dependent on nature, as I was really sheltered and nurtured. I had potable water at home. I didn't need to go to the stream or to the well to get water, but my parents did. They were just telling me the other day about how their lives were 40 or 50 years ago. They're from a small community. It was a tiny town. They said back then, that they were so poor they didn't even have bathrooms inside the houses. When they wanted to use the bathroom, they just went outside. There wasn't even any toilet paper, instead, they used the corn husk to clean themselves, or leaves. They described to me how they would just go poo, and the pigs would come and try and eat their excrement. Going to the area outside where they would relieve themselves, the pigs would follow them so closely, they'd have to kick the pigs. The pigs, who didn't know any better just saw this as an opportunity for food, they were so hungry. That's how

I personally know what it's like to be dependent on nature, based on what my parents have told me. There was no running water either, so my parents had to go to the river or wells. They told me how they had big bellies full of parasites, and it was just a traumatic, traumatic experience for them. There's a pill that you have to take to rid your stomach of parasites every six months, and they would tell me they would just sit and watch so many worms come out of them. It was eye-opening for me because I was just told about all this as an adult. But I know many people still live like that today.

I'm ashamed to say that the first eye-opening experience of women having a material dependence on nature in my country happened as an adult. I am one of the privileged people from this country. I had access to a great education, and I'm bilingual, so that equates to my parents having a good social status. I didn't have any disadvantage growing up. Sometimes that privilege can blind you, and that's what happened to me. My eyes finally were opened to what was happening around me when I started working eight years ago at an NGO that functions as an orphanage and a halfway house for single mothers trying to get back on their feet. I also started noticing things when I became a psychologist. I saw women and talked to people in real life; not just my friends or classmates that were as the same social status as me. With those persons in my life, all we ever really talked about were material things, or the commodities we had. So, when I started to see the real world through my work, it's then I started to realize what the reality is for a lot of people in my country. I saw how much violence people suffered, and how normal that violence was. Having reality hit me was really hard. It's harder feeling like I don't have that much power to change the hardships many women face.

Over the pandemic I would go out hiking, and I loved it. I fell in love with hiking, because during the day I think it helped me to not go crazy. Where I live, it's so beautiful with the mountains and the sunset. It was then that I really started to feel one with nature for the first time in my life. I would love to keep hiking, because I mark it as a spiritual practice. I see God in nature. I see him in the trees, and in the sunset, in the air, and even in the cool breeze. I feel like for the first time I could really feel this connection with nature. I would just lay down on the ground, and just stay there, and breathe, and look at everything. It was so beautiful, so magical. While walking outside, I'd notice the ways the movement of my body connected with the movement of nature.

My mom has always talked about loving nature. She has a garden, and she loves spending time in the garden and just taking care of plants, and I can remember from when I was a little girl. I remember the medicine. She used to make all types of homeopathic stuff from the plants around our house when I got sick. She used to give us baths with all types of herbs and leaves.

We need to use the earth to survive. We need to cut down trees and, hunt animals for food. But it's been hard for me to understand that know how, can we survive when we damage the flora and fauna of our country. I thought about how we destroy when we need to eat like to plant or to grow to harvest. But, as humans, we don't just use of nature what we need, we use nature and irreparably destroy it in the process.

Women don't get enough credit. As the supporters of the household, we are the soul and heart of everything. I know about the land being taken away from women. I know it happens when the government comes in and takes pieces of land that belongs to entire families. It makes me so mad. It makes me shake with anger that the government can do this, and there are no consequences for them. They just take the land from women and children, leaving them homeless. Honduran women try and fight this as much as possible. We use everything we have,

even our own bodies to protect our nature, our land, our kids; and I just think that's so beautiful. Even thinking about all the mothers I know who have sacrificed so damn much. Personally, I don't want to be a mother, because I've seen how much mothers are forced to give up. I want my freedom. Women here are slaves. From slave labor in their own house to slaves of their land and country. They're not free. It makes me so sad. I want to fight for their freedom, so they can live as free as I am now.

I see nature being mistreated, but I feel like that's defending it is not my fight. We all must fight, but we must choose our fight, which is why I'm studying and getting ready to help women in other areas, just not specifically protecting nature. Right now I am writing my thesis for my Master's program that focuses on discovering what types of gender-based violence girls and women suffer here. With this, I want to find out why they suffer, and who are the perpetrators of this violence. I then want to know what's going to be the consequences for the perpetrators. I'm going to meet with a collective that works to help women that have been violated. I do this by performing deep interviews with the women. For example, I was just talking to a girl, she's now a grown up, but she was just telling me about all the violence she suffered. She told me that her first sexual relationship was when she was raped by her teacher. This is what's happening to little girls here. I am compiling statistics to try and get an accurate picture of how many women suffer from gender-based violence, so I can begin to understand how this is happening at such an alarming rate. Out of 1,000 girls I plan on interviewing a certain percentage for a focus group, and see how many of those girls suffer from gender-based violence. But based on what I've witnessed already, I know the numbers are going to be ridiculous.

So, going back to my involvement with the NGO that functions as an orphanage I work with, I plan to set up a prevention project, as it's key to stopping this kind of violence. We need to start talking to kids girls and boys you know about this stuff at an early age. We need to start asking them questions like "What does a relationship mean?" We need to change the ways the old, archaic, sexist ways of gender roles in a relationship. We need to kill these stereotypes of gender expectations before we can change anything. In this way, prevention is key. Those are the projects I'm currently working on. That, and seeing women in therapy.

It was actually through my experience of therapy when I realized that I wanted to help other women, specifically. I realized my relationship with men, like many women in Honduras, wasn't okay. The speech I used when I talked about my brothers, my dad, or the men I dated always circulated back to how they hurt me. That's when I put a name to what I was experiencing. I saw it in myself, and in the way my mom and other women around me lived. That was so shocking for me. I even got a bout of depression over it for a while. I couldn't get out of bed for a few days, just thinking about the extreme sexism here, and how unfair it was. I felt mad at myself because I hadn't done anything to end this kind of treatment to myself or women around me. It was like realizing, "you know this happened to me because I am a woman." That's when I decided to pursue my Master's and do the consulting job for the UN. There I get to talk to a lot of other psychologists that have been doing this kind of work for a long time. It's then I started hearing from them all the awful things that have happened to women, just because they are women. That's what makes me angry. That's what moves me. It makes me want to change this. So that's the way it started for me, by seeing sexism in my own experiences.

My Master's has been a disappointment, because I'm getting it in a university from Spain, because it's one of the few places you can get a degree like this in Spanish. So, I have

learned a lot about violence in Europe. Everything to me feels imperialistic. So when we finally had to do our final project with practice hours, out of all the options my school gave, I picked the only one that was from Latin America. I did this because I wanted to feel closer to the reality of the situation I was living in, and in doing so, I met this amazing group of women. This collective I have been talking about has counselors and lawyers that help women. I got to talk to a lot of people, and understand them from a psychological perspective. I began to gain the perspective of what a survivor and a victim are feeling. That's why learning all of this stuff about Spain is so disappointing to me. For twenty years Spain has had a law against violence of all genders that protects women. We don't have that in Honduras. We just have a weak ratification made in 1996 that tried to protect women, but it doesn't really do anything, it's so old. We don't have any real legislation in Honduras protecting women. That's what made me realize all the work that the psychologists and teachers are doing isn't nearly enough as what's needed. If we don't have a law, we don't have a place to go and denounce violence that's been brought against us. A dear friend of mine witnessed the murder of a mother and an infant by a drunk driver. The woman who was killed was trying to get her life back together at the orphanage-halfway house I mentioned. The woman who witnessed what happened couldn't go to the police to report what was happening, because the drunk driver's family started sending her death threats. It's been years, and she's still getting them. She wants to flee the country, but it's been hard because she helps run the orphanage, so she feels pressure to stay for the kids. The drunk driver paid off the police, so they won't charge him, or stop his family from threatening my friend.

These are all problems women face, but it's not the root of the problem. So that's what I learned about from my Masters. For you to understand gender based violence, you have to understand the roots of the issue. In class, it was explained to us through the illustration of a tree. The tree has roots. The roots are like the factors that contribute to the violence. Then there are the leaves that are all the consequences of that violence. Sometimes we just can see the consequences, like mental health. While it's important to treat the consequences, you also have to solve the problem, the root. The root of the issue, literally, the abuse of power that exists at the root. The root of it all is the abuse in the gender roles. The effects of not getting to the root of things are believing what society tells you about gender, how to behave, what you can and can't say no too; because if you do those things then you're not a good man or a good woman. It's ridiculous. When you understand that, then you can start working there, because that's how to get rid of gender based violence, by starting at the root. As a result, I've been trying to get rid of people that violate me. I also have to get rid of the destructive parts of myself, and not talk down to myself. Right feminism starts with yourself. It starts by loving yourself and understanding yourself, and not being critical with yourself. That's what I've started to do, and will spend the rest of my life doing it. It's going to take a lot of time to change, and I'm going to need a lot of help. But through this process I'm going to be able to help other women know this and feel this.

El Testimonio de Esperanza

Esperanza is an environmental activist and a member of the Copán Environmentalist Coalition. When she's not doing that, she is a Spanish teacher. As mentioned earlier in my thesis,

she had a life-changing impact on me. She continues to instill change in all of her students.

When we sat down to do this interview, she had just got back from protesting for the continuation of the release of environmental activists, who were illegally jailed on trumped-up charges by Juan Orlando. These environmental activists at Guapinol successfully paused a development project that would have cut off their people's access to use of the river. Her name was changed for anonymity. Esperanza speaks only Spanish, which is the language our conversation was spoken in, over zoom.

I just got back from protesting in defense of the immediate release for those from Guapinol, who were imprisoned illegally by Juan Orlando. They were imprisoned for defending their rivers. We also went to Guapinol, as that time and space served as a meeting with all the social groups in Honduras. Xiomara, since becoming president, demanded the immediate release of the water defenders, but we still have to wait for the court to approve of their release based on executive order. This is because the dictator government imposed the court systems. The eight members of Guapinol are supposed to be free today, but we have to keep waiting because the court cannot be changed, It will change in two more years.

Their freedom can be organized but remember that right now the court is full of members of the corrupt party has not finished their terms. Right now it's time to wait, but I always hope that they might be free today and that everything goes well with those who defend environmental rights .

President Xiomara has good plans, but I hope that the deputies of Congress and everyone are supporting her ideas, because her ideas are social, right. So there are still deputies in Congress who are from the dictator's regime, but there are also deputies from Xiomara's Liberal Party. For this reason, I know change can come, but because of those corrupt politicians everything will be a little slow but hopefully not.

It is almost impossible to make a significant change in four years, almost impossible, remember that the dictatorship has been formed for years, not only 12 years, 12 years were a stronger narco-dictatorship, but we have been living a two-party system for almost 200 years.

As a mestiza woman who cares about the environment, I can say we all, depend on the land almost 100%. Remember that the land provides everything, water, oxygen, food, so we totally depend on nature to survive or to live.

I began to have enough awareness of my connection with nature more than 15 years ago, since I became part of the Copán Environmental Coalition. That is where locals can learn a lot about the importance of the forest, the importance of the land, of our rights. I also became more aware of my indigeneity about 15 years ago, too. This made me more aware of my ancestry and those connections with nature. When I was a child I depended on the land, but I was not consciously aware of this dependence, because my mother never told me about nature. I think that it is important to take care of the forest or that it is important to take care of water. I learned this process with the training schools of the Copán Environmentalist Coalition.

For me, I find nature as a space for recreation, I don't use meditation much to connect with nature. I also like gardening a lot, I really like the garden. Spiritual practices no, that is done more by the cultures, for example, like the Garifunas. They practice such spirituality a lot. Here, there isn't really that spiritual connection with nature. Here, my purpose of being part of the earth is to enjoy the air, gardening, and nature. For this reason, I prefer natural medicine more than chemical ones, that's why I use the garden to plant medicinal plants. I feel that nature gives me the energy to carry out many activities, for example, to do my job well, I take great care of nature. Thus, I have more connection with other people because the truth is that nature has a lot of influence on people, because we need oxygen, food and water. These are basic things that we use every day.

I think that there is mistreatment of nature and there is mistreatment of women in this country. In nature there is mistreatment because there is no respect for the trees, there is no respect for the rivers. Hondurans think that they are necessary, but for example, the Government has never protected these resources from the population. As a result, there is a lot of pollution with mining. There is also a lot of destruction of forests, with the idea of cutting them for domestic use, for example for houses, beds, tables, chairs, cooking, etc.

There is mistreatment done to women too. Berta Cáceres is a great example, who was always present to defend nature because she was very aware that without nature we cannot have life. I think there is a lot of violence against women, because women are the first victims of the destruction of the environment. This is because we need water to cook, to wash clothes, to sell, for example. We need air to breathe, among other things that nature gives us. As women, we are the first to realize the situation of contamination or destruction of the environment.

Yes, I feel the need to defend nature in many ways. One example is awareness in people, since many people cut down trees. They are cut down to produce fire and be able to cook food. That is why it is necessary to plant more trees. We have to carry out an awareness in campaigns as well. It is necessary to protect the rivers because if we do not have water, we cannot have crops, and then we cannot have food. If we cannot care for the water we use, we need to remind ourselves that if God left us the nature, or if God gave us the world with a great natural wonder, we have to protect it.

The environmental coalition is very important because, with the young people at this time beginning training; we are connecting them right now with political advocacy programs. Political advocacy is the issue right now, we are working with 30 young people from this local area. The coalition is also working with training schools that includes: politics, economy, and human rights. We are not only working in our local areas, but also at a national level. We work unified with people from Guapinol to give support to people whose rights have been violated, so we can then mobilize in different places to give support to other people who need to defend their rights as well. We are also investing in training schools by giving support to other groups, like those in Guapinol. We are always in contact via meetings, like we had 2 days ago in Tegucigalpa. 300 people arrived in Tegucigalpa from more or less 26 social groups, so we need more articulation at the national level.

I believe that it is necessary for the Government to recognize the important work that these social movements do, we are volunteers. We do not have economic resources to make movements, or move from one place to another, or to carry out more training processes. We are working right now with NGOs, Christian organizations, non-government organizations, but I think the government has a great responsibility to strengthen these movements so that we can

have more articulation recognition at the national level of our work, because our work is volunteer-based we do not have a salary.

I think that right now many people know about the Guapinol problem, We have a little awareness; which displays kindness of humanity, by people being supportive. But we are trying to make all the social movements aware of the national concerns and not just Guapinol, for example. We know a nearby community that has a concern with mining, we want all of Honduras to know about it. We want all of Honduras to have that sense of solidarity. That is why it is important for the Government to recognize the social movements that exist in Honduras and give them strengthening or support. To be more united means to work hand in hand, because social movements not only benefit the communities, but they also support the Government in a way because we do a job that the Government *should* do.

Conclusion

Mestiza/Indígena women of Honduras have long been silenced by neocolonial and settler-colonial forces who deem them as subaltern bodies that should be left to rot in the necropolitical zones in which they place them. Lakhani's description of how Indigenous people were lied to and tricked into selling their land by the Honduran government and empiric forces is one example that establishes how women are placed into such zones. Centuries have passed with women being made the victims of femicide, which still flourishes in Honduras, and they have become tired. They not only began to be able to survive the necropolitical zones where they were placed, but also stood in the turbulent waters of liminality by reminding themselves who they were. We can see examples of this in Indigenous rights leader and environmentalist Berta Cáceres, who was a decolonial force that pivoted both the empire and the state on its head, stopping destructive global projects in their tracks. Berta now represents more than just the life of one woman, but an entire movement and collective of women who are seeking justice for the atrocities that have been committed against them. When analyzed in a postcolonial-ecofeminist perspective, these lives are given a chance to be represented in a field that represents their fight accurately. Snapshots of these movements can be seen as Cardoza describes them in *The 13 Colors of The Honduran Resistance*. She depicts women using their bodies to shoal the White

settler-colonizers of Honduras, and not letting them enter the land that is sacred to them. Women, through Cardoza's retellings, realize that they are the decolonial force needed to feel the monster of oppression which seeks to ruin them. Standing together, Hondureñas realize they have the power to do it all.

Along with Lakhani, my aim is to ally with the strong and brave Hondureña voices that have already bridged the graveyards in literature that surround them, as Cardoza did. I believe that sharing women's stories via the use of testimonio as a source of resistance literature accurately depicts women as the leaders, caretakers, and way-makers they are. It listens to their voices and their perception of how they see their life and land around them, without taking into account the critical-empiric- Western gaze. This practice is life-restoring. It begins to heal as the power of coloniality is taken away from the white mestizo and hurled into oblivion.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Work

My thesis explores two geopolitical regions of Honduras, the coast, and the mainland, and explores the lives and struggles of the women that live in those two places. My research focuses on understanding the oppressive neo-colonial, settler-colonial, and empiric forces that work to undermine and exterminate the support systems of these women, and the environment around them. The transnational corporations that operate in the regions work to damn rivers, which change the natural biodiversity to a region; mine and terraform mountains beyond what is sustainable for them to maintain vegetation; introduce aggressive foreign plant species for mass production that choke out the nature that is native to an area; and install large wind turbines in coastal places that disturb both marine and fowl life. These transnational political-economic forces also work to silence Indigenous and mestiza women by forcing them off of indigenous land that they are dependent upon for material survival; kidnapping, assaulting, and murdering the environmental and Indigenous elders that are symbolic of communal ideology; annihilating any chance of upward social mobility by placing women in TNC backed jobs that barely allow them to survive; and weakening legislation that serves to protect them, thus, upholding violence against women and femicide which establishes a murder rate that is one of the highest in the world.

The main theoretical tool of analysis I use to examine women and the environment in Honduras is Neelam Jabeen's postcolonial-ecofeminism. Postcolonial-ecofeminism is an intersectional tool that best encompasses Hondureña's experiences, as it acknowledges their post-coloniality, while incorporating their specific fight for the environment. Using this tool of analysis, the struggle for gender equality and environmental justice merge to highlight the

struggles that many Hondureñas go through as they seek justice for their lives, which are materially dependent on the nature that surrounds them. One of my main arguments in this thesis is that though Hondureñas have a dependence on nature, this dependence is more of a symbiotic relationship that benefits both the women who protect and defend their nature, and the nature that provides sustenance and spiritual growth for the women. In this way, I have found that this dependency facilitates an endearment of women to the nature that they struggle to protect. I have found that these indigenous women, highly dependents on nature, engage in a variety of decolonial practices that inspire a restoration of life to the women, and their surrounding communities. My thesis highlights the complexity of women and the environment of the Global South by questioning whether Neelam Jabeen's claim that women's forced and material dependence on nature is a relationship of mere necessity and convenience. By looking at Honduran indigenous/Garífuna authors, and speaking with Indigenous/environmental activists, I shake or challenge Jabeen's arguments by proving that there are women in indigenous Honduran communities who have a dependence on nature, but that such a dependence does not constitute a purely parasitic relationship with nature. Instead, I show how that symbiotic relationship has flourished into a deep reverence and appreciation of nature by indigenous women, not a resentment to it, as Jabeen has suggested.

Along with understanding Honduran women and their fight for justice through a postcolonial-ecofeminist lens, one of the main arguments that my thesis makes is that, as it stands, there are too many literary graveyards regarding the biopolitical technologies of power produced by those that oppress Honduran women, hence an urgent need to create a literary field of production for Central America, especially for indigenous women. I define a thriving field of literary production for Hondureñas as literature written by Honduran women about their

lives, everyday struggles and anxieties, and aspirations for themselves and their communities. For the Indígena/mestiza women of mainland Honduras, this has already begun happening with the likes of authors like Melissa Cardoza, who writes about the shared experiences of many Honduran women. To the best of my knowledge, there are no female Garífuna authors publishing for a wide audience.

I posit that one of the most successful ways to begin bridging the literary graveyards that surrounds Honduran women is through the use of testimonio. Testimonio, at its heart, is resistance literature. It is a way for Indigenous folk to speak in a manner that is native to them, as they can speak communally and represent the community, they are a part of. Testimonio also favors an authentic story. The use of phenomenology as a methodological framework justifies the use of Hondureña testimonio, as it seeks to validate the perception of the narrative being told about someone's lived experiences. Testimonio, when married with phenomenology, becomes a powerful decolonial praxis that cuts out the critical academic western gaze, emphasizing instead the importance of the events of a story as the person giving the story believes them to be. I argue that producing Hondureña testimonio is one way to bridge literary graveyards that surround them and amplify their voices to reach new audiences. In this way, a field of Postcolonial-Ecofeminism can be created within the field of Hondureña literary production, giving voice to the Indígena/mestiza experience and making it heard via circulating their stories with a broad and diverse audience.

One of the most important contributions my thesis makes is the sharing of four testimonios by two Garífuna women and two Indígena/mestiza women from their respective Honduran communities. By sharing their testimonios, I share their voices and experiences, as well as their feelings from a postcolonial-ecofeminist perspective. This is done by highlighting their stories as

they engage with nature, their history with it, how they feel about it, and exploring why they feel the need to protect and preserve it. By diving deeper into understanding the Hondureña testimonios, one can better understand their connection with nature, and why they fight so hard to preserve it. I argue that the use of my thesis to share Honduran women's testimonios is just one small step in the right direction needed to bridge the literary graveyards that surround the Hondureña voice. The goal is to have Honduran women be the subject of their own literary works, and not the object of someone else's. The only way that literature about Honduran women can begin to move forward is if it is *from* them, and not an outsider's ethnographical perspective *of* them.

As well as the contributions the Hondureña testimonio makes to the Latine community, it also makes contributions to the larger feminist, ecological, and post-colonial fields as an intersectional work. The Hondureña postcolonial-ecofeminist testimonio, specifically, adds to all of these literary fields by questioning what the norm of literary producers should be. It adds the Indígena/mestiza voice to the postcolonial and ecofeminist works of the global south, and bears witness to the atrocities that have been committed to post-colonized communities as an ongoing genocidal process, an *herida abierta*, that needs to be paid attention to. My thesis as a space where Hondureñas can share their stories is one of the modest contributions that my research makes, as it emphasizes and validates a group of people who have, for centuries, been cast out of normative society, and instead thrown into the margins of life, where even access to the most basic means of survival is a struggle. Focusing on how this process happened to the Indígena/mestiza Hondureña, and validating their experiences and stories instead of their oppressors, opens up channels of new voices, stories, and experiences to further diversify and expand old, antiquated fields.

The limitations of this study, like many other ecofeminist studies, lies in the fact that I examined Honduran women's lives exhaustively, and had little time to focus on the nature and environment as heavily as I focused on women. Though topics of the environment were covered broadly, if given the time to explore Honduras from an eco-feminist perspective, one topic I would love to study more concretely is the ecological aspects of how land is being polluted, wasted, and used in Honduras, moreover than just its connections to women. Another area I would have liked to explore more in depth is the topic of phenomenology as a theoretical tool, and how it intersects with the written practice of testimonio in Indigenous and post-colonial studies. Understanding the roots of where these intersections began is pertinent to analyzing how it grew, and how it will eventually help craft new literary fields of production of the global south in the future, especially in Central America.

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