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Resisting an unfolding genocide: reflections from radical struggles in the Global South

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ABSTRACT

This essay theorizes radical struggles at the world's end, emergent from registers of organizing against colonial-imperial-capitalist violence in the Global South. Working through the ongoing genocidal violence carried out by Israel in Gaza, I explore the role of voice infrastructures in the Global South as the spaces where Global South theories are imagined, tested, and continually transformed. The tenets of the culture-centered approach (CCA), reflected in the everyday organizing work of the Center for Culture-centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE), guide the conceptualization of the relationship between theorizing and struggle as embodied practice. For radical organizing to materialize at the world's end, I argue the urgency of reorganizing the relationship between struggles and theorizing, cultivating a rhetoric and politics of suspicion, enacting sovereignty, forging connections, and sustaining a politics of preparation.

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“If I must die
let it bring hope
let it be a tale.”

(Refaat Alareer, the martyred Gazan poet, academic, and activist)¹

The genocide² carried out by Israel in/on Gaza, witnessed by the everyday accounts painstakingly crafted by communities, journalists, artists, health workers, and activists who are simultaneously under siege, elucidates the terrorizing violence unleashed by the intertwined projects of settler colonialism, imperialism, and racial capitalism at the world's end. Gaza, as a tale of the world's end, is marked by extreme violence in the form of bombings that have witnessed over 25,000 Palestinians, over 85 journalists and media workers, and over 1,000 health workers killed to date, along with health care infrastructures destroyed, dismantling of water and sanitation infrastructures, a

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hunger crisis in the form of a famine, and severe damage to the ecosystem and the climate.³ The violence meted out on Gazans by settler colonial Israel,⁴ sponsored by the U.S. and its allies, and underpinned by the global infrastructure of white supremacy and capitalist structures, is legitimized communicatively by framing Palestinians as terrorists. The extreme terror that forms the security–military infrastructure of the colonial–capitalist–imperial project is communicatively inverted as the “war on terror.” To carry out this violence, the colonial–capitalist–imperialist structure marks out spaces of white exceptionalism, continually producing techniques of governmentality as exceptions. In these exceptional spaces, the very rules of international law that are (re)produced by the Empire to legitimize its architecture of violence do not apply. The unfolding Israeli genocide both replicates and is a template for settler colonial–imperial violence. As Indigenous people and people of the Global South struggle with the violence and crises at the world’s end, repressed through techniques of policing and police–military control continually perfected in and learned from the “Palestine laboratory,”⁵ the epistemology of struggles offers the basis for hope and survival. In this essay, I argue that the extremist violence unleashed on Gaza is an exemplar of violence at the world’s end. The genocide being carried out on Gaza, materialized through ever-innovative instruments of surveillance and destruction by the Empire’s security–military apparatus, narrates the story of violence unfolding on the peoples of the Global South as we/they are increasingly marked out/up for accelerated and aggressive extraction at the world’s end.

Yet, the voice of the martyred Gazan poet and academic Refaat Alareer shared in the opening of this essay and written in the last days of his life reminds us, through testimony, that it is at the world’s end that hope lives.⁶ For example, note the handle @MuhammadSmiry on X, “Staying in Gaza is resistance.” The survival of Global South people at the world’s end is the architecture of hope. As the extreme violence of this moment renders visible the grotesque limits of white exceptionalism that erases Palestinian voices,⁷ the voices of the Global South, evident in the case brought by South Africa against Israel on genocide to the International Court of Justice, narrate the liberatory story of ongoing transformations at the world’s end. This liberatory story is crafted through connections, solidarities, and radical organizing to redefine the international structures that have historically been deployed to destroy the Global South and profit from its destruction. We are witnessing the unfolding of a dismantling process of the intertwined violence of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and imperialism that exists in continuity with the histories of such anticolonial struggles that have been taking place ever since the beginning of the colonial project. Even as most of the West/Global North, including the academe that has historically profited from the proliferation of decolonizing discourses under the umbrella of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), has remained silent or complicit in the perpetuation of the genocide, simultaneously rendering as illegal speech in solidarity with Palestine, the embodied liberatory and intransigent struggles from the Global South bring forth an anticolonial register. These struggles teach us that, even as DEI in the Empire is under attack by the organized efforts of white supremacists and Zionists, explicit articulations of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist positions in the face of colonial violence form the crux of decolonization struggles. Given the power of communicative acts such as witnessing, narrating, and embodied performance in accounting for and dismantling violence,

what is the role of communication for academics at the world's end, learning from the struggles waged by the Global South, inhabiting spaces of struggles, and developing practices of interconnected communities in action?

In this essay, I explore the openings for communicative transformations in academe that are necessary for retaining and sustaining the radical traditions and possibilities based on learning of/from the Global South. In exploring the openings for radical organizing, I reflect on the collective work that we carry out under the umbrella of the Center for Culture-centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE), a space I co-created with community organizers and activists in imagining together radical interventions connecting Indigenous rights, anti-racist struggles, migrant rights, climate justice, food justice, and working-class struggles.⁸ I also draw upon the lessons learned from the activist-in-residence program housed at CARE and the “Interventions from the Global South” podcast I host for the International Communication Association. This essay suggests that reorganizing the relationship between struggles and theorizing, cultivating a rhetoric and politics of suspicion, enacting sovereignty, forging connections, and sustaining a politics of preparation, are how radical organizing can materialize in the world's future.

Reorganizing the relationship between struggles and theorizing

The Indigenous theorist and one of the architects of Kaupapa Māori theory, Graham Hingangaroa Smith, notes, “This is the reason that when people are speaking about Kaupapa Māori theory, I often challenge them, ‘show me the blisters on your hands’.”⁹ Kali, a Santali activist and an interlocutor in my work amidst adivasi land struggles in India, refers to the role of research in the context of land struggles and advises that we should “consider what you're giving to the community.” This invitation to community accountability, where academics are held responsible to struggles we write/theorize about, is an invitation to radical re-organizing of the extractive infrastructures of academe.¹⁰ This invitation to radical organizing as embodiment reorganizes our relationship with communities and struggles, de-centering the whiteness/Brahminical hierarchy that shapes hegemonic constructs of abstract theorizing, including in elite and largely performative manifestations of decolonizing syllabi, decolonizing classrooms, and so forth.¹¹ The recognition of the relationship between struggles and theorizing unsettles and dismantles the politics of caste purity that sees interventions as dirty/impure. Simultaneously, situating theory work in struggles unsettles hegemonic notions of community engagement in the service of neoliberal expansionism/extractivism.

In our work at CARE, guided by the wisdom of Indigenous and anti-racist activists we have dialogued/partnered with, we have co-created a three-year guideline in seeking to articulate a relationship between struggles and theorizing. This three-year guideline suggests we usually don't write about a struggle until we have spent at least three years within the struggle and having walked the land (this idea of walking the land takes diverse forms, depending on contexts), prompting us to interrogate how we place our academic privileges amidst struggles, and then walking through ongoing dialogues held in the rhythms of community life in mobilizing our academic privileges for co-creating community-led interventions.

Challenging the intersecting violence of casteist hierarchy and whiteness that form the extractive logics of academe, writes the late adivasi activist-theorist Abhay Xaxa:

I am not your data, nor am I your vote bank,
 I am not your project, or any exotic museum object,
 I am not the soul waiting to be harvested,
 Nor am I the lab where your theories are tested,
 I am not your cannon fodder, or the invisible worker,
 or your entertainment at India habitat center,
 I am not your field, your crowd, your history,
 your help, your guilt, medallions of your victory,
 I refuse, reject, resist your labels.¹²

Abhay's voice is attentive to the violence of foreclosures of settler colonialism within postcolonial spaces, including within the contours of postcolonial academe, witnessing the casteist infrastructures of postcolonial spaces that propel dalit and adivasi students to suicide. This same casteist violence at the end of the world writes itself into diaspora postcolonial spaces, from academe to tech boardrooms, performing and leveraging DEI initiatives within white infrastructures to further propel caste privilege while simultaneously erasing accounts of the violence.¹³ When academic bodies are immersed in struggles, theorizing emerges from the embodied labour of struggles, including from anti-caste, anti-racist struggles within the academy.

At the world's end, the work of theorizing is rooted in and guided by communities, attentive to the nuances of community life and the deep inequalities that play out within communities. Communities as spaces of contestation shape the contours of theory formation. Theory work is both collective work and community work, connected to community wisdom, and tied to forms of labor that are individual, relational, and collective, embedded within struggles. In our organizing work of CARE, we do things that cover a whole range of activities depending upon the need and the context emergent from community rhythms. Community accountabilities call for academics to be present in the protest, to sit, stand, sleep on occupied lands, to sing songs, to write and recite poems, to shout slogans, to perform on the streets, to do media training, to build campaigns, to write white papers and policy briefs, to co-create documentary films, to co-design posters and placards, to carry those posters and placards, to write posts on digital platforms, to write blogs, to write opinion pieces, to choreograph dances, and so on.¹⁴ In that sense, the notion of what constitutes knowledge is radically transformed, emergent from practices of sitting together in community circles and developing strategies of sustenance amidst the ongoing assaults of extractive colonialism/capitalism, intimately and intricately intertwined with practices of walking the land. The body reworks the historically extractive characteristics of knowledge, prodding with the question: Are we *really* ready to place our privileges at stake?

Cultivating a rhetoric and politics of suspicion

The whiteness that underpins the colonial capitalist project propagates itself, at least in part, by consistently consuming and co-opting the radical politics of/from the

South. It appropriates radical organizing of the global South and seeks to incorporate and domesticate the radical features of Global South organizing to propagate more whiteness in the form of neoliberal capitalism/colonialism.¹⁵ Note, for instance, the proliferation of DEI infrastructures in the face of radical struggles against colonialism and capitalism as expressions of whiteness. Note again the proliferation of journal spaces on DEI, white allyship, internationalization, etc., reproducing the economy of whiteness.¹⁶ These so-called radical performative spaces and the postcolonial elites who occupy them go strategically silent as genocidal settler colonial violence is unleashed on the margins of the Global South. More critically for the Global South is the politics of what Olúfemi O. Táíwò describes as elite capture—the domestication of identity politics by postcolonial elites to reproduce postcolonial privilege (s) and perpetuate superficial identity-based performances that uphold the extractive neoliberal apparatus.¹⁷

In contexts such as India, the Brahminical capture of academe retains and recirculates the colonial hierarchy, erasing accounts of casteist violence, albeit fashionably marketed as postcolonial theory.¹⁸ The worst excesses of this postcolonial violence are played out in far-right co-option of decolonization and Indigeneity to prop up fascist methods of carrying out violence as evidenced in the context of Hindutva in India and far-right Zionism in Israel. The end of the world thus must be reframed as the end of castes, and the divide-and-conquer logic of DEI. Within the organizing spaces of academe, this translates into the project of upending caste, dismantling its “invisible” work in the Global North’s knowledge production. A politics of suspicion holds possible the end to an (academic) world organized overtly and covertly by capitalism, colonialism, and caste. Cultivating a politics of suspicion invites us to critically and continually interrogate the co-optive politics that incorporates us to the service of the intertwined projects of colonialism and capitalism. The politics of sustaining radical organizing turns toward the organizing of secrets to retain sovereignty. Strategizing on narrative sovereignty, intentionally and collectively deciding which stories to tell and which stories to withhold, timing stories for impact, are part of that decolonizing register, carrying forth imaginations so our worlds can be transformed.

Enacting sovereignty

Amongst struggles in the Global South and the South in the North, the work of transforming structures is rooted in the organizing of sovereignty. In Aotearoa New Zealand, for instance, struggles for Māori sovereignty are rooted in the concept of Tino Rangatiratanga, turning to Te Tiriti as the foundational document that underlines the relationship between Māori and the Crown.¹⁹ The concept of sovereignty offers an organizing device, anchoring diverse struggles against the intertwined forces of extractive colonialism and racial capitalism, driving plural registers of organizing from seed sovereignty to land sovereignty to sovereignty over management of water resources, agricultural practices, and climate adaptation solutions.²⁰ Global South concepts of sovereignty explode the parochial idea of state sovereignty/individual autonomy operating in the West/Global North, dismantling the possessive whiteness that constructs sovereignty as private property.²¹ In the struggles of the Dongria Kondh in the Niyamgiri Hills of Odisha against the British mining corporation Vedanta for instance, Indigenous

sovereignty expressed as the relationship of the Dongria Kondh with the sacred mountain, Niyam Raja, serves as the basis for expressing Indigenous rights in the Gram Sabhas (local decision making bodies) and for resisting bauxite mining. Similarly, in the struggle for land against a housing development project in Ihumātao, Aotearoa, the expression of Tino Rangatiratanga dismantles the settler colonial construction of property as development.

Indigenous articulations of knowledge claims dismantle the lies perpetuated by the extractive industries at the world's end to perpetuate further accelerated extraction. Consider here the Indigenous struggle against the Keystone pipeline in North America, where the blockade disrupted the colonial construction of property as extraction.²² Material struggles for sovereignty have been intertwined with the concept of communicative sovereignty, referring to struggles among communities at the margins to own participatory voice resources, and to mobilize through these resources to transform colonial and capitalist structures.²³ In our organizing work at CARE working alongside Indigenous land struggles, co-creating voice infrastructures owned by Indigenous communities at the “margins of the margins” serves as the basis for the enactment of narrative sovereignty, voicing Indigenous knowledge as the basis for making claims rooted in community participation. In the land occupation at the Ōroua River in Aotearoa resisting the Council's takeover of Māori land, the co-creation of voice infrastructures in the form of the “What we say matters” campaign becomes the basis for retaining narrative sovereignty, and challenging the climate adaptive solution imposed top-down by the Council mired in whiteness.²⁴

Forging connections

Radical organizing in spaces of the Global South sees connections and builds them as the basis for creating a widely spread net that challenges the interplays of violent patriarchy, cisnormativity, racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and imperialism. The Global South has historically organized around forging connections, from building connections between diverse registers of struggles, such as connecting Indigenous struggles with working-class struggles and connecting antiracist struggles with Left party politics to building bridges across spaces such as the tricontinental movement that connected spaces of anti-imperial Global South struggles with Black anti-racist struggles.²⁵ Consider, for instance, the articulations of solidarity with Palestinian struggles, solidarity with Cuban anti-imperialism, and solidarities crafted by Zapatistas as exemplars of the organizing capacity of the Global South to form connections, weaving together anti-colonial pedagogies based on resisting colonial divide and rule practices.²⁶ Amidst the protests in Aotearoa New Zealand against the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza, my activist interlocutors Tina Ngata and Tameem Shaltoni carefully weave together this connecting politics.²⁷ Writes Tameem, “Palestinians’ freedom and self-determination also are not complete without that of Māori, as global colonial powers are one.” Responds Tina, a Māori activist:

The Indigenous movement is worldwide, because colonialism has also been a global project (one which arguably started in Palestine), and we know full well that while colonialism remains in force around the world, its dark threat will also hang over our own heads. Permitting colonialism here in Aotearoa allows for it in Palestine, and permitting it in Palestine

allows for it here. For this reason, we call for colonialism to end, everywhere. For this same reason, solidarity against colonialism must be something we do within our resistance actions, not just with our resistance calls.

The articulation of solidarity as the basis for anticolonial resistance stands in opposition to the upper caste take-over of decoloniality, postcolonialism, and social change to serve careerist self-interest. The casteist colonization of radically transformative Global South politics of the everyday has meant that the spaces in the U.S. academe talking about Global South politics, decolonization, and postcolonial theory are occupied by South Asian caste-class elites. These elites from the cosmopolises of postcolonial contexts, largely raised in Brahminical, middle and upper-middle-class families, often descending from feudal landlords, bureaucrats, corporate managers, and/or business owners (from petty business to medium and large-sized firms), trained by the Anglosphere and educated by the pedagogic tools of Eurocentrism, are invested in reproducing the language games of whiteness while posturing to challenge whiteness.²⁸ In the Empire, they perfect the games of performing grievance, leveraging DEI, and disconnecting from Indigenous, Black, and working-class people of color struggles, while, back in the postcolonial cosmopole, their families and ancestors participate in the active repression of anticolonial and anti-capitalist struggles, perfecting authoritarian state techniques taught by colonialism and collaborating with capitalist-imperial interests. That these postcolonial intellectuals turn into collaborators with repressive techniques of authoritarian repression in the service of global capital is a product of this pedagogy of disconnection/extraction.

The silence of the postcolonial elite on the settler colonial violence in Gaza is reflective of the casteist take-over of conversations on colonialism in the academe. The world's end, as being witnessed in Gaza, implodes the sacred ontologies constructed around the Universities of the Empire, built on stolen lands and on architectures of violence. As with the extreme forms of surveillance, repression, and violence directed at protesting students and academics across U.S. university campuses and the organized attacks on DEI, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and decolonization, the façade of academic freedom and leadership crafted by U.S. higher education is dismantled. As witnessed with Israel's bombing of universities in Gaza and the killing of academics, the Empire's material architecture is based on violence on Global South knowledge. "Cognitive epistemicide"²⁹ is situated amidst extreme forms of material violence directed at infrastructures of learning, intertwined with genocide. Forging connections renders visible these interplays of Empire, violence, and epistemicide.

Forging connections dismantles these extractive habits of casteist academe invested in the reproduction of the Empire. It dismantles the very concept of academe, disrupting the enclosures of learning propped up by the rules of whiteness, and instead embedding learning within the struggles in the community. It shifts accountability from the neoliberal corporate structures of increasingly privatized universities to the transgressive spaces of community life. Forging connections render impure the U.S.-centrism of academe, re-narrating internationalization as the active politics of forging international connections among anti-capitalist and anticolonial movements across the Global South and the South in the North, turning to the intransigent histories of building connections in the organizing practices of the Global South.

Sustaining a politics of preparation

The materiality of sustaining radical spaces is based on a politics of preparation that anticipates the organized attacks on the body that are inevitable when hegemonic structures are threatened. Politics of preparation reflects the range of communicative practices that resist and sustain resistance to the forces of oppression directed at silencing voices. At CARE, our individual, relational, and collective bodies have been harassed, subjected to bullying and audits, subjected to witch hunts carried out by an authoritarian state, and subjected to targeted attacks by fascist formations.³⁰ When students spoke out against the sexual violence legitimized in the institutional structures of the regime, narrating their personal experiences of sexual violence on digital platforms that infiltrated into the spaces of state-controlled mainstream media and eventually dismantled the institutionalized practices of covering up for sexual violence, our syllabi were audited, interventions were scrutinized, and academics teaching courses on social change were called in for questioning, eventually being pushed out of the university system after three years of organized bullying. I have been accused of mismanagement of funds for hiring transgender women working on human rights violations in the regime as community researchers under the umbrella of CARE, despite a detailed description in the funding application spelling out the researcher roles and justifying the roles.³¹ The line of questioning asked why CARE hired human rights activists when the objective of the Center is to study health communication in Asia. The deliberate and debunked rumors of financial mismanagement planted by the authoritarian regime were amplified and circulated by known postcolonial intellectuals who have earned a name in the white structures of the discipline for performing postcolonial rhetoric,³² picked up by white supremacists using anonymous web-based campaigns,³³ and then amplified by Hindutva supremacists targeting me and CARE for our interventions addressing the Islamophobic hate spread by the fascist ideology of Hindutva.

In response to a white paper on “Cultural Hindutva and Islamophobia,”³⁴ Hindutva trolls on digital platforms created a disinformation campaign, labeling me as Hinduphobic, sending rape threats and threats to murder, accompanied by Hindutva-linked organizations in Aotearoa writing into my university asking for me to be fired. An official complaint was mobilized through the Office of the Race Relations Commissioner in the Human Rights Commission, with the Commission also writing to my university. Most recently, my expression of solidarity with Palestinian voices has mobilized the Zionist network in Aotearoa, organized around labeling me as a terrorist by the selective use of a phrase on my blog expressing solidarity with Palestinian resistance and seeking to get me fired yet again.³⁵ What sustained me, our CARE collective, and the organizational body of CARE amidst these targeted attacks are/were the networks of activists, lawyers, and rights advocates outside of academe, offering an infrastructure for fighting back.

At the center of this organizing infrastructure are the values of *aroha* (love) and *manaakitanga* (relational care) offered by Māori activists and academics supporting the work of CARE. In responding to the attacks mobilized by Hindutva and Zionist structures, the organizing work of Muslim organizations such as the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ) and South Asian resistance organizations such as Aotearoa Alliance for Progressive Indians (AAPI), Bhagat Singh Charitable Trust, and Indian

Association of Minorities (IAM) have been instrumental in offering sustenance. The organizing infrastructure built by activists housed through the activist-in-residence program at CARE has shaped our practices of resistance, naming and challenging the interplays of white supremacy, far-right Zionism, and Hindutva.³⁶ A politics of preparation accounts for the price to be paid for embodied work, anticipates the violence on lives and livelihoods placed in struggles, and turns to build connections outside of academe to sustain the body amidst organized attacks. It carefully and intentionally builds spaces that nurture and safeguard precarious academics engaged in this work. The recognition of the violence perpetrated by the state-market collaboration further offers a comparative register that accounts for the scale of violence directed at the margins, for bearing witness to this violence, and for organizing challenges to it by bodies placed amidst struggles in solidarity. Preparation sustains the politics of embodiment in organizing radical politics at the world's end.

Conclusion

Radical struggles at the world's end are also the futures for radically organizing the world at its end. The survival and everyday politics of staying put, rooted in land, amid settler colonial terror, depict the transformative power of Global South organizing. The practices of generating knowledge across platforms, witnessing the genocide in Gaza, offer invitations to reorganizing what counts as knowledge, dismantling the U.S.-centred hegemony of knowledge production. That the U.S./Empire is not the leader for global knowledge generation at the world's end is powerfully evident in the silences in the curated U.S. academic spaces (such as journals) on the Israeli settler colonial violence in Gaza. Simultaneously, the protests across university campuses globally, largely led by students, taught by Palestinian journalists, activists, and writers on digital platforms such as X and TikTok, speak to the pedagogical power of the Global South. As the project of extractive neoliberalism faces its end, turning to radical politics of/ from the Global South offers registers for building futures rooted in theories/practices of care, relationality, and justice.

As noted in this essay, these practices of care are embodied, situated in community, placed in struggle, fundamentally disrupting and dismantling the casteist-colonial forms of academic practice that place the theorizing position at distance from the struggle. In this sense, the radical organizing in/of the Global South at the world's end is the process of dismantling and re-organizing the academe. This radical politics at its core unsettles the organizing features of academe, turning to embodied partnerships in community struggles against intersecting forms of violent oppressions. As communities and activists struggle to build alternative futures, how we as academics contribute to these processes of building our collective futures at the world's end is fundamentally tied to our capacities to break free from the shackles that define and con/s/train our academic practices. Amid the unfolding genocide in Gaza and the resistance of the global majority to it, the communicative processes of reorganizing the relationship between struggles and theorizing, cultivating a politics of suspicion, enacting sovereignty, forging connections, and sustaining a politics of preparation build a radically transformative academia that does the work of witnessing, narrating, and being in struggle.

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