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DIGNIDAD REBELDE'S ART ACTIVISM: LOOKING BACK, SEEING FORWARD

Each year I teach a university level course on Chicanas/Xicanas in society and a course on Chicanx/Latinx creative expression. For over a decade I have shared the graphic works by Melanie Cervantes in particular, as her art resonates with what I hope to express to students as visual and tangible representations of Chicana feminism. Through my teachings of creative expression, I became more familiar with collective art groups, such as Justseeds, and organizations focusing on political graphics, namely The Center for the Study of Political Graphics. Not surprisingly, my research mirrored my growing teaching interests and I began to focus my work on political artworks and graphics within cooperative art associations, specifically focusing on art activism within, or in solidarity with, communities of color residing in the United States.

A few years back, I participated in a critical ethnic studies conference in Vancouver, British Columbia centering on decolonization, artist imagina-

ries, and collective possibilities. As chance would have it, during the time of the conference an art exhibit titled “Arts of Resistance: Politics and the Past in Latin America” was showcasing the artwork of Lapiztola, a collective originating in Oaxaca, Mexico, who specializes in graphic design using stencil and screen painting. It was in viewing their displayed *La defensa del maíz* protest piece when I had an “aha moment” regarding the expression of art in social movements spanning the Americas.¹ Here I was in Canada and witnessing artwork from Mexico, while sharing political artwork by artists in the States. My academic and personal interests from that time on expanded to linking social justice advocacy in the Americas through anticolonial and revolutionary art activism as expressed by Black, Indigenous, and cultural workers of color.

After the conference, I remembered viewing an art piece by Cervantes depicting an Indigenous woman holding a stalk of corn and a rifle with a braid trailing down her back. The similarities between the graphic work by Lapizola in *La defensa del maíz* led me to locating the screen print by Cervantes titled *Indigenous Women Defending Land and Life*.² This in turn led to a heightened awareness of the work by Dignidad Rebelde. Dylan A. T. Miner, an art historian, posits that the artwork by Dignidad Rebelde “situates indigeneity within a structure of active agency”.³ In relation to the above-mentioned graphic, Miner stipulates “Braids, rifles, and corn have a seemingly unfamiliar relationship, yet for Dignidad Rebelde

¹ Creators Vancouver: Latin American Resistance Art @ MOA. (2018, May 27). Retrieved from: <https://creatorsvancouver.com/latin-american-resistance-art/>.

² Cervantes created “Indigenous Women Defending Land and Life” in 2009.

³ Miner, D. (2014). *Creating Aztlán: Chicano Art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding across Turtle Island*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 204.

become signifiers of Native defense of land-based cultural practices, food-systems and, as Zapatismo develops, community autonomy".⁴

Dignidad Rebelde is an Oakland-based⁵ graphic arts collaborative co-founded in 2007 by Xicanx husband and wife artistic duo, Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes.⁶ Barraza and Cervantes follow in the footsteps of other Chicax-identified artists in the creation of protest art. Barraza shares that he was mentored by Malaquías Montoya, a Chicano poster artist and major contributor in the Chicax art movement.⁷ Cervantes found mentorship by enrolling in Chicana/o studies art classes with Celia Herrera Rodriguez.⁸ Barraza and Cervantes grew as Xicanx artists by combining their passion for art with their political ideologies. As stated by long-time Chicana artist and activist, Judith Baca, "Chican[x] art is making visible our own reality, a particular reality—by doing so we become an irritant to the mainstream vision".⁹ The advocacy demonstrated in the artworks by Dignidad Rebelde for Indigenous women's rights, such as the *EZLN Women's Revolutionary Law*¹⁰ poster, and the continual designing of graphics for social justice movements, including Black Lives Matter and Solidarity with Standing Rock, is both admirable and visually stunning.

⁴ Miner, *Creating Aztlán*, 205-206.

⁵ Oakland is the largest city in the East Bay region of the San Francisco Bay Area in Northern California (U.S.).

⁶ Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes are discussed as "Barraza and Cervantes" throughout this work solely due to alphabetical order. (Same for the shared biographical information of both artists.)

⁷ Barraza, J. (2018). Signs of Solidarity: The Work of Dignidad Rebelde, *ASAP/Journal*, 3, 208-216, 208.

⁸ Barraza, J. and Cervantes, M. (2016). *Empujando tinta: The Work and Politics of Dignidad Rebelde*. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 41, 209-220, 210.

⁹ Baca, J. (1991). Prologue. In R. Griswold del Castillo, T. McKenna, and Y. Yarbro-Bejarano (Eds.). *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985* (17-25). Los Angeles, CA: Wight Art Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles, 21.

¹⁰ "EZLN Women's Revolutionary Laws" is the first collaborative screen print by Barraza and Cervantes in 2007.

As previously mentioned, Cervantes is a printmaker whose artworks politically align with the principles representing Chicana feminism, and Barraza is a graphic designer who has been working in the Chicax / Latinx art world since the 1990s.¹¹ A community centered co-op, the artwork produced by Dignidad Rebelde, including screen prints, political posters and multimedia projects, is “put back into the hands of the communities who inspire it”.¹² Furthermore, Barraza and Cervantes state the following:

We recognize that the history of the majority of people worldwide is a history of colonialism, genocide, and exploitation. Our art is grounded in Third World and Indigenous movements that build people’s power to transform the conditions of fragmentation, displacement and loss of culture that result from this history. Representing these movements through visual art means connecting struggles through our work and seeking to inspire solidarity among communities of struggles through our work and seeking to inspire solidarity among communities of struggle worldwide.¹³

The above declaration aligns with the artists’ application of Xicanisma and Zapatismo not only in their artwork, but also in Dignidad Rebelde’s overall collaborations with other artist and community organizations, as well as institutions. Barraza and Cervantes state that Dignidad Rebelde became a space for collaboration due to a merging of art practices and

¹¹ Barraza, Signs of Solidarity.

¹² Dignidad Rebelde: About Us. (n.d.). Retrieved from: https://dignidadrebelde.com/?page_id=8.

¹³ Dignidad Rebelde: About Us.

shared politics.¹⁴ Overall, Dignidad Rebelde is “a collaborative project that creates art as an empowering reflection of community struggles, dreams, and visions”.¹⁵ The name of Barraza and Cervantes’s graphic arts collaborative, Dignidad Rebelde, has significance, as well. *Rebelde* directly translated means rebel or insurgent, and *dignidad* signifies dignity. In connection with Zapatismo, the reference to both words is noteworthy.

A statement put forward by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN)¹⁶ explains the significance of dignity as a reason for their unification. “We saw [...] that all we had was DIGNITY, and we say that great was the shame of having forgotten it, [...] and dignity returned to live in our hearts, and we were new again, [...] to dignity, to struggle”.¹⁷ This construct of dignity links to rage and hope, and as an impetus for a worldwide battle for justice and humanity. Also viewed as a group of insurgents, the EZLN is credited with the creation of a globally recognized uprising and rebellion for Indigenous and human rights, specifically against the national government of Mexico. This perspective sheds light on the commentaries provided by John Holloway, a known sociologist and philosopher, in his work regarding the Zapatistas. Holloway states, “The creation of a society based on dignity can only take place through the development of social practices based on the mutual recognition of that dignity [...]. There is no question of first revolution, then dignity: dignity itself is the revolution”.¹⁸ Based on the importance of dignity as a key component to the philosophies held by the Zapatistas,

¹⁴ Barraza and Cervantes, *Empujando tinta*.

¹⁵ Barraza, *Signs of Solidarity*, 209.

¹⁶ Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional in English.

¹⁷ Holloway, J. (2002). Zapatismo and the Social Sciences (1) (Polemic). *Capital & Class*, 78, 153-160, 155.

¹⁸ Holloway, *Zapatismo and the Social Sciences*, 159.

it makes sense that an activist artist co-op invested in Zapatismo ideology would select the word *dignidad* as part of their collaborative identity. Moreover, adding *rebelde* to the name of Barraza and Cervantes's graphic arts collaborative is fitting since the artists strive to struggle in solidarity and fight for humanity in their work and personhood, as well.

As artists, both Barraza and Cervantes have a long history of involvement with social justice concerns, such as immigration rights, affordable housing, access to education, environmental justice, and gender violence. They also share similar educational backgrounds as graduates of Raza Studies and Ethnic Studies and, most obviously, graphic arts training. Barraza refers to himself as an interdisciplinary artist and master printer.¹⁹ He is an adjunct professor with a Chicana Studies specialization in the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State and the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Cervantes identifies as cultural worker²⁰ and Xicana artist.²¹ She has artwork in various permanent collections, such as the Center for the Study of Political Graphics and the Library of Congress. Currently, Cervantes is participating as a recipient of a two-year Art in Resistance Fellowship. Additionally, Barraza and Cervantes are members of various art activist organizations with beliefs mirroring those of Dignidad Rebelde, for example the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative mentioned in the beginning of this essay. Justseeds is a decentralized network of artists

¹⁹ Dignidad Rebelde: Jesus Barraza. (n.d.). Retrieved from: https://dignidadrebelde.com/?page_id=748.

²⁰ A cultural worker identity is based on lived experiences informing understandings of culture, work and community.

²¹ Dignidad Rebelde: Melanie Cervantes. (n.d.). Retrieved from: https://dignidadrebelde.com/?page_id=8.

from the United States, Canada and Mexico who are "committed to social, environmental, and political engagement".²²

International solidarity is the primary thread running through the artwork collaborations and projects of Dignidad Rebelde. This directly results from Barraza and Cervantes's application of Xicanisma and Zapatismo. As Barraza states, "Guiding the work we do are the principles of Xicanisma and Zapatismo: we create work that amplifies people's stories of struggle and resilience into a radical visual language".²³ Xicanisma is an ideology stemming from Chicana feminism and MexicAmerindian consciousness. Ana Castillo's groundbreaking text, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1994), provided practitioners of Chicana feminist theory with an alternative term for discussing Chicana-Indígena identity as experienced in of the borderlands of the United States and Mexico by acknowledging Xicanisma as a path forward in reconciliation with our pre-Conquest past. Castillo states the following:

U.S. MexicAmerindians/U.S. Latinas had to become excavators to being their work as Xicanistas. Starved for affirmations about our legacies, we early feministas began to research our ancestry. [...] These efforts were strenuous because Indigenous perspectives were omitted from the material we were handed in our formal schooling.²⁴

²² Justseeds: About. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://justseeds.org/about/>.

²³ Barraza, Signs of Solidarity, 209.

²⁴ Castillo, A. (2014). *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (Updated Edition). Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 5.

Essentially, she opens the discourse surrounding notions of *mestizaje*²⁵ outside of a settler-colonial context and situates Chicana feminism and identity within an Indigenous Xicana²⁶ framework. *Mestizaje*, when placed within a theoretical space, is more than a reference to a racially created mixed personhood. It becomes a space of belonging where possibilities exist, and the trauma of colonization begins to heal.²⁷ For example, Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa's new *mestiza* consciousness "presents one option for undoing the epistemic damage of colonialism and for making visible the histories and diverse knowledges that have been subjugated by colonial designs".²⁸ Radical *mestizaje* takes shape in critiques of racialized oppression and internalized colonialism, and above all, indigeneity is foregrounded.²⁹ Castillo applies an understanding of radical *mestizaje* by stating, "I have chosen the ethnic and

²⁵ *Mestizaje* is often understood as the nation-state process promoting assimilated Whiteness. However, Chicana scholars, including Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Emma Pérez, Chela Sandoval and Alicia Arrizón, have introduced notions of *mestizaje* outside the constructs of a mixed-raced identity, such as intellectual *mestizaje*, spiritual *mestizaje*, and the queering of *mestizaje*.

²⁶ The origins of the label "Chicano" are unknown. Speculation exists that it is a derivative of the Nahuatl word Mexica (pronounced Meshica) and gendered into ending with "o" because of the Spanish language application. The identifier of "Chicano" gained popularity among people of Mexican descent who were born in the United States during the Chicano Movement in the 1960s. (Not all people of Mexican descent residing in the United States respect or use the label "Chicano," as generationally it may be viewed from a classist lens. Additionally, some people associate "Chicano" as an antiquated label from the civil rights era.) The label "Chicana" addressed the lack of representation and voice of Mexican American women, and "Chicanx" is often used to provide visibility for gender nonbinary persons. "Xicano/a/x" is used to signify an Indigenous-identified Chicanx person or community. Lastly, the label of Chicanx (or Xicanx) is used not only by people of Mexican descent, but by individuals who are politically vested in the principles of Chicanx feminism and social justice activism.

²⁷ Pérez, L. (2007). *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Alterities*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 146-147.

²⁸ Ríos, G. R. (2016). *Mestizaje*. In I. D. Ruiz and R. Sánchez (Eds.). *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies* (109-124). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 113.

²⁹ Smith, A. (2010). *Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism*. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16, 41-68.

racial definition of MexicAmerindian to assert our Indigenous blood and, at least in part, the cultural source of our spirituality".³⁰ Spirituality, as a mindbodyspirit practice, is a guiding principle of Xicanisma,³¹ and it is applied in the artistic and collaborative community work by Dignidad Rebelde.

Overall, Xicana feminism and Zapatismo push against systems of power in order to disrupt present-day social and political relations to power. An illustration of what this means is a goal Cervantes lists in her resumé of identifying a long-term strategy to support a racial justice movement to end structural racism in the United States, which she refers to as "the heart of social inequities".³² Like Xicanisma, Zapatismo is rooted in Indigenous-based ways of knowing, and its application is relational to all of humanity. Sociologist Kara Zugman³³ mentions Zapatismo as "a discourse and a political practice" that inspires the recognition of an Indigenous worldview as valid among "diverse political actors" across the globe.³⁴

Unique to Zapatismo is its reframing of autonomy. A premise of the Zapatista uprising was to take a stance regarding their rights as existing in the execution and application of Indigenous rights. Thus, the EZLN's understanding of rights goes against the belief that state-led governance and systems of law making are what dictate human rights. In other words, everyone has the right to have rights. This relates directly to

³⁰ Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers*, 5.

³¹ Xicanisma is preferred in place of Xicana feminism at times because many women of color associate the term "feminism" with the white women's movement. Similarly, a Chicana feminist, or a Latina feminist, may self-identify as a Chicanista, Xicanista or Mujerista.

³² Dignidad Rebelde: Melanie Cervantes.

³³ Kara (Zugman) Dellacioppa.

³⁴ Zugman, K. (2005). Autonomy in a Poetic Voice: Zapatistas and Political Organizing in Los Angeles. *Latino Studies*, 3, 325-346, 336.

understandings of power relations within the praxis of Zapatismo. For instance, communities or organizations who apply Zapatismo in their self-governance, base decision-making in community gatherings. As such, “everyone is expected to express their opinion, even those who strongly disagree with the majority,” and “the goal is to achieve a compromise among everyone”.³⁵ The inclusion of community members’ voices, also known as *dar la palabra*, “or the practice of giving one’s opinion or perspective”,³⁶ impacts the ways ideas are shared. Additionally, the members of these communities and organizations promote mutual carework³⁷ and political engagement for social justice, which also correlates with the praxis of Indigenous feminism.

Along these lines, a mindset and application of Xicanisma and Zapatismo is apparent in Dignidad Rebelde, both as a graphic arts collaborative and as a political vision shared by Barraza and Cervantes. Advocacy for equity, justice, and dignity for all is displayed in the artworks, collaborations, and projects of the graphic arts co-op. Autonomy, as put forward by the Zapatistas, is also enacted by Dignidad Rebelde in the form of what human geography scholars Jenny Pickerill and Paul Chatterton have coined “autonomous geographies”.³⁸ Defining autonomous geographies as “spaces where there is a desire to constitute non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity and citizenship”, they

³⁵ Zugman, *Autonomy in a Poetic Voice*, 335.

³⁶ Blackwell, M. (2012). The Practice of Autonomy in the Age of Neoliberalism: Strategies from Indigenous Women’s Organising in Mexico. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 44, 703-732, 723.

³⁷ Here carework is understood as the concept of caring for self and others, and it is recognized as any act performed out of care, such as listening to another’s complaint or running an errand for a friend.

³⁸ Pickerill, J., and Chatterton, P. (2006). Notes towards Autonomous Geographies: Creation, Resistance and Self-Management as Survival Tactics. *Progress in Human Geography*, 30, 730-746, 730.

go onto explain that these spaces are “created through a combination of resistance and creation, and a questioning and challenging of dominant laws and social norms”.³⁹ Like Zapatismo, autonomous geographies are associated with hope and radical visions of the future that entail interstitial qualities, thus linking possibilities with the past and present.

Indigenous geographies are associated with hope, as well. They allow for a deeper understanding of belonging and responsibility, while elucidating a “more-than-human world that requires a new way to see”.⁴⁰ Zapatismo may also relate to elements of Indigenous geographies regarding the ways in which places and stories hold wisdom.⁴¹ Wisdom is guided by experience, and experience happens in locations, thus spaces becoming encoded with social and cultural ways of knowing. Indigenous geographic understandings also regard the world “in terms of flows of energies (and sometimes entities) across a permeable boundary between manifest and unmanifest realities”.⁴² Anti-capitalistic in practice, Indigenous geographies employ wisdom in the making of decisions embodying the philosophy of maintaining balance and harmony for the present and the future. This is demonstrated in the Indigenous way of viewing the world as being connected by the Seven Generations.⁴³ Indigenous scholar-activist Vine Deloria Jr. interpreted the Seven Generations in the following manner: The first three

³⁹ Pickerill and Chatterton, Notes towards Autonomous Geographies, 730.

⁴⁰ Coombes, B., Johnson, J. T., and Howitt R. (2012). Indigenous Geographies II: The Aspirational Spaces in Postcolonial Politics—Reconciliation, Belonging, and Social Provision. *Progress in Human Geography*, 37, 691-700, 692.

⁴¹ Herman, R.D.K. (2008). Reflections on the Importance of Indigenous Geography. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 32, 73-88, 73.

⁴² Herman, Reflections on the Importance of Indigenous Geography, 75.

⁴³ The Seven Generations is often associated with the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) belief that present-day decisions should be made with the understanding of supporting sustainability seven generations into the future.

generations represent the past, the fourth generation represents the present, and the next three generations represent the future.⁴⁴

It is through the guidance and wisdom demonstrated within the philosophical values of Xicanisma and Zapatismo that Dignidad Rebelde creates geographies of hope within artistic spaces⁴⁵ using digital platforms and collaborative installations, exhibits, and workshops. Xicanisma provides “a way of understanding a matriarchal future, something for which we can look to our Indigenous roots to understand and reclaim”.⁴⁶ And, by applying a Zapatista anti-colonial, anti-capitalistic, and pro-Indigenous worldview, Dignidad Rebelde strives to “make work that serves as symbols of solidarity” and “empowers people struggling for self-determination”.⁴⁷ The following sections provide a closer examination of graphic artworks and murals by Dignidad Rebelde to assist in developing a richer understanding of their work as an art collective.

Overarching themes within Dignidad Rebelde’s work are memory and community. In an exhibit named *Looking Back Seeing Forward*, Barraza provides viewers with the following statement discussing the significance of the installation combining prints, photos, and altars:

I draw my inspiration from a Xicana Cosmovision that has faced near destruction but has persevered in stories and gestures that have been passed down through the

⁴⁴ Wilkins, D. E. (2015, June 18). How to Honor the Seven Generations. *Indian Country Today: Digital Indigenous News*. <https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/how-to-honor-the-seven-generations-0UNifbN5UOL36SXV6rliQ>.

⁴⁵ Dignidad Rebelde refers to these spaces as “temporary autonomous spaces” (Barraza, *Signs of Solidarity*, 211).

⁴⁶ Barraza, *Signs of Solidarity*, 210.

⁴⁷ Barraza, *Signs of Solidarity*, 210.

generations and in the symbols and images left on codices, stone stamps and temple walls. Looking back to the Seven Generations of Indigenous ancestors, my work honors their struggles and works to create a future in which struggles are continued.⁴⁸

Barraza and Cervantes indicate that installation art became a strategy through which they work with objects and materials by “exploring their conceptual meaning” in relation to their lived experiences and work towards honoring the people who have impacted their lives.⁴⁹

Another artwork example displaying a shared philosophy pertaining to memory and community is labeled *Future Ancestors: A Ceremony of Memory*.⁵⁰ Representing a unique visual blend of graphic prints and portraits, Dignidad Rebelde explains the sentiment behind “Future Ancestors” in this manner:

We look at the present and give thanks and celebrate the individuals whose life work is contributing to a world we leave behind for future generations while investigating what was handed down by their ancestors and continues to shape who they are today.

Through conversation with five people we reflect on lessons and objects held sacred that have been passed down to them. [...] By placing these five people as the center point between the Seven Generations that have come before us and the

⁴⁸ Dignidad Rebelde: Looking Back Seeing Forward. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://dignidadrebelde.com/?project=looking-back-seeing-forward>.

⁴⁹ Barraza and Cervantes, *Empujando tinta*, 218.

⁵⁰ Dignidad Rebelde: Future Ancestors. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://dignidadrebelde.com/?project=future-ancestors-a-ceremony-of-memory>.

Seven Generations that are yet to come [...] we contemplate what it is about our actions, in the present, that will contribute to building a just and sustainable world.⁵¹

In the above a passage, a connection to Zapatismo and Xicanisma is demonstrated with an understanding of autonomous geographies and the Indigenous concept of Seven Generations, as previously explained in this essay. The visual images accompanying this exhibit include unlabeled portraits of people in conversation on one wall with mirrors in-between each piece. The mirrors are positioned as mini altars, thereby acknowledging the existence of the ancestors and providing space for the unknown faces of the future. Lastly, photos of various community members holding white boards provide viewers with messages of love, sustainability, gratitude, and Indigenous ways of knowing. One message offers these words of wisdom: “Seek and embrace love and connectedness with your ancestors. This will guide you on our shared journey as full human beings in connection with one another”.⁵²

By and large, Dignidad Rebelde is most known for their graphic artworks, specifically prints, posters, and portraits. The main themes in most of their graphic projects and collaborations are struggle and solidarity. One such project called *I Love the EastSide* involved a collaboration with InnerCityStruggle, an organization established by community members concerned with increasing neighborhood violence and crime.⁵³ Billboards with the message “I Love the EastSide” were installed throughout the neighborhoods of Eastside in the Boyle Heights area of

⁵¹ Dignidad Rebelde: Future ancestors.

⁵² Dignidad Rebelde: Future ancestors.

⁵³ Dignidad Rebelde: I Love the Eastside. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://dignidadrebelde.com/?project=i-love-the-eastside>.

Los Angeles, California. The goal of InnerCityStruggle was to create a vision for a healthier and stronger community using grassroots strategies. The billboards used by Dignidad Rebelde were to encourage residents to share their stories about the Eastside. These stories were later shared via an online using wordpress.com, an open access blogging platform.

Another collaborative example is titled *Solidarity with Indonesia*.⁵⁴ This project involved working with an art collaborative located in Indonesia using graphic artwork as a means of addressing environmental issues, including water contamination and the construction of a factory near a village. Dignidad Rebelde assisted in creating a joint protest poster to increase awareness and solidarity. The piece was shared online and printed for local protests. The images for this project show viewers various scenes of protest sites in Indonesia displaying graphic artworks by Dignidad Rebelde and photos with community organizers. The connection to the points made in the larger context of this essay include the accessibility of Zapatismo ideology to a globe stage, and the collaborative efforts expressed by Barraza and Cervantes to assist in building people's transformative power.

Additional themes demonstrated within the artwork by Dignidad Rebelde include Indigenous identity, queerness, and land. References to these themes are found in the naming of their pieces, such as *A Prayer from Occupied Nisenan Land*, or mentioned directly in the artists' statements. For example, in *Untitled/Sin título* Barraza and Cervantes created an *ofrenda* dedicated to their "Queer relatives" with the intention to "remember them and center the life that was lived in secret and is still

⁵⁴ Dignidad Rebelde: *Solidarity with Indonesia*. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://dignidadrebelde.com/?project=solidarity-with-indonesia>.

unspoken”.⁵⁵ In protest, Dignidad Rebelde also offer up public statements, such as in connection with an installation *Ohlone People Still Here*.⁵⁶ This artwork reverberates with multiple passages in the essay regarding indigeneity, activism and visions of hope for the future. The below proclamation is from “Ohlone People Then...Ohlone People Still Here”:

This is not a public service announcement; this is a challenge to your preconceived notions of where you stand. This is not the United States of America, this is Ohlone Land, and since time immemorial, this has been Indian land and it will always be [...]. Ohlone songs continue to be sung, some songs as old as time, some as new as this morning’s rising sun the people continue singing.⁵⁷

For this piece, Dignidad Rebelde began with a ceremony on Market Street in San Francisco giving thanks to the ancestors and acknowledging the Ohlone land. Screen-prints of Ohlone community leaders, along with informational posters describing the history of the Ohlone and the current struggle to defend Ohlone burial grounds, were publicly displayed. The images of Ohlone community members were intended to dispel stereotypic representations of Indigenous peoples as mere memories of past times, and to create awareness of their present-day existence. The artwork promotes the recognition of Indigenous rights in relation to land rights and tribal recognition by expressing the Zapatismo

⁵⁵ Dignidad Rebelde: Untitled/Sin título. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://dignidadrebelde.com/?project=untitledsin-titulo>.

⁵⁶ Dignidad Rebelde: Ohlone People Still Here. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://dignidadrebelde.com/?project=ohlone-people-still-here>.

⁵⁷ Dignidad Rebelde: Ohlone People Still Here.

philosophy of rights exist in the practice of the rights, not by state-induced laws. Dignidad Rebelde strives to call forward political action by all community members to honor the land as Ohlone land. Additionally, the inclusion of ceremony with song and prayer honors the Ohlone and links the mindbodyspirit principle of Xicanisma together with the Indigenous understanding of the Seven Generations.

As mentioned, Dignidad Rebelde is also recognized for their mural projects and collaborations. Autonomous art⁵⁸ and anti-colonial resistance are primary themes found in the murals. Two examples of mural work by Dignidad Rebelde are *Aikako`nikonhraién: ta`ne`* and *Home Is Where the Heart Is*. To begin, *Aikako* is more than a mural project. It is a collaborative initiative with an art collective known as Decolonizing Street Art connecting artists and activists from Turtle Island,⁵⁹ or Ixachilan, the Nahuatl term for the Americas. This collective organizes Unceded Voices, which Dignidad Rebelde refers to as “an anti-colonial street art convergence of Indigenous women and women of color” who “reclaim public space to share their art-works”.⁶⁰ The space where Unceded Voices is held is in Tio`Tia: ke (otherwise known as Montreal, Canada), and the goal of Unceded Voices is explained as being twofold. One, to develop solidarity and support among Indigenous street artists and, two, to instigate anti-colonial resistance using various forms of street art, such as the wheat-pasting of graphic art pieces. Connecting with ideological influences of Xicanisma and Zapatismo, the guiding principles for Decolonizing Street Art are stated below:

⁵⁸ Autonomous art is a reference to street art that is not financed by government or corporate institutions.

⁵⁹ Turtle Island is a name used for North America by Indigenous peoples and activists.

⁶⁰ Dignidad Rebelde: Unceded Voices. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://dignidadrebelde.com/?project=decolonizing-street-art>.

The organizing principles of Decolonizing Street Art include opposition to colonialism, capitalism, and all forms of oppression, including but not limited to racism, patriarchy, heterosexism, ableism and transphobia. We organize on the basis of solidarity, mutual aid and support, as anti-colonial street artists and supporters.⁶¹

These principles reflect the mission and vision of Dignidad Rebelde as a graphic arts collective. As collaborative organizations, both Decolonizing Street Art and Dignidad Rebelde put forward the dignity and rights of Indigenous peoples, as well as public decrees for justice and equity. They believe in the dismantling of power structures and capitalism. Concepts of Zapatismo autonomy are shared, as well as Xicanista understandings of carework in the form of mutual assistance. Philosophical similarities are also apparent in the mural project *Home Is Where the Heart Is*.

Working with Mazatl, a “graphic maker who uses the public space as his main way to communicate ideas and emotions seeking to create conversations towards collective liberation”,⁶² Dignidad Rebelde assisted in creating *Home Is Where the Heart Is*. The graphic mural is titled, *Looking Back, Seeing Forward (Home Is Where the Heart Is)*, and it is located on a separating wall in the Washington, D.C. area. The mural was created as a means of calling attention to gentrification in the NoMa⁶³ neighborhood. The description of the project is as follows:

The NoMa neighborhood has recently undergone intensive development and will experience more as the entire city

⁶¹ Dignidad Rebelde: Unceded Voices.

⁶² Justseeds: Mazatl. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://justseeds.org/artist/mazatl/>.

⁶³ North of Massachusetts Avenue.

grows. This mural combines stenciled pieces and painted patterns and prints with portraits of youth to call attention to the community that has called the area home for at least three generations as well as animals native to the area who have recently been deemed extinct. The piece confronts the threat of displacement caused by gentrification and reasserts a claim by residents over their home.⁶⁴

The explanation of the purpose behind the mural project embodies Indigenous perspectives regarding sustainability and the Seven Generations. Furthermore, it highlights anti-colonial art activism along with the creation of autonomous art. As stated by Coombes *et al*, "Indigenous conceptions of responsibility and autonomy provide lessons about how to ground activism in place-based politics, a basis for alliance-building and shared visions for decolonization".⁶⁵

Dignidad Rebelde also conducts community printmaking and poster workshops. These workshops symbolize the praxis of Xicana feminism and Zapatismo. Each workshop is thematic in nature with specific attention to social justice concerns. A common theme of Dignidad Rebelde's workshops is centered on border activism. One such workshop focusing on border activism is called, *Breaking Down Borders through Art Making*, and it represents the largest collaborative project enacted by Dignidad Rebelde. The collaboration included the San Francisco Art Institute Urban Studies Program, the Indigenous Arts Coalition, 67 Sueños, the Native American Health Center, and the Center for the Health Assessment of Mothers and Children of Salinas (CHAMACOS). In the

⁶⁴ Dignidad Rebelde: Home Is Where the Heart Is. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://dignidadrebelde.com/?project=188>.

⁶⁵ Coombes *et al*, *Indigenous Geographies II*, 693.

artists' statement for the project, their meaning of borders and art as activism is shared:

We talked about our communities, what challenges our communities face such as racism, health issues like diabetes, multi-racial identity and alcoholism. We learned how much we share in the struggle and we practiced making art to amplify our voices. It was a beautiful day of young people breaking down borders through art.⁶⁶

In this instance, borders are expanded to reference all the barriers and inequities established through colonization and notions of power associated with race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, language, national status, education, religion, etc. The results of racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, capitalism, and genocide all contribute to the lived experiences of marginalized communities. By using art as a platform for activism, Dignidad Rebelde is placing forward a new understanding of being in the world. For example, one of the photos shared in *Breaking Down Borders*, depicts a young person holding a protest poster stating "Power, Peace, Pride" and "Equality⁶⁷ and Unity" with images of activists. In this case, art becomes a vehicle for providing dignity, justice, and hope.

In conclusion, the collaborative artwork and activism by Dignidad Rebelde provides us with modern day examples and applications of Indigenous wisdom, namely through Xicanisma and Zapatismo.

⁶⁶ Dignidad Rebelde: Breaking Down Borders through Art Making. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://dignidadrebelde.com/?project=breaking-down-borders-through-art-making>.

⁶⁷ Equity is the author's preferred term.

Introduced as a graphic arts collective, the mission and vision of Dignidad Rebelde, as well as the personal philosophies of co-founders Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes, advocate for resistance and societal change. Highlighted as theoretical frameworks for Dignidad Rebelde's initiatives, the foundations for Xicanisma and Zapatismo link readers to constructs of hope, dignity and justice. As stated by the artists:

Our goal is for our art to empower our community and create a sense of healing through the messages we send out into the world, but more importantly we seek to share an Indigenous worldview that focuses on healing ourselves and in turn Mother Earth.⁶⁸

In reflection, the artworks by Dignidad Rebelde provide us with visual narratives embodying intersectional and intimate landscapes (both physical and theoretical) depicting relationships with people, animals, and nature, as well as all the unseen forces enveloping our world. Their art becomes our decolonial pedagogy. By creating autonomous geographies and honoring Indigenous ways of being, including sustainability and mindbodyspirit, the future is *now* through artistic imaginings of the Red Road.⁶⁹

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⁶⁸ Barraza, Signs of Solidarity, 215.

⁶⁹ The "Red Road" is an Indigenous metaphor for living a spiritual way of life and "Walking the Red Road" symbolizes living life in a good way that embodies a sense of obligation and purpose guided by the values of prayer, honesty, humility, compassion, respect, generosity and wisdom.

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