Global Indigenous Youth:
Through Their Eyes
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We are grateful to Seqininnguaq Lynge Poulsen who, in addition to her article, offered her inspiring artwork for the cover of this book.

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The Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Program of the Institute for the Study of Human Rights, dedicated to human rights advocacy, research and teaching, appreciates the collaboration with the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus for this book, a testimony to the relevance and potential of academia and the Indigenous Peoples’ Movement to create community together.

We hope that the book will make even more visible the continuing and robust Indigenous Youth voices that bring new life and broad horizons to the struggles for social justice, peace and human rights and for a sustainable world of well-being and diversity.

Dali Angel Pérez, Victor Anthony Lopez-Carmen, Elsa Stamatopoulou

Co-editors 15 February 2019
About the Cover Art

My name is Seqininnguaq Lynge Poulsen and I am a 17-year-old young Inuk woman from Greenland. I’m a high school student in Nuuk, Greenland, and a visual artist. I dedicate a lot of my time to human rights activism, mostly focusing on Indigenous Peoples and the LGTBQ+ community.

To bring this painting and the people in it to life, I painted using a watercolor palette. I chose to work with watercolor because not only is it the medium I’m most experienced in, but also because it is such an interesting and beautiful medium. It’s always so fun to work with, though it can be a bit hard to control. The water mixes with the paint and flows. Sometimes it feels like it has its own life, which is what I wanted for this painting. That it has life, energy and feelings, just like we all do.

I had a lot of ideas for what I wanted to paint and visualize for the book. We have so many groups of Indigenous Peoples and it’s obvious that I can’t represent each Indigenous group in one painting. But I still wanted a painting that Indigenous Peoples could identify with. A painting that they could look at and see themselves, feel home. A painting that could help them be more proud of their culture, their people, and their identity.

For many years, I have felt that we, Indigenous Peoples, haven’t been represented
enough in the art world, or in any worlds for that matter, and that we all have something to say to the rest of the world. And that’s pretty much what I wanted to represent in this painting. That all of us Indigenous Peoples are here and have always been here. That we all have words and feelings to let out. But I also wanted to show that even though we are different people from different parts of the world, a lot of us have stories that share a lot of similarities. And that we all are going to take care of each other and protect each other, no matter where we come from and who we are.

Seqininnguaq Lynge Poulsen
6 February 2019
Foreword

Shaped by their Indigenous identity, unique cultural heritage, sustainable living and connection to the earth and nature, Indigenous young people have much to contribute to our world as agents of positive change.

At the same time, however, many Indigenous young people face tremendous challenges as a result of the intergenerational impact of colonization and assimilation policies, as well as the ongoing struggle to exercise and safeguard their rights and identity as Indigenous Peoples. Institutional discrimination, such as social and educational exclusion, the lack of inclusive health services or the lack of political representation, exacerbate this situation. It is critical therefore, that national, regional and local Governments around the world, along with the United Nations and others, uphold and uplift the rights of Indigenous youth, as contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Maintaining their roots in the Indigenous community or pursuing an education and employment in cities far from home, is a dilemma that many Indigenous young people find themselves confronted with. While opting for the latter can offer opportunities for personal and professional advancement, it can also further expose Indigenous young people to risks and increase their vulnerability.
Both the lack of recognition to the right to maintain their Indigenous identity and the few incentives to protect it have created hostile environments for young people. Indigenous youth, more than any other age groups, are exposed to pressures to assimilate with the external societal culture, especially due also to their generation’s high levels of activity on the internet and social media networks. Subsequently, they are among the first to face and resent discrimination, unfounded stereotypes, violence, loss of their languages, as well as social, educational, economic and political exclusion.

Their situation is worsened by the lack of access to quality health services that respond to the particular needs of Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous youth. This goes from poor sanitation, malnutrition, lack of access to adequate sexual and reproductive health services, education and information, high levels of alcoholism and substance abuse, and severe lack of attention to mental health issues, especially to the problem of the worryingly high levels of self-harm and suicide, that Indigenous youth experience.

Furthermore, many Indigenous youth have come to witness the intimidation, harassment, forms of violence and undue criminal prosecution that their leaders and/or peers have been subjected to when seeking to defend their rights, including their environmental rights. This was most recently
manifested as a result of organized protest against large-scale projects involving extractive and infrastructure business, as was also pointed out by the United Nations Human Rights Council’s Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in her 2018 report.

Despite these incredible challenges, Indigenous young people are the bearers of the diversity and cultural richness of their peoples and driving positive changes in their communities from within. It is a mistake to think of them as victims, rather than actual survivors with an enormous potential for transformation. Moreover, Indigenous youth are able to “walk between both worlds”—the Indigenous and society as a whole—and play a main role with regards to representation, mediation and conflict resolution.

We therefore need to nurture, support and tap into this incredible potential that Indigenous youth possess. This is important for the benefit of Indigenous young people themselves, as well as for their communities and societies as a whole.

To fully achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nation Member States in 2015 as the global roadmap to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable future for people and planet, it is vital to empower Indigenous young women and men and to equip them with the skills to engage in its implementation, monitoring and review. We need to ensure that
young Indigenous Peoples have a voice not only in their communities, but also in national and international policy and decision-making.

The good news is that the United Nations has committed to seriously step up its work on youth issues all over the world. To this end, the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, recently launched the United Nations Youth Strategy: Youth 2030, which seeks to facilitate increased impact and expanded global, regional and country-level action to address the needs, build the agency and advance the rights of young people in all their diversity around the world, and to ensure their engagement and participation in the implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as other relevant global agendas and frameworks.

With the launch of Youth 2030, the United Nations reached a new milestone in its work for and most importantly with young people, and obviously we need to include Indigenous youth to advance the vision underpinning the United Nations Youth Strategy of “a world in which the human rights of every young person are realized, a world that ensures that every young person can reach their full potential and that recognizes young people’s agency, resilience and their positive contributions as agents of change.” The success of engaging Indigenous youth depends on their capacity and opportunity to actively participate in the various decision-making processes concerning their
peoples’ future. This includes providing them opportunities to join in intergenerational dialogues that aim to revitalize their languages, customs and traditional lifestyles. At the same time, as young people, they may be encouraged to take advantage of the new technologies and social media to overcome the lack of information and misconceptions when it comes to the ‘Indigenous world.’ Similarly, it is crucial to further expand partnerships with Indigenous youth to tap into their knowledge and expertise in matters such as human rights and land protection and education and health issues.

This publication stands as a unique effort to bring together and amplify the voices of the Indigenous young people from around the world, giving them a much-needed space to express their own perspectives and views on what it means to be Indigenous and young in today’s world. By presenting these diverse personal testimonies, this publication is offering us a channel to bring the unique insights and voices that too often go unheard.

I highly commend this important initiative of Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights and the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus for embarking on such a remarkable endeavor. These kinds of collaborations are indispensable in the construction of a better future for Indigenous Peoples, especially for young Indigenous people. I am inspired and confident that this work will make a significant contribution in the
building of more tolerant, more inclusive and more resilient societies that come together to work in favor of peace, security, sustainability and full observance of human rights. Please count on my full support and commitment to work closely with Indigenous youth as we seek to advance sustainable development and sustainable peace for all, while ensuring we leave no-one behind.

Jayathma Wickramanayake
United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth
10 January 2019
Introduction

Qivioq Nivi LØVSTRØM (Inuk, Greenland), Kibett Carson KIBURO (Endorois, Kenya) and Q”apaj CONDE (Aymara, Plurinational State of Bolivia)


Listen to us - we are the future

This book aims to resolve the lack of information and knowledge about Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Youth from the first-hand perspective of Indigenous Youth. The information available in the literature, academia, legal writing, film, and pop culture about Indigenous Peoples very often portrays Indigenous Peoples as the noble savages, the fierce savages or as extinct nations.1 We, Indigenous Peoples, are a dead race in the minds of many in the world. We belong in old black and white movies and history books—relics of a shameful past that many would rather forget. With this book, we ask you to challenge the colonial past, to see past the mere illusionary idea of indigeneity. We also invite you to embrace our truth—the truth is that we are alive, and our roots are strong.

This book would behove everyone to read from cover to cover, as it is multi-authored by fourteen Indigenous Youth, two selected from each of the seven Indigenous socio-cultural regions of the world: (1) Africa; (2) Asia; (3) the Arctic; (4) Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation and Central Asia; (5) Latin America and the Caribbean; (6) North America; and (7) the Pacific.

This compilation provides a rich perspective from each region; at the same time, it addresses different challenges. In this book, we, Indigenous Youth, explore the human rights challenges that we face nowadays, including how we view our identity as Indigenous youth in the face of modernization and globalization. We get a glimpse of how the Youth practice Traditional Knowledge in a contemporary world and live their everyday life in a culture filled with traditions. Some write about the health of their communities—be it spiritual or physical. Others write about experiences with migration and immigration. The Youth expound upon their experiences with sexism and racism, and their lifelong battles for land rights and intellectual property protection for Indigenous knowledge. Some Youth come with portrayals of poverty and unemployment, while others write about technology, innovation and the education systems in their region. This richness on the different issues addressed by the authors responds to the need that the book be an honest testimony of Indigenous Youth. This is why, for the first time ever, the
Indigenous Youth, under the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, are narrating their own stories.

**The Global Indigenous Youth Caucus**

The Global Indigenous Youth Caucus (GIYC) is a platform for Indigenous Youth to advocate before the international community, to participate in international decision-making processes that affect their lives, and to bring awareness to the issues concerning Indigenous Youth on local, regional, national, and international levels.

The GIYC is comprised of numerous Indigenous Youth from various states, organizations, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Since the first session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), young Indigenous participants have gathered together and, since the caucus’s formal inception in 2006, developed statements voicing concerns of the Youth. The UNPFII formally recognized the GIYC as a working caucus in 2008. The GIYC is a caucus with a simple organizational structure. It is led by the Co-Chairs, who are elected for a one-year term at an annual meeting during the UNPFII. Each of the seven regions also appoints up to three Focal Points per region each year for a one-year mandate. The roles of the Focal Points are to facilitate discussion and consensus within each region. Alongside the Co-chairs and the Focal Points are the Advisors—former Co-chairs and
Focal Points—who provide guidance and expert knowledge to the leadership and to various working groups within GIYC.

The GIYC provides a link between the Indigenous Youth and other organizations. Currently, our area of work covers the UNPFII, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030, and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

**Understanding the Indigenous Youth movement**

Each Indigenous People has its own culture, language, and worldview. We, as Peoples, are very different; however, we, as Indigenous Peoples, face similar challenges. The GIYC also aims to be a global response to those inter-connected challenges. For example, the lack of opportunities in Indigenous territories pushes Indigenous Youth to migrate to urban areas looking for better educational and employment opportunities. Once they have migrated to urban areas, they face harsh discrimination. Urban areas are often hostile to Indigenous Peoples’ cultures and ways of life. Indigenous migrant Youths rarely have access to education or employment opportunities.\(^2\) In

\(^2\) Q”apaj Conde, *Informe Perspectiva de Jóvenes Indígenas a los 10 Años de la Adopción de la Declaración de Naciones Unidas sobre los Derechos de los Pueblos*
addition, although physically and psychologically separated from their culture and territories, they inherit a responsibility to protect their traditional lands and culture, including their Traditional Knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, from misappropriation. The trauma of colonialism, discrimination, and the difficulties they face in trying to protect their territories and Traditional Knowledge force Indigenous Youth into unsustainable and desperate situations in which, lamentably, many engage in self-harming behavior and/or commit suicide.

It is estimated that there are more than 370 million Indigenous Peoples in the world, making up 5% of the global population and 15% of the world’s poor; and yet we safeguard 80% of the biodiversity of the world. Indigenous Peoples are often the poorest in their nations and have some of the

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highest rates of poverty and suicide.\textsuperscript{5} They are looked down upon and regarded as backward because of their unwillingness to part with their rich cultural heritage. It is estimated that among the 370 million Indigenous Peoples in the world, approximately 45\% are between 15 and 30 years of age.\textsuperscript{6} This group of Indigenous Peoples faces numerous challenges, including frequent marginalization, migration and early motherhood.

**Challenges**

Indigenous Youth from all over the world undergo many challenges across the globe. There is a tremendous diversity amongst Indigenous communities and Peoples, each of which has its own distinct culture, language, history, and unique way of life. Despite these differences, Indigenous Peoples across the globe share some common values derived in part from an understanding that their lives are part of an inseparable cycle with Mother Earth.

**Colonization**


The violent colonization of Indigenous Peoples, their Waters and Lands across the globe has caused many of the several challenges that Indigenous Peoples face today. Colonization has created a collective trauma that has been transplanted onto Indigenous Youth. It has rooted a racist relationship between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous societies. For Indigenous Youth, decolonization is a must. Decolonization is a range of actions that go from thinking with our own head—this means to use our own systems of knowledge\textsuperscript{7}—to learning our own history and creating international solidarity among Indigenous Peoples and with non-Indigenous allies. Colonization is a violent act, not necessarily manifested as physical violence, but violence nonetheless because it dehumanizes the colonizer and the colonized. The colonized becomes an object or a nonbeing; at the same time, the colonizer loses his humanity in performing cruel and inhumane acts to what they consider to be non-beings. Decolonization, for Indigenous Youth, is the act of taking back our humanity.

**Living in two worlds**

Indigenous Youth live between two worlds—the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous—and our battle to protect our Lands and Waters and our human rights is made immeasurably more difficult by the ignorance about us, by the lack of

\textsuperscript{7} Fausto Reinaga, *Revolución India*, 6\textsuperscript{th} ed. (La Paz: Editorial Obrera, 2016).
knowledge about our cultures, our heritage, and our everyday lives. The fact that we want to show you is this: that Indigeneity and modernity are not mutually exclusive; we live with our feet on our lands and phone in our hands, listening to our elders while we speak in both our Indigenous languages and colonial tongues understood by the rest of the world.

**Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)**

Free, prior, and informed consent was established in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples\(^8\) (UNDRIP) as a fundamental safeguard to the right of self-determination\(^9\) and non-discrimination.\(^10\) Thereby, 

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\(^10\) *Supra* note 8, at Articles 1, 2; United Nations General Assembly, *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, United Nations,
FPIC is a reflection of Indigenous Rights established in international customary law and international human rights treaties.\textsuperscript{11} From an Indigenous Youth perspective, FPIC restores control and decision-making to Indigenous Peoples over their lives and their futures. Not all Indigenous Youth are aware that the FPIC is a collective right, as the implementation of it has been sparse. This means that the future of the next generation is dimming. Governments and large corporations do not always consult Indigenous Peoples and their Youth, and in many cases, the Indigenous Peoples are not even aware that they have the right to free, prior, and informed consent.

\textbf{Suicide and mental health}

Indigenous Peoples, and especially Indigenous Youth, are among those made most vulnerable in society. With suicide being the second leading cause of death amongst adolescents

worldwide, it has made its impact on Indigenous Peoples as well.\textsuperscript{12}

Mental health and suicide will also be touched upon in this book. We hope that by shedding some light on the subject, and by showing how survivors of suicide attempts and bereavement have overcome their trauma, we can give hope for a brighter future.

\textbf{Climate change}

Climate change is altering the physical, biological and social systems of many Indigenous communities across the globe. These altercations are often negative in nature, and go beyond changes to food supplies, to susceptibility to diseases and long-lasting cultural disturbances.\textsuperscript{13} Indigenous Peoples have been at the forefront in the fight against global warming and its influence on climate change. As protectors of our ancestral lands, rivers and seas, we have fought against corporations for years, we have stood for water rights, fought against logging and deforestation, protested mining and demonstrated against the pollution of Mother Earth.

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
Traditional Knowledge

Traditional Knowledge represents a variety of skills, practices and processes, such as agricultural, hunting or fishing techniques. Traditional Knowledge also incorporates traditional cultural expressions such as dances, art, designs, and names, among others. Indigenous Peoples have the right to create, maintain and develop their Traditional Knowledge as part of their identity, a foundation of their well-being, and social cohesion. Indigenous Youth have the customary obligation to learn those skills and to protect them. However, misappropriation and misuse of Traditional Knowledge is a phenomenon occurring every day on a global scale. Indigenous elders do not always share the Traditional Knowledge, which gives identity to Indigenous Youth, because of the threat of misappropriation and misuse. An intellectual property system is urgently needed, addressing the needs and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Youth.

Food and agriculture

Indigenous Youth have, in many cases, been denied their right to Indigenous education; in many places in the world, even the simple use of their own language and the practice of traditional customs have been banned. Yet, the traditional Indigenous practices have prevailed, and Indigenous Food Systems can now be documented as some of
the most sustainable ways of producing sustenance. In fact, according to Kuhnlein et al., “the traditional food systems of Indigenous Peoples touch the full spectrum of life in ways that modern food systems do not.”

Acknowledgements

This compilation came to be through the work of each of the fourteen Indigenous Youths who contributed to the book. Their commitment is an example of the historical struggle of our elders and our Peoples. We would further like to acknowledge the enormous work of one of our Focal Points, who is also one of the co-editors, Victor Anthony Lopez-Carmen. It was he who suggested the book compilation during the annual GIYC meeting in New York in April 2018, and it was through the phenomenal efforts of the book’s co-editors that this compilation was produced. We are deeply grateful to our editors Dali, Elsa and Victor.

We would like to thank MADRE and Tebtebba for the funding, as well as the staff support received by Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights, without which this book would not have been possible.

We, Indigenous Youth, have listened to the stories of our elders, and we remember that we are the guardians of the forest. We are the protesters that stand for water rights, the sisters who demand environmental change in a world that is simultaneously melting and drowning, the brothers who advocate for policy change in a world that is plagued by droughts and floods, the communities who combat hunger and corruption. We are the survivors who are healing after the rape of our peoples and our lands, who, to this day, are fighting the people and corporations who want us gone for the sake of profit.

We, Indigenous Peoples, have been mowed down and burned, frozen and drowned, but our roots remained strong; we are sprouting and growing and we want you to witness our hybrid flowers blossoming. We demand the acknowledgement of our space in the contemporary world as Young, Indigenous and Living.

Indigenous Youth are not a relic of the past; rather, we are a promise of a better future. We thank you sincerely for reading this book.
AFRICA
Ethiopia

Chapter 1: Historic Violence and Contemporary Resistance in the Ogaden-Somali Region: A Youth Perspective

Juweria ALI (Ogaden Region, Somali People)

Background

The Ogaden, also known as the Somali Region, is the easternmost region of Ethiopia’s nine ethnic divisions. It borders Djibouti to the north, Kenya to the southwest, and Somalia to the north, east and south. Indigenous ethnic Somalis inhabit this region.

In 1884, using the arms and expertise provided by the colonialists, the Abyssinians captured Harar, a key strategic geographical point, and began raiding Ogaden Somali villages. From 1896 to 1948, Abyssinia (renaming itself Ethiopia) waged a constant war of conquest against the Somalis. Italy invaded Abyssinia in 1935 and captured it along with the Ogaden and the territories of neighboring nations. In 1941, the British defeated Italy in the Horn of Africa, and administered the Ogaden for eight years until it transferred part of the Ogaden to Ethiopia. The other parts of the region were transferred in 1954 and 1956 to Ethiopia.1

1 Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, “Member Profile, Ogaden: Ogaden National Liberation
Ethiopia gained control over the Ogaden without the knowledge or the consent of the Indigenous Peoples. This occupation of the region by Ethiopia has led to the continued confiscation of lands, crackdowns on resistance efforts, and persecution based on ethnicity. From then onwards, successive Ethiopian administrations ruthlessly oppressed the Ogaden people and whenever liberation movements seriously threatened the status-quo, a foreign power intervened to re-establish colonial rule over the Ogaden.\(^2\) The Indigenous Peoples of the Ogaden have long sought cooperation with the rest of Somalia as a means of ending the illegal Ethiopian occupation, which provided much of the antagonism for the Ogaden war in 1977, when Somalia invaded Ethiopia in support of the liberation movements inside the region. In 1984, the Ogaden National Liberation Front was established to seek the self-determination of the Somali people living under Ethiopian rule; this was formed as a national liberation movement driven by the local people, which constituted a departure from Somalia’s previous involvement in the liberation of the Ogaden.

Both the current political and humanitarian climate inside the Ogaden is dire. Access to safe drinking water, education and basic healthcare is extremely limited. The region is largely dependent on agriculture as its main source of economic stimulus, but land rights issues have been the cause of much tension between the people and the local and national governments. Under Ethiopian rule, the population of the Ogaden region has been subjected to economic and political discrimination, leading to an appalling standard of living in the region, and a lack of direct political representation. The military forces continue to commit grave human rights abuses, and the state perpetuates crimes that violate the “laws of war,” according to Human Rights Watch. Moreover, the discovery of natural resources in the Ogaden, most notably natural gas, has subjected communities living near exploration sites to continuous displacement and violence.

Control over traditional territory and the right to land are two one of the most fundamental issues faced by Indigenous Peoples globally. Forces of colonialism, neo-colonialism and capitalism have constituted a deep-seated threat against the lives and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples, their histories, languages, cultures, religions and their overall ways of life. One of the biggest challenges for Indigenous

Peoples globally is the modern state-system/governing systems—most notably, their forceful integration of diverse nations and peoples in the creation of a single unified national identity, in pursuit of a coherent national image in the international arena. Cultural uniformity and state-sponsored assimilation policies, such as the promotion of a single national language by suppressing linguistic differences, is a common strategy employed by nation-states around the world.

Ethiopia is home to diverse nations and peoples, and its modern configuration was a result of military conquests and occupations under Menelik II, who was responsible for increasing the territories controlled by historic Abyssinia by almost threefold. The forceful integration of various territories under an overarching Ethiopian governing system was supported by an equally aggressive promotion of an Ethiopian identity championed by the ruling elite. Dominant ruling groups have been described as the “the carriers of the historical civilization of semitized Ethiopia” and the “distinguishable Abyssinian type,” with their legitimacy derived from their biblical and ancestral

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connections to King Solomon and Queen Sheba. This sense of antiquity and mythical allure equipped ruling groups with the legitimacy to subjugate diverse nations and peoples, in an attempt to protect the divine and ancient character of the monarchy from any outside hostilities.

**Human rights violations**

Ethiopian state-sponsored violence against the Ogaden civilians is institutionalized through state policies and entrenched within the country’s military doctrine. Ethiopia's Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, passed in 2009, is used to silence political dissidents, opposition party members, journalists and others in civil society—and it is the Indigenous youth who are systematically targeted.6 The Charities and Societies Proclamation Law places excessive restrictions on the work of human rights organizations. Human Rights groups argue that the law itself infringes on fundamental human rights and restricts civil society groups from accomplishing their work.7

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In addition, the Ethiopian government uses tactics such as institutionalized rape and gender-based violence. Defected military officials have testified to being trained on how to use rape as a tool of intimidation. Many of the human rights violations in the Ogaden were committed in places such as the notorious Jail Ogaden and other detention centers, including underground holding facilities and military barracks. Since 1994, when the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) embarked upon an armed struggle, the region has been under a state of emergency. Essentially, there are individuals who have been missing (and presumed dead) for as long as I have been alive. For 24 years and beyond, the Ethiopian military has acted with complete impunity, causing large-scale destruction in this heavily militarized region.

In a 2018 report released by Human Rights Watch, prisoners described regular beatings by

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prison officials, either with hands, boots, gun butts, metal sticks or plastic wires. Abdusalem, a prisoner in Jail Ogaden, told Human Rights Watch, “I was kept in solitary confinement in complete darkness for most of my [three-year] detention. I was only taken out at night for torture. They [prison officials] did many things to me—they electrocuted [applied electric shocks to] my testicles, they tied wire around them, and they put a plastic bag with chili powder over my head. I often had a gag tied in my mouth so I wouldn’t scream too much. During the day, I was given very little food—one [piece of] bread and occasionally a bit of stew. They also raped my wife [who was also in Jail Ogaden]. She gave birth to a child that was not mine there.”\(^{11}\) This account is just one of many stories of the Indigenous Peoples of the Ogaden. The Ethiopian administration in the Ogaden treats the Somalis in the Ogaden as second-class citizens in their own homeland; exploits the region for economic gains in collaboration with large corporations; and deprives the Somali people of their fundamental human rights.

**Child soldiers**

One of the dire consequences of violence in the Ogaden has been the creation of a para-military force known as the Liyu Police. The Liyu Police were established in 2007 in response to an attack against Chinese oil exploration carried out by the

\(^{11}\) *Supra* note 8.
ONLF. Seventy-four Chinese and Ethiopian workers were killed in the attack. The Ethiopian federal government created the Liyu Police following the oil attack as a counter-insurgency force to patrol and incite fear among the civilian populations. Many of the Liyu Police members are young Indigenous boys and men from the region. Many of them were removed from their homes, forcefully ordered to join the Liyu Police and faced severe punishment if they refused. These young men are trained, armed, and instructed to carry out violence against their own Indigenous Peoples.

**Sexual exploitation**

In the Ogaden, sexual violence and rape is not just a consequence of conflict, but rather a deliberate military strategy employed by the Ethiopian regime. It is used to psychologically and emotionally humiliate women and men in the region. It is coordinated and used as a systematic combat tool of terror to dismantle the family unit and displace Indigenous youth and civilian populations. In addition, military personnel, or paramilitary groups such as the Liyu Police, commit sexual violence against women with impunity. The Liyu Police along with prison officials oftentimes rape multiple women at a time, in front of each

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13 Ibid.
other. This is another tool used to physiologically demean women in Jail Ogaden. Based on interviews, Human Rights Watch has documented that, “Women who said they were raped in Jail Ogaden by either Liyu Police or prison guards were either taken to a room located near the guards’ quarters or outside of their cells but within the prison complex.” Many women reported being raped multiple times over the course of their sentences. Senior officials facilitated the rape of prisoners. One former Liyu police officer described going to Jail Ogaden to “get some ladies” for Abdirahman Labagole, the head of the Liyu Police. “He told me to bring him some ladies that were in the jail. Just any ladies. We are just free to enter and take people; there is no process for us.”

The rape of women in the Ogaden has resulted in social alienation of the victims, wherein they have difficulty integrating back into their communities due to the stigma attached to sexual violence. The negative stigma associated with being the victim of rape must be addressed within the Ogaden community. This alienation has led to displacement on a mass scale. Women from the region have fled to neighboring countries precisely due to this stigma, but also for their own safety. Not a single officer has ever been held accountable for acts of rape or any form of gendered sexual violence in general in this region.

14 Supra note 8.
15 Ibid.
Lack of access to healthcare, education, and employment

Segregation and discrimination against Indigenous Somalis, in terms of education, healthcare, employment and economic development, is institutionalized. In terms of education, there is no policy of inclusion or outreach, particularly towards pastoralists who have a distinct way of life. The state-regulated education system excludes the history of the Ogaden and the ancestral cultures of the Indigenous communities there, while also excluding Ogaden youth from accessing education systems and institutions entirely. This form of alienation and marginalization has a corrosive and long-lasting impact on young people.

The United Nations has adopted several international instruments aimed to protect the rights of minorities globally. In 1960, the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) introduced the Convention against Discrimination in Education. This Convention recognizes the right of minority groups within states to carry out their own educational activities; for instance, this includes the right to establish schools and teach in Indigenous languages.\(^{16}\) The Ethiopian government has chosen not to ratify this Convention, further

highlighting their disregard in protecting disenfranchised groups. While Somali youth are victims of the same structural abuses suffered by the wider population in the Ogaden region under Ethiopian rule, there are particular sufferings unique to young people within their status as a minority. Another instrument to secure the rights of minority groups is the prominent 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly without a vote in December 1992. It is as if these rights and conventions were non-existent in the Ogaden region.

Moreover, Indigenous youth have no access to the increasingly limited healthcare facilities in the region and therefore experience fatalities from highly preventable illnesses. For instance, the alarming number of maternal deaths after childbirth, as well as the worrying infant mortality rate inside the Ogaden region, are both causes for concern. These issues are exacerbated by recurrent famines in the Horn of Africa, which claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people, including young children, in 2017 alone. The spread of the 2017

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18 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Ethiopia: New drought puts
cholera epidemic inside the region also viciously hit the agro-pastoralist community.\(^{19}\) Humanitarian organizations operate in the region on a very limited basis; the little humanitarian support the population may receive does not typically reach communities in remote areas, away from major cities and towns. Consequently, the people living in these communities tend to suffer disproportionately from neglect and marginalization at the hands of the state.

**Activism and advocacy**

Youth & Student Union (OYSU) was established in June 27, 2010, in Copenhagen, Denmark, as a way of unifying all Ogaden youth-led social justice organizations from around the world and bringing together all young people interested in and passionate about the Somali cause in the Ogaden.

OYSU is an international youth organization that advocates for the rights of the Somali people in the Ogaden region under Ethiopian occupation. It is the only youth advocacy body currently monitoring, reporting on and educating individuals and agencies on the violations and abuses committed by the Ethiopian government against Somalis living in the Ogaden region.20

OYSU focuses on organizing and mobilizing the potential of Ogaden youth both in their native region and in the diaspora. Indigenous youth from the Ogaden have strategically worked on providing a single united voice for a marginalized group within a marginalized group—the Indigenous youth. Advocacy is at the core of OYSU activities; their aim is to be present and engaged in the conversations around human rights in Ethiopia, whilst bringing the dire human rights situation in the Ogaden to a global audience.

On a local level, OYSU members raise awareness by holding lectures and workshops at

universities, aiming to engage university students, both those of allied liberation organizations and those studying the humanities who will progress to be tomorrow's leaders. OYSU educates them on the little-known humanitarian crisis in the Ogaden. OYSU also raises awareness in the wider community outside of educational institutions, holding occasional public talks. OYSU members also actively partner with local organizations to participate in local events such as Genocide Awareness Walks, parades, local festivals and other initiatives.

On the world stage, OYSU members have taken part in many conferences and hearings held at both the United Nations and the European Union. Following the success of the 2015 conference entitled “Cartoon Democracy: Authoritarian Rule and Elections in Ethiopia” which offered a platform for dialogue in which existing challenges in Ethiopia were openly addressed and possible opportunities for democratic changes were explored, youth were able to co-organize a hearing at the European Parliament called “Minority Women’s Rights: An Ethiopian Inferno?” In 2017, one of the OYSU members presented at this EU conference, highlighting the psychological traumas associated with sexual violations and how these hinder the democratic participation of women. Furthermore, in July 2017, OYSU members took part in the “United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS): A Progress Study” to document
young people’s positive contributions to peace processes and conflict resolution and to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels.\textsuperscript{21} Conciliation Resources, a peace-building organization based in London, facilitated focus groups with OYSU members for the purpose of this study and have recently published their findings.\textsuperscript{22}

**Challenges of activism**

Following the 2007 government-sponsored counter-insurgency campaign against rebel groups in the Ogaden region, an economic and media embargo was imposed by the Ethiopian government on the region and international organizations were also banned from the area. This made it extremely difficult to report on the extent of the atrocities committed by the Liyu Police and the Ethiopian federal forces. To restrict any awareness of the atrocities committed in the Ogaden region, former President Abdi Iley ran a sophisticated intelligence service that documented the activities of any human rights activists tracking this evolving situation around the world—specifically those whose


\textsuperscript{22} *Youth Aspirations for Peace and Security*, ed. Claudia Seymour (Conciliation Resources, January 2018), https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c5d032_2921dc0ce824435591edc431c35bfdc3.pdf.
families still lived in the region. Abdi Iley, the former President of the Ogaden region, delivered both threats and bribes through his most trusted staff, some of whom would personally visit youth activists. Although many youth activists received direct threats from the office of the former President via email and post regularly, and their family members living inside the harshest parts of the Ogaden region were harassed daily, this did not deter them from continuing their advocacy work.

Moreover, activists and their families are often harassed even outside the Ogaden region. Over the years, men sent by President Abdi Iley with the purpose of intimidating youth activists have approached families living in the United States and throughout Europe. This is a common practice used by Ethiopian officials to further silence youth. In the past, they have extorted money; bullied elderly parents into denouncing the human rights work carried out by their children; and forcefully recorded family members on video under

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24 Source needs to be protected.
duress. Such acts of humiliation, extortion and threatening the livelihoods of families of activists is widespread. This systematic policy of reprisals against human rights defenders is what has driven many young people to work in collaboration with human rights advocacy organizations as well as law firms to put together a case against President Abdi Iley for these acts of reprisals against citizens of the United States, United Kingdom and other countries. OYSU members have coordinated with fellow youth organizations and various human rights groups in London and organized for victims of reprisals to be interviewed by several law firms; so far, numerous interviews have been conducted and more are still underway.

One of the other key challenges faced in defending human rights in the Ogaden region is that many young people become citizens-in-exile due to their advocacy work, and they remain separated from their parents and close family members for years, unable to visit them. Not only are they not able to visit them, but they are unable to speak with them frankly on the telephone as intelligence services systematically listen in on phone calls made between human rights defenders and their

family members. Young people frequently use fake names in order to spare their family and prevent them from being harmed more than they already have because of their work. Understandably, one of the other key challenges faced is the lack of access to information on the ground; this is due to the strict media blockade that prevents any type of accurate reporting on the human rights situation of the region from being shared. This has been worsened by the regional president's use of a single media outlet to shape the news that emerges from the Ogaden; it is state-sponsored and effectively obscures any notion of reality on the ground. Thus, young people have been faced with the challenge of actually collecting reliable information from the ground. They often have to rely on local friends of theirs whose lives are put in danger each time they share information of abuses with the outside world and challenge the state-sponsored narratives used by official media outlets. Despite the serious challenges these activists face, including the loss of family members due to their human rights work, Somali youth from the Ogaden have taken it upon themselves to continue raising awareness of the concerning human rights situation in the Ogaden region.

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Resiliency and hope

The lessons we have learned from Indigenous youth in the Ogaden are remarkable. Their resilience in the face of exploitation, poverty and injustice despite decades of oppression, is something we can all learn from. Their hope and aspirations for a better tomorrow have assisted them in this quest for freedom. This resilience was proven on August 27, 2018, when a major crackdown on a known perpetrator of human rights violations and crimes took place. Abdi Iley, the regional President of the Ogaden and an autocratic ruler in the region for over seven years, was taken into custody by the Ethiopian government on that day. Iley is known for years of assaults, crimes, looting, bribery, blackmail, and injustice against the population in the Ogaden. Following Iley’s detention, many shifts have occurred in the region and things continue to change. On August 22, 2018, Mustafa Omer was appointed the interim regional President of the Ogaden. A staunch critic of Iley’s harsh policies and procedures, Omer openly spoke out against the human rights violations in the region, which resulted in Iley murdering Omer’s brother, an Indigenous young professional from the region.28 The appointment of Mustafa Omer has been welcomed as a win due to Mustafa’s active human rights work and open advocacy for improving the quality of life in the Ogaden. For

over ten years, Omer has been working for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. He recently vacated this post after taking office to lead the Somali Regional Administration. The international community, as well as the Indigenous civilian populations in the region, are hopeful that Mustafa will bring much-needed changes to the region. For many years, Indigenous youth have resisted the injustices faced in the Ogaden, despite having endured trauma, rape, torture, and forceful indoctrination intended to force them to lose their Indigenous identity. From this, we learn about the resiliency of the Indigenous youth who have stood against injustice for years. Despite the immense consequences suffered, Indigenous youth have never given up their struggle for freedom and are still hopeful for a future of well-being and dignity.

The role of the youth in rebuilding the Ogaden

Indigenous youth are at the forefront of rebuilding the Ogaden. Youth in the region are actively working on a reconciliation process that plans to heal and socially integrate displaced communities in the region. On August 14, 2018, OYSU delegates headed by OYSU Chairman Shaafi Sheekh Abdi, travelled to the Ogaden region for the first time since the organization was formed in 2010. This was made possible following Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed’s call for increased
inclusivity and greater freedoms throughout Ethiopia.

Many youth activists around the world have been unable to travel freely to the region due to the nature of the advocacy work they are involved in, and many of them have been personal victims of reprisals during the reign of Abdi Iley and earlier Ethiopian administrations. For this reason, this trip was an opportunity for the delegates to meet and collaborate with Indigenous youth who have been operating secretly inside the region. Such youth are the cornerstone of this movement, and have consistently upheld the values of justice, peace, and freedom under extremely difficult circumstances.

The youth delegates are currently in the process of engaging the local Indigenous community and gathering support and information. They are in the process of implementing a needs assessment to better identify local needs and gaps in order to strategically align resources and strengthen partnerships. Youth delegates are traveling throughout the region, even to the most remote towns and villages, to truly capture the needs and wants of the people. Youth activists plan on using the information to create initiatives that call for midnimo (“unity”), reconciliation, so the region can move forward, and the Indigenous Peoples of the Ogaden can continue to seek the fulfilment of their fundamental rights. The next generation of decision-makers and leaders emerging from the Ogaden region must be afforded the same
opportunities that other young people are given. Only the direct involvement of young people in political processes today will equip tomorrow’s leaders to make sound decisions on behalf of their people. The journey has been long but the Indigenous youth in Ogaden are hopeful. With their continued ambition, resilience, and overall aim of freedom, we are confident of better days to come in the Ogaden.
Morocco

Chapter 2: Through the Eyes of a Young Amazigh

Amnai HANDAINE (Amazigh)

For my first words in this book, I would like to take the opportunity to recall the great action initially taken by Haudenosaunee Chief Deskaheh, who was the first Indigenous leader to put the issue of Indigenous Peoples on the international intergovernmental stage; this has subsequently helped the voices of different Indigenous Peoples throughout the world to be heard and has raised awareness of their neglected conditions.

I would also like to thank the United Nations, especially the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, for giving me the opportunity to participate for the first time in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in May 2018, and to further strengthen my identity as an Amazigh.

And finally, a last thank you belongs to the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus and Columbia University for giving me the chance to share my little story through this book and to share the life of a 27 year-old Amazigh.

Through my story, I wanted to share both my personal experiences and those of other young
Amazigh people around me who also want to provide their visions and share their conditions. Their stories have been shared with me through meetings, sometimes-animated discussions, and provided testimonies of youth still living in Morocco, who have a more in-depth vision of the Amazigh situation. That vision is, of course, a subjective point of view conditioned by different life experiences which could be different from one person to another.

Before getting to the thick of the subject, and as this book is aimed at an international audience, it is important to first introduce who the Amazigh are by explaining our origins and our history.

The “Imazighen,” “Amazighs” or “Berbers” (which means “free man” in Amazigh language) are the ethnic inhabitants of North Africa, spread over an area that spans the Atlantic Ocean to the Oasis of Siwa in Egypt, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Benue River in Niger.

The origin of the Amazighs is a question that has been raised throughout the history of North Africa. It has generated much debate and countless theories, contributed by historical figures such as Herodotus, Ibn Khaldun, Thomas Shaw, and Guiseppe Sergi. Today, most historians and archaeologists believe we are the descendants of an Indigenous population of North Africa, a paleolithic
Ibéromaurusienne culture, which then became Mesolithic Caspian.\(^1\)

Paintings and various forms of art, including scripts written in Tifinagh (which is the Amazigh written alphabet), have been discovered in the region and they indicate that the Maghreb region was inhabited by Amazighs since at least 10,000 BC. One of the most important event of the Amazigh history is that relating to the Kingdom of Numidia. King Massinissa was the first man to form a state, which was called Numidia, by unifying several provinces bounded on the west by the kingdom of Mauretania, on the east by the territory of Carthage, on the north by the Mediterranean Sea, and to the south by the Sahara Desert.\(^2\)

The Amazigh people then faced several invasions, mainly religious in nature. The Christian invasion of the Roman era and the Muslim invasion at the beginning of the Middle Ages both faced remarkable resistance from the Amazigh, most notable among them from the great Kahena, also known as Dihya in Berber.\(^3\) But it was the Muslim

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\(^1\) Serge Lancel, *L'Algérie antique - De Massinissa à saint Augustin* (Place des Victoires, February 2014).


\(^3\) Dihya is a Berber warrior queen who fought the Umayyads during the Muslim conquest of the Maghreb
conquest that deeply transformed the Amazighs because today, Islam is the dominant religion of the “free men” that we are, and Arabic is the main language spoken. This is mainly due to intermarriage and state assimilation programs.

Today, the majority of Berbers still live in North Africa; we find them in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Egypt, but also in the Canary Islands. Abroad, large diasporas live in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Canada.

Amazigh identity is more than just language and ethnicity and includes the entire history and geography of North Africa. We are not an entirely homogenous ethnic group, and we cover a range of societies and ancestries.

In Morocco, although Arabic is mainly spoken, Amazigh is still an active language. It is estimated by the government that the number of Amazigh speakers is 45% of the population; the Amazigh associations claim that the rate of Amazigh speakers in the region is closer to 65% or 70%.\(^4\) This means that we may be around 20 million

Berbers in Morocco and around 30 million throughout North Africa and the Sahel.

The Amazigh founded several organizations over the last few decades, among them the Amazigh Cultural Movement (ACM) and Tamunt N Iffus, to defend our rights. Tamunt N Iffus is a civil society movement based on the universal values of human rights. There are more than 800 Amazigh associations established throughout Morocco nowadays, and we actively participate in collaboration with government, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations to succeed in implementing our objectives.

Personally, I was able to participate in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) for the 2018 session through the Indigenous People of Africa Co-Coordinating Committee (IPACC), which links 150 Indigenous organizations representing six regions of Africa. Through this organization, I delivered several recommendations for the development and improvement of the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Africa, including the Amazigh Peoples, on behalf of the IPACC, and these are intended to be taken into account by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) following the Permanent Forum procedure of decision-making.5

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5 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Permanent Forum,” United Nations
Several successes and achievements in the field of Indigenous Peoples’ rights have been obtained in North Africa, including the creation of the Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) in Morocco. The mission of this Institute is to advise King Mohamed VI on different measures to save and promote the Amazigh language and culture. In collaboration with the governmental authorities and other concerned institutions, IRCAM contributes to the implementation of the policies adopted by His Majesty to allow the introduction of Amazigh into the educational system and ensure its influence in the social and cultural spheres, as well as in national, regional and local media.

This is an encouraging response to the demands of Indigenous youth during recent decades. However, like many Indigenous Peoples around the world, Amazigh youth have faced and still face many challenges, especially in an era ruled by rapid and powerful upheavals. Through my experience as Moroccan-Amazigh, I have realized that we confront many socio-cultural difficulties.

First of all, language constitutes a major hindrance for Berber integration in a country where the Arabic language in the Moroccan dialect is official and predominant in almost all public and

private institutions: schools, hospitals, banks, etc. At the same time, the different Amazigh languages have been neglected or even outright despised for a long time. There are three main Amazigh languages in Morocco:

- The Chleuh, spoken by nearly 8 million people, mainly in the High Atlas, the Anti-Atlas, the Souss and the North of the Sahara, as well as in big cities like Casablanca, Marrakech and Rabat; it is the primary dialect of the Amazigh;
- Tamazight (or Tamazight of central Morocco, formerly Beraber), spoken by 4 to 5 million people, mainly in the High and Middle Atlas; and
- Rifain, spoken by nearly 3 million people, mainly in the Rif Mountains.

Other varieties of Amazigh languages also exist in Morocco, such as the Sanhadji of the Srayr (about 40,000 speakers in the Riff Mountains), the Ghomari (about 10,000 speakers in the Rif Mountains) and the Berber of Figuig (about 30,000 speakers in the area of Figuig).\(^6\)

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This “linguistic wall” has led to the repression of young Amazighs who cannot find or create their place in society and often have to regroup within communities of other Indigenous youth in order to socialize. This same obstacle is the cause of many academic and educational gaps, because Arabic is the only language taught at school and language transition for young Amazighs—from Indigenous languages to Arabic—is by no means assured. Several times, I have witnessed discrimination and mockery towards young people, myself included, even when we are trying to speak the Moroccan dialect with an accent—and we silently suffered it. This type of infantile malice greatly contributes to the creation of an inferiority complex among young Amazighs, which strongly affects their childhoods and later their ability to evolve within Moroccan society. It ends with the continuation of a vicious cycle since, later, the lack of success in the education system leads to unemployment or involvement in crime.

Another distressing aspect of this discrimination is the outright loss of Amazigh culture due to a lack of self-confidence. In the Sahel region, the transmission of Indigenous culture to young people via Tamachekt, the Amazigh dialect of the Tuareg people, is endangered by:

- The marginalization, insecurity and oppression experienced by the Tuareg people;
The inadequacy of education systems that reflect their way of life; and
The lack of national media using the Tamachek language.

These issues have been known in Moroccan society for many years, and some improvements and changes have been made in favor of the promotion of all the different Amazigh languages. Some of these actions have subsequently born fruit, including the nationalization of the Tamazight television channel.

On the professional level, Amazigh people face severe unemployment, especially in the Rif region. Many employers, especially those from private companies, prefer Arabic speakers rather than Amazigh speakers, even if language skills are not required for the job. This discrimination is largely present in major urban centers such as Casablanca or Rabat. Some Amazighs feel they ought to deny their Berber origins to find a job. That constitutes a loss of Amazigh culture among young people, as they look to further their employment opportunities.

Morocco was absent from the UN General Assembly during the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

(UNDRIP), and has not ratified the ILO (International Labor Organization) Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Unfortunately, this does not help to counter the scourge of discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in Morocco. I encourage the Moroccan government to ratify ILO Convention No. 169 and to adopt the UNDRIP for greater recognition of the Amazigh condition and the rights of the Amazigh people.

Many Amazighs are still part of the rural population of Morocco. These rural areas experience great poverty and lack of access to education or health facilities. Single-parent households, youth and farmers are the people most affected by rural poverty. The Moroccan government must do more to remedy their living situations.

More and more, the social movements of the Amazigh people are active in protecting the land and irrigation rights of rural collectivities. In many cases, the Moroccan state has encouraged the privatization of tribal grazing lands in order to promote the development of the tourism, agricultural, and mining sectors; or, they have

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commandeered large tracts of land in order to create nature reserves or develop infrastructure such as roads and telecommunication lines. In a number of instances, these land expropriations caused local controversy by impeding rural communities from water and firewood collection, or by alienating territory traditionally held for collective use. Activists have founded federations demanding fiscal and territorial self-determination in the northern Rif Mountains, the southeastern pre-Saharan oasis, and the southwestern Souss Valley.

It is becoming clear today that the future of the Amazigh peoples will be in the hands of the younger generations. The most difficult years have been a relentless fight by our elders, who have achieved much with great bravery. The changes and improvements regarding the rights of Amazighs, which a few years earlier appeared utopian, are now indeed real. The torch will have to be taken by us, the youth, to perpetuate what our ancestors have always wanted for our people.

Today, we face another phenomenon as omnipresent as the dominions that the Amazigh people have experienced in the past. This phenomenon is even more terrifying because it is impossible to identify clearly.

Globalization marks the hegemony of a single model in all its aspects; the most prominent model is the American one. It is a theory, a way of life made for a “merchant society, transparent, mobile,
without roots, without borders, where money is king and the state far away,” if I borrow the words of the journalist Jean Sévillia. These convergent evolutions tend towards a dominant world ideology marked by the concepts of free trade and political democracy, which are spoken of as the sources of this freedom, implying interdependence between the two.

Globalization is accompanied by the domination of an “Anglo-American language,” which is most evident on the internet. This domination could be qualified as linguistic imperialism, and the Indigenous languages are most threatened. The dominance of English is also strongly manifested through American sociocultural influence. The United States of America has a very strong influence in the economic, financial, scientific and technological fields, as well as in entertainment such as through music and film. This influence tends to spread to the Indigenous Peoples and Amazigh people especially, which leads to neglect of the potential evolution of the Amazigh languages. Eventually, this would certainly lead to a “dead language” unable to exist in the present era while all these new technologies abound. The Amazigh language is already suffering from this.

According to UNESCO, of the 6,000 languages spoken worldwide, 3,000 are currently at risk. At the dawn of the twenty-first century,

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linguistic diversity is increasingly under threat.\textsuperscript{10} Through various projects, such as the promotion of multilingual fair communication, certain actors are trying to fight against this linguistic domination.

The Amazigh people, like many other Indigenous Peoples, are therefore subject to the monoculturalism of globalization. Many young people, myself included, have a hard time perpetuating our culture and traditions, language being the first to suffer. This is why many organizations are developing media projects such as movies and television shows to entertain the Amazigh population, and many historians are engaged in continuously improving the state of Amazigh literature and updating it for our new era.

In this context, I have several final recommendations to governments, Indigenous Peoples, and the United Nations:

\textbf{For Governments:}

1. Implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and have it translated into Indigenous languages so that Indigenous youth are aware of their rights enshrined in the Declaration.

2. Constitutionally recognize the Indigenous languages of the Peoples who inhabit your state, to make Indigenous youth proud of their identity and to ensure continuity of these languages.

3. Introduce the teaching of Indigenous languages in the education system from kindergarten to university, providing training on Indigenous languages to professionals.

4. Support the use of Indigenous languages in the media so that young people can connect to their traditions, and combat globalization and mono-culturalism.

**For Indigenous Peoples:**

1. Consolidate local Indigenous networks to exchange experiences and promote Indigenous successes and improvements.

2. Increase awareness among Indigenous women to maintain their languages at home and teach them to their children.

3. Support and encourage Indigenous youth to study their own culture and history.

**For the United Nations:**

1. After the proclamation of 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, the UN system should take active and sustained measures to support actions for the strengthening of Indigenous languages.

2. The General Assembly should proclaim the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.
3. Reserve a Global Fund to promote Indigenous languages.
4. Establish an international United Nations prize for states that have revitalized Indigenous languages in the context of “equality of languages.”
5. Establish a UNESCO prize for Indigenous organizations that have worked for the promotion of Indigenous Peoples’ languages.
ASIA
Philippines

Chapter 3: Carrying on the Fight

Aisah Czarriane MARIANO (Kankana-ey, Itogon Benguet)

“...Such arrogance to speak of owning the land when we instead are owned by it. How can you own that which will outlive you? Only the race owns the land because the race lives forever.” - Macli-ing Dulag

Macli-ing Dulag, a Cordillera martyr of the Butbut tribe in Tinglayan, Kalinga, Philippines, uttered these words during the famous Chico Mega Dam Struggle. He was killed on April 24, 1980, by state agents because of his resistance efforts and his assertion of the importance of protecting ancestral land. The date of his death is now being commemorated by the Peoples’ movement as Cordillera Day. He is one of the many inspirations for me to continue to be an Indigenous Peoples’ human rights defender. I have been a part of the Indigenous Peoples’ struggle since I was studying in college. Little did I know of my culture as I grew up in the city, yet the work of urban-based Indigenous Peoples’ organizations has led me to realize the different issues faced by Indigenous Peoples. It started with a question of “why” and “how” Indigenous youth can better the situation of Indigenous Peoples and become present and future leaders.
When I was younger, I remember one time, as I was going to my hometown in Itogon, Benguet, I noticed a mountain up-close. The mountain had no trees, it looked dry, and it was surrounded by a green-looking pond. I found out that these are effects of the destructive open-pit mining that takes place throughout the Philippines and that the green pond is the toxic tailings waste of the Benguet Corporation, a mining company that has wreaked havoc in our province for more than 100 years.

During the annual Cordillera Day in 2014, I became a part of a theater performance. The story was about the struggle of Indigenous Peoples in the Cordillera region and their fight against the construction of the World Bank-funded Chico Dam in Kalinga and against massive illegal logging by the Cellophil Resources Corporation in a forest managed and preserved by Indigenous communities in Abra. The story, as written and told by elders, was an eye-opener as to how brave the women were because they were at the front line of mobilizations, with their young clinging to them and the men supporting them. At the same time, my eyes were opened to how the youth were also part of the struggle by educating their people on the issue and by presenting actions that would enable the community to win this fight against such a large corporation. As I was portraying one of the women in the theater performance, I felt agitation and at the same time pride as Indigenous Peoples were able to stop such a destructive project. Through that
performance, I felt the power of collective actions of Indigenous Peoples; I also felt that these stories should be passed down to this generation of youth.

Upon joining Indigenous youth organizations, I learned that other provinces are also affected by destructive projects, such as irresponsible and unregulated large-scale mining and dam projects twinned with militarization, causing unimaginable effects of environmental destruction, community displacement and continuous human rights violations. These are some of the reasons that, despite that fact that we as Indigenous Peoples live in areas with rich forests, free-flowing rivers, and abundant natural resources, Indigenous Peoples are still considered as part of the marginalized sector of society. Being educated by my experiences and reminded of the task ahead, I have committed myself to become a full-time volunteer for Indigenous Peoples’ organizations. Working with the Cordilleran Youth Center, I became aware that we have similar issues to other Indigenous Peoples throughout the globe. Thus, we have to link with other Indigenous youth organizations to strengthen our unity. I learned through my local organization about the importance of reliving history, as this is where lessons can also be learned about the vital role of youth in this struggle.

Now, as a part of the Asia Young Indigenous Peoples Network (AYIPN), it has come as a realization to me that Indigenous youth can and
will change the path to a better and more sustainable future for Indigenous Peoples worldwide.

**Asia Young Indigenous Peoples Network (AYIPN)**

AYIPN, formerly the Asia Pacific Indigenous Youth Network (APIYN), serves as a regional network of Indigenous youth organizations and groups in Asia. It is a non-stock (meaning it does not have owners represented by shares of AYIPN stock) and non-profit network which relies on the commitment of its member organizations and support from its partners and other networks. In general, it aims to contribute to building the capacities of grassroots Indigenous youth in the Asia region while maintaining linkages at the international level in advancing and defending the Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination, national patrimony and sovereignty, cultural integrity and heritage.

The network traces its roots to the first International Indigenous Youth Conference (IIYC) convened by the Cordillera Peoples Alliance-Youth Commission (CPA-YC) in 2002. That international gathering developed and strengthened solidarity among Indigenous youth representatives from around the world. It recognized the need to empower Indigenous youth.
Through the various activities that the network has launched, and different conferences that member organizations have attended, a clearer picture began to emerge that Indigenous Peoples—especially the youth—continue to experience government neglect, discrimination and continuing effects of globalization, thus prompting more Indigenous youth to defend and assert Indigenous Peoples’ rights.

**Issues**

Indigenous Peoples continue to be over-represented among the poor, the illiterate, and the unemployed. Indigenous Peoples number about 370 million around the world. While they constitute approximately 5% of the world’s population, Indigenous Peoples make up 15% of the world’s poor. They also make up about one-third of the world’s 900 million extremely poor rural people.¹

While attending a regional youth capacity workshop training in March 2017, different Indigenous youth organizations from Asia were reporting on their issues and how they came to act

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in resolving these problems. What struck me the most was the fact that we all decided to be part of Indigenous Peoples’ organizations, all for the cause of fighting for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, sometimes even to the point where our lives are placed at risk. As the training came to an end, I realized that the situation in the Philippines is not that different from that of other countries.

The influx of westernization in society, the history of colonialism and the continuous process of modernization in the guise of bogus development has negative impacts on Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth are faced with challenges and issues in the fields of land, culture and identity; education and employment; participation and inclusion, especially for women; and human rights violations.

a) Land and culture

Land is life, identity and culture for Indigenous Peoples. However, extractive industries and megaprojects, such as dams, mining and plantations, threaten Indigenous communities and their territories. Indigenous communities are forced to leave their ancestral lands as a result of land grabbing, destruction and militarization. Such conditions are a significant factor in the loss of identity and culture among Indigenous youth.

Culture is thereby weakened as the alienation of Indigenous Peoples from their land
weakens the continued practice of their Indigenous knowledge and socio-political institutions. In addition, elders are no longer able to practice their rituals, customs and traditions, and systems of governance. Furthermore, there is also the intentional miseducation and discrimination that promote stereotypes of Indigenous Peoples as backward or uncivilized people, causing Indigenous youth to be ashamed of their own culture and identity. Thus, Indigenous culture and valuable Indigenous knowledge and practices are disintegrating, weakening and, even worse, being lost.

b) Education and employment

Education is a basic right for every child; however, Indigenous youth are continually fighting for their right to quality, culturally sensitive, accessible education, since state and government support for this kind of education is often insufficient. Governments in developing countries often allocate a very small budget for education, while encouraging the further commercialization of education. This situation in turn deprives Indigenous youth of attending school, as fees are expensive and other requirements for school are such that marginalized families cannot afford them.

In addition, the formal education system is seldom responsive to the particularities and specific needs of Indigenous youth and children. Schools are often found in city centers, and appropriately sized
classrooms, adequately trained teachers and books do not reach far-flung areas, where Indigenous Peoples are often located. In addition, the language that is used in classrooms is often a common and internationally used language, such as English. Indigenous youth have different ethnolinguistic languages that they use because of their heritage. Indigenous Peoples speak the overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages and represent 5,000 different cultures.\(^2\) Unfortunately, these languages are also being lost.

As education for Indigenous Peoples in remote areas is a low priority for many states and governments, it is also difficult for Indigenous youth to look for job opportunities once they either graduate or age out of the school system. Indigenous youth who cannot attend school prefer to look for a job to help their family meet everyday needs. The percentage of Indigenous youth who are literate and the percentage of Indigenous students who are attending higher education is still considerably behind in comparison with mainstream students. The reasons for this are insufficient schools in majority Indigenous areas, language-cultural difficulties, poverty, lack of teachers from Indigenous groups and poor communication and transport channels, such as accessible roads to Indigenous communities. All of these difficulties affect the academic results of Indigenous students

as well as their employment opportunities. As a result, Indigenous youth are pursuing alternate sources of income such as migrating from their villages to the city for low-level jobs; engaging in prostitution, crime, drug addiction, corruption, or suicide; joining armed groups; and increasing human trafficking. Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines are rarely found in high-level jobs and in government services, as they need to compete with mainstream youth for these positions.

c) Youth participation and inclusion of women

Indigenous women and children are the most vulnerable members of society, as sexual violence, such as rape and harassment, continue due to a strong patriarchal system and the misogynistic views held by many. Women are viewed as sexual objects and continue to be the victims of violence. In the Philippines, sexual and domestic violence is still prevalent in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), despite the existence of laws for protection such as the Anti Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC). These violations can be found in forced sex that leads to teenage pregnancy, human trafficking of children, and the continuing disrespect of the rights of women.

There is also less participation of Indigenous women in decision-making policies in communities and even less for Indigenous youth. In customary practices of some communities, only men are allowed to make decisions, while women are found cooking and tending to the needs of the family. Also, youth are often given tedious work. At a young age, they tend to farms, participate in the family’s economic needs—thereby disabling them from attending school—and are not invited to share their voice by participating in any political roles. Although some communities are now giving Indigenous youth the freedom to speak, act and decide on community matters, there remains much room for improvement.

Safe spaces for Indigenous youth to organize and mobilize themselves are limited as well. Providing such space provides Indigenous youth with confidence and a sense of belonging in society.

d) Indigenous human rights defenders

Indigenous Peoples’ territories in Asia continue to be heavily militarized, resulting in massive human rights violations. Our assertions of the rights over our lands and resources, as well as our assertion that our fundamental human rights be met, have been received with repression, deception, imposition and militarization. Indigenous youth are being subjected to intimidation, harassment, illegal arrest and detention. Killings and several cases of
rape of Indigenous women and youth have been documented in India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Burma.⁴

The sustained militarization of Indigenous territories aims to disrupt and weaken community cohesion and the consistent practice of socio-cultural systems, in order to further divide and rule the people. When under a constant state of militarization, the elders and community members cannot practice, teach and demonstrate thoroughly to the children and youth their socio-cultural practices. In this way, Indigenous youth suffer from a fundamental lack of understanding, knowledge and appreciation of their own distinct culture. This is one major factor causing an identity crisis amongst Indigenous youth.⁵

In her 2018 report, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, mentioned that: “I continue to receive reports of escalations in conflicts and continued militarisation on Indigenous peoples’ ancestral lands; displacements,

⁵ Ibid.
dispossessions and violence; peaceful mobilisations that are countered with attacks, criminalisation and harassments; and the continued, systematic discrimination against Indigenous peoples and the denial of their identity and rights. These violations are part of the everyday lives and struggles of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous human rights defenders across the world.”

There is a need to protect Indigenous human rights defenders, as political repression is becoming a trend among governments dealing with Indigenous leaders. From the training and engagement that we have with Indigenous youth, we are growing increasingly concerned as our youth are now targets of state persecution and vilification.

I question the private sector and some states and governments on the “need” to silence people who are genuinely fighting for and protecting their human rights. As an Indigenous youth, our struggle for self-determination and protection of ancestral land is right and just. I remember stories shared by my fellow Indigenous youth in which they experienced being tailed by a group of authorities, their information taken and sometimes being threatened. If one hears stories from grassroots

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community organizations, they will always say, “I am only protecting my land and people.” Is there something wrong with not allowing a mining project to enter the community since it will only destroy the environment and the people?

My family is experiencing such human rights violations as well. My mother, Rachel Mariano, an Indigenous community health worker, submitted herself to court on September 17, 2018, for trumped-up charges filed against her by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The charges were filed in August 2017, then in October 2017, on three counts: homicide, frustrated murder, and murder. The last charge—murder—is what she is facing now and the reason she is in jail. All her life, my mother has devoted herself to bringing health services to Indigenous communities in far-flung areas. She is the reason why communities, reached by her services and the services of others doing the same work, have basic knowledge of first aid and are able to promptly decide on what to do about certain illnesses. Although she is not a doctor, many call her such. She has carried me along to these communities and to see the situations there first-hand is heartbreaking. The road going to one particular community takes 13 hours by bus followed by a six-hour walk. While their health training was ongoing, one of the elders said to me: “It is better to die immediately than to get sick.” He further explained that in dying, only his funeral would have to be taken care of, but if he gets sick, his transportation to the hospital, his associated bills
and medicine would only burden his family. This is an example of why my mother continues to advocate for a proper healthcare system for Indigenous Peoples.

Activists are not terrorists. Development workers are not terrorists. Nor are they criminals.

**Good practices**

Despite all of these issues that are experienced first-hand on the ground, Indigenous youth continue to empower and strengthen themselves. One of the activities that member organizations of AYIPN do at the grassroots level is capacity skills training. Capacity skills training is a way to raise awareness of the various challenges and conditions among Indigenous youth by providing them with knowledge of their rights. These member organizations of AYIPN have established themselves at the grassroots level and most have been working for Indigenous youth even before becoming a member of the network.

I admire the work that these Indigenous youth leaders perform in their communities and they continue to be an inspiration for me and others to continue working and advocating for Indigenous youth rights. Listed below are some of the many activities of member organizations, especially on raising awareness of issues facing their Indigenous Peoples among other network members.
The Chittagong Hill Tracts Youth Headman-Karbari Network, Bangladesh, organized an Indigenous youth leadership training entitled “Training on Land Rights and Climate Change.” This was held at the Hill Resource Center, Rangamati Hill District, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. It is noteworthy that the majority of the participants in the training were young Indigenous women. Some of their elders were also invited to share their wisdom and experiences with the youth participants on how they nurture their lands and other natural resources.

Alongside Jharkhand Indigenous and Tribal Peoples for Action (JITPA), located in India, the National Indigenous Youth Network of India (who are founded and managed by JITPA) organized the Second National Indigenous Youth Conference in Bagaicha, Ranchi, Jharkhand, India, with the theme “Converging Diversity into Integrity.” This four-day event had the participation of Indigenous youth from eleven states of India and guests from Nepal. Among the highlights of the conference were educational discussions and workshops on the key issues confronting Indigenous youth and the various Indigenous Peoples of India, including militarization and human rights violations, land problems and lack of adequate quality education, among others. The young participants also learned skills in drafting position papers, memoranda, letters to authorities and press releases, as well as skills related to media engagement and conducting dialogues with authorities.
The Cordillera Youth Center (CYC) and Progressive Igorots for Social Action (PIGSA), Philippines, organizes a Kaigorotan Youth Week which is celebrated annually by the Indigenous youth in Baguio City, Philippines. This annual commemoration is held to remember the Indigenous youth struggles in the city during their campaign against the commercialization and bastardization of the Igorot culture in the early 1990s. In 2018, under the theme “Engaging the Indigenous youth in the defense of land, life and resources,” the various Indigenous youth organizations in the city, including the Regional Secretariat of AYIPN as part of the commemorative committee, celebrated KYW through cultural workshops where the youth participants shared their cultural skills with fellow youth. In addition, CYC is currently acting as the secretariat of the AYIPN.

LIMA Indigenous Youth Working Group, in Taiwan, together with students of Shih Hsin University, conduct an annual Indigenous youth exchange with Indigenous youth in the Philippines. The exchange is about learning and sharing cultures and practices and also learning about the present issues facing Indigenous youth in each country.

Youth for Environment Education and Development Foundation (YFEED), in Nepal, conducts Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) orientation workshops in schools and universities. They also co-organized the second International
Youth Forum on Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goals in Kathmandu, Nepal, in 2018. The workshop and training were fruitful for all members and helped these members to understand the SDGs.

Barisan Pemuda Adat Nusantara (BPAN), in Indonesia, conducts an annual community immersion in Indigenous Peoples’ communities, where participants learn Indigenous cultural traditions and conduct activities to strengthen their own organization and leadership.

Belia Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia (JBOAS Belia/JOAS), in Malaysia, together with the Indigenous Youth’s Council Sabah (MBOA Sabah) and more than 200 Indigenous youth, organized for youth representing more than 20 Indigenous communities from all over Malaysia to come together to celebrate Indigenous Youth Day on September 16, 2018. This is the first time that many of these Indigenous youth had gathered with other Indigenous youth in one place, and this was an excellent opportunity to learn and share issues to increase awareness and capacity building among themselves.

The Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA), in Cambodia, recently conducted an action protest in October 2018 to stop illegal logging by a private company in the Kbalromeas village. These youth are also active in the campaign against the Lower Sesan 2
hydropower dam project that threatens the vitality and biodiversity of two of the Mekong River’s most significant tributaries.

The above-mentioned are some of the many activities that member organizations of AYIPN are doing at the grassroots level.

At the regional level, AYIPN and its members provide venues for Indigenous youth to meet and organize, such as the International Indigenous Youth Conference (IIYC). Aside from these organizations, below are some other Indigenous youth organizations encountered by AYIPN: Covalima Youth Center (Timor Leste), Youth Circle (Myanmar), Youth Federation in Nepal (YFIN), Newar Student Association (Nepal), Ping-pu Taiwan Indigenous Youth (Taiwan) and the Indigenous Student Council (Bangladesh). In 2016, AYIPN held its third IIYC where Indigenous youth leaders gathered and updated themselves on emerging issues and actions that needed to be taken in response. The conference offered spaces and opportunities for grassroots Indigenous youth organizations to express their ideas, concerns and voices on important issues occurring at the global level. The discussions and sharing included the application of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); Indigenous self-determination; international policies, mechanisms and processes for resolving issues faced by Indigenous Peoples; and the Sustainable Development Goals. Other topics that are relevant
to Indigenous youth, such as the environmental crisis, education, employment, health and culture, were also tackled. From the discussions and workshops, the Indigenous youth participants studied the appropriate frameworks and skills on these themes that are relevant to them and their communities. The sharing included elders, who challenged the youth to act as their country’s hope.

Additionally, at least 200 youth leaders from various countries in Asia gathered for the International Youth Solidarity Conference, which was held on September 2, 2017, in Quezon City, Philippines. The conference had the theme “Strengthening the Role of the Youth in Advancing Peoples’ Rights and Self Determination.” The young participants learned about the key concerns and successful struggles of the National Minority and Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines, the international situation of Indigenous Peoples, and the vital role of Indigenous youth. In the afternoon, Indigenous youth leaders from the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Indonesia shared their experiences in handling issues such as plunder and militarism, culture and identity loss, and community organizing and action.

In the international arena, Indigenous youth organizations and individuals regularly engage in different mechanisms such as attending both the preparatory meetings for the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous
Peoples, and bringing the recommendations from the meetings to the forum itself. Representatives of AYIPN from the Philippines, Taiwan, Burma, India, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Malaysia and Bangladesh participate in the annual Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting on UN Mechanisms. This is a venue where participants learn the processes involved in the various UN mechanisms that are relevant to Indigenous Peoples. They also share the current conditions of Indigenous Peoples in their communities and, from these discussions, the participants come up with resolutions and statements that may be submitted in the upcoming United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues or the upcoming Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**Passing on the light**

“We must struggle for a better life. Never give up and stand up for our rights. Defend our land, the source of life. Learn from the past and carry on the fight.”

This was a song composed and sang by the AYIPN secretariat about the vital role of youth in our society today. Being an Indigenous youth of today is quite challenging as issues affecting Indigenous Peoples are still regarded by society as insignificant concerns. We are at a period in our lives where we have the most energy and time, we have the ease of learning and adapting, and we are open to change with aspirations of being that
change ourselves. Our role for today is to continue passing on good practices that we learned from our elders and to become stewards of change and development for our People.

Upon visiting different places in Asia, I saw how Indigenous youth can be leaders and change makers. They are able to pass on the culture by learning and performing it in different ways.

The youth carry a greater responsibility as the next holder and changer of the future. It takes courage to be in our line of work, where lives are often at risk. It takes passion and motivation to be able to stand with the oppressed and marginalized and join them in their struggle. It takes collective power to be able to achieve significant change.

Let us recall the Indigenous youth leaders who dedicated themselves to serving the people and at the same time let us take lessons from the work that they have put in. Let us continue to be pillars for sustainable development by working hand in hand. Let us link with the oppressed and marginalized sectors of society in crafting a better future for us all.
Chapter 4: The Life of an Indigenous Youth

Abhinav JOSHI (Newar, Patan, Lalitpur)

Being an Indigenous youth can provide a world full of opportunities as well as serve as a barrier. Youth hold the power to shift the dynamics of the world. If we want change, we must provide leadership support for youth to make change possible. Indigenous youth, in particular, continue to face racism and discrimination and are marginalized in society, but when they have a sense of belonging and a strong cultural identity, they become resilient, powerful individuals. They have roots through their ancestral lineage, wisdom, and intelligence. They are the future leaders of their communities. It is critical to restore leadership from the erosion of their traditional knowledge practices and ancestral lands so that they can begin to create a more sustainable, interdependent system for the coming generations.

The Newar community is one of the oldest communities living in Nepal, with a history dating back many centuries. The Newars are one of the many Indigenous communities that reside in the country of Nepal. This is an Indigenous community that has its own separate knowledge systems and culture. One of the chief systems in this community is that of the community organization known as
“Guthi.” The “Guthis” are Indigenous organizations of the Newari community that oversee social and cultural functioning of the Indigenous community. Every Newar is in one way or another bound to the Guthi. This is one of the main reasons for the respect earned by the Newari community in Nepal. This is a form of community organization that has provided the Newari society with sound and stable management since ancient times. This is, in a sense, one of the Indigenous knowledge systems of the Newari community. The Newar community speaks the Newari language and their native settlement has been in the Kathmandu Valley since ancient times. Migration out of the valley began in the Medieval Period (Bikram Era 937-1826) and the Newari people have settled in many countries around the world, especially in recent times. Amongst Nepal's various ethnic communities, Newar is a cultured and, as a whole, prosperous community.

The Newari community has its own caste systems. It is composed of followers of both Hinduism as well as Buddhism. Due to this, both the Hindu Newar community and the Buddhist Newar community have separate caste systems. While the Rajopadhyaya, Shrestha, Pradhan and Joshi are regarded as the highest castes among the Hindu Newars, the Bajracharya, Shakya and Rajopadhyaya are regarded as the highest castes among the Buddhist Newars. The Newari community has over one hundred and fifteen different surnames.
I have had the privilege of meeting many other Newari and non-Newari people in my life, and this range of experiences has allowed me to understand my role in relation to my Indigenous community as well as in relation to the non-Indigenous world around me. There have been moments where I felt extremely supported and there have also been moments when I experienced clashes between my ideas and the ideas of my community. Each moment has taught me something and helped me understand the world around me. This chapter will showcase my experiences as an Indigenous youth in various sectors, primarily in the area of human rights.

Human rights are one of the most important topics of discussion in the present context of the world. It is a topic spoken about by many but understood by few. People claim they advocate for human rights but in truth, many are not even aware of what human rights are. I have been working in the field of human rights education for about a year. Before that, I knew that we have rights because we are humans but not any more than that. Most of the youth that I encounter, in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, are in most cases unaware of human rights and also unaware of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This lack of basic information on their rights is one of the major challenges in the field of human rights among Indigenous youths.
The government of Nepal has signed the UDHR and has recognized many rights for all of its citizens. One of these is the right to equality. However, this is one of the human rights of the Indigenous community in Nepal that has not been recognized by the government. The participation of Indigenous Peoples in politics and in the public sector is quite limited. The word “Indigenous” itself has become a form of discrimination. The word “Indigenous” separates the Indigenous People from the rest of the population and implies that such people are supposedly backwards. This line of thought has become quite prevalent in the present Nepalese society. The government of Nepal has been unable to guarantee the right to equality for Indigenous youth in every sector, although it claims that it has.

In the same way, the human rights of many other Indigenous communities have also been exploited. The systems and beliefs that have existed among the various communities of Nepal have created a barrier between various communities. For example, the Brahmin community of Nepal does not accept the partaking of buffalo meat whereas the Newari community is one of those communities that consumes buffalo meat in large quantities. Due to this, the traditional Brahmins cannot stand the presence of the Newari people. Right to equality has been officially recognized for all, but can we say that the right has been implemented for all?
I have conducted a few human rights seminars in various schools and colleges as a part of my duty as a human rights educator. In all the institutions where I conducted these seminars, my first question has always been, “What are human rights?” To my surprise, not even a single student has been able to give an answer to this question. This is a topic that has been ignored in most educational institutions.

Just as I am an Indigenous youth, I am also a social work student. During my course of study, I have seen many Indigenous youths from various Indigenous communities. As I travelled to different parts of the country for my fieldwork, I saw many different Indigenous communities all experiencing similar discrimination. For example, in 2017, I travelled to the district of Jhapa in the easternmost corner of Nepal. Jhapa, a region famous for its tea gardens and factories, is populated by people of varied communities. However, regardless of which area I visited, the people of the Indigenous communities were either working as laborers in the tea gardens and factories or running extremely small businesses. Not one garden or factory was owned by an Indigenous person.

People believe that all the various communities live in peace and harmony with each other in Nepal. It is claimed that there is no barriers between the communities. However, I say that this is not true. Though the youths are taking steps to
make this harmony a reality, such efforts have not been fully successful in many cases. I think an actual incident might be able to explain this better than simple statements. However, in order to protect the right to privacy of my friend and her family, I will not use their real names. I have a friend, Anna, who belongs to the Brahmin (Bahun) community. Her elder brother, Rohan, loved a Newari girl, Anu, but their love was not accepted by Anna’s father, Manish, and her uncles. However, their love was accepted by the rest of the family, as the rest of the family members accepted inter-caste relationships. Rohan, therefore, ran away with Anu. Even today, Manish does not let Rohan attend family functions or stay at their home. As Manish lives in another district and visits his wife and daughters only at certain periods of time, Rohan and his mother and sisters tend to meet while their father is away. This is a situation that was created by the dislike and distrust that exists between the people of these two communities, simply because of their Indigenous identities.

Differences in traditions between various communities have also led to increased distance and separation between those living in Nepal. Even today, most of the Indigenous communities strictly adhere to their ancient beliefs and traditions. In a sense, this is good because the traditions are what define the community for what it is. If an Indigenous community stops all its traditions, how is it different from the other communities? This would be like losing the Indigenous identity.
However, the value that many Indigenous communities put on protecting their traditions has, in some cases, hurt their own members. As a member of an Indigenous community, I have seen a few such situations.

A short story from an Indigenous youth can provide a better understanding of the situation:

*Being born and raised in a Newari family can be quite challenging for girls, especially as we have to adapt to societal norms while also having modern thinking. My name is Jemie Shrestha, a proud Indigenous woman from the Newar community. The Newar community is the fifth largest Indigenous group in Nepal and within that group, there are many sub-groups. In particular, I belong to the city of Bhaktapur, often known as the Bhaktapuri Newar, who have their own beliefs and practices. To add to this, my mother is Shakya, a high caste and Buddhist, while my father is Hindu and from a medium caste. Therefore, I have a mixture of cultural practices. For example, Kathmandu Newar celebrate Ghode Jatra, where the horse is worshipped and taken around the ancient city, while Lalitpur Newar celebrate Machhindranath Jatra, where the god Machhindranath is worshipped and the deity’s chariot is taken around the ancient city of Patan for a certain period of time, depending upon the lunar calendar. The Bhaktapur Newars happen to*
celebrate Bisket Jatra, which marks the New Year, wherein family members gather.

The Newar community is quite conservative in discussions about sex and sexuality. Though I am quite comfortable talking about sex, sexuality and sexual protection in my community, I cannot imagine talking about this with my parents. I believe our cultural practices depict sexuality in a variety ways. The Newars practice Gufa, which celebrates girls entering into womanhood; this ceremony is conducted before girls menstruate for the first time in their lives. I also practiced Gufa before I reached puberty. Instead of staying for 12 days for Gufa, I stayed for only three days in a Vihar (Buddhist Monastery). The area of residence during the ceremony can vary depending upon the practice of the family (i.e., it can be at home or monastery). After I got my first period, I was worshipped and everything was separated from me by my family. The plate I used to eat from was not used by others and I was made to sit separately while partaking in any meal during my menstrual periods. I was not even allowed to mention the name of boys or see them. I believe every community, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have their own way of practicing and acknowledging sexuality.

In Nepal’s political sector, the Constitution states that every political party must present an Indigenous person as a candidate for a pre-
determined number of seats, as per Articles 40 and 51 of the Constitution of Nepal. However, this law has often been ignored by many. Also, the Indigenous candidates presented by some parties are unable to gather much support. The main cause of this is that the people tend to vote for people from their own communities rather than Indigenous candidates who come from other communities. Hence, as the Indigenous communities in Nepal are small and scattered, most Indigenous candidates are unable to win the elections in their areas.

Thankfully, this is not so in the case of local administrations. Each local administration is composed mainly of people of the same area and so Indigenous candidates are able to obtain seats in their local administrations with ease.

Through law, the government has made provisions about inclusiveness. The Public Service Commission (PSC) has allocated a 45% quota of seats for inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the PSC. Here is where a contradiction of words and actions can be noted. The government has violated its own provisions; not many representatives of Indigenous communities have been appointed in vacant posts of constitutional bodies. Those who have been selected as Indigenous candidates do not truly represent Indigenous communities. They are either Chhetri-Bahun women married to Indigenous men or Indigenous women married to Chhetri-Bahun men. The Chhetris and the Bahuns are two of
the major communities in Nepal. They are communities formed by the Hindu caste system.

In recent appointments in constitutional bodies, non-Indigenous women and Madhesi (the people living in the Terai region of Nepal or “Madhes” are known as Madhesi) have been elected in a larger proportion when compared to Indigenous Peoples. There could be two reasons for this. Firstly, the ruling parties are not against the inclusion of women as much as they are against the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples. Since the Madhes movement (a movement demanding a separate state for the people of the Terai region of Nepal that started during the economic blockade by India after the Nepal earthquake of 2015), Madhesi parties have emerged as a strong political force. They can raise their voices on the streets and in the Parliament without receiving backlash from the majority. Even within the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), the voice of the Madhesi is strong. This is not the case with Adivasi Janjati, another term for Indigenous Peoples in Nepal. Adivasi Janjati are weak in the Parliament. Most of them fear being labeled as anti-social elements if they raise their voices to protest something. So, can we truly call this government one that has people from all communities? Can we truly call it a people’s government?
As a student of social work, I have been to many communities throughout the country, particularly Indigenous communities. In my visits, I have been a witness to the problem of migration out of many Indigenous communities. The youths in most Indigenous communities tend to migrate abroad or to urban areas from the rural areas in the hopes of receiving better opportunities for employment. Most of the Indigenous communities in the rural areas of Nepal have mainly women, elderly people and children in their villages. Migration out of Indigenous communities is actually similar to migration out of other communities in Nepal. Most youths in Nepal prefer to go abroad for higher studies and work. This is because the education system and the methods of teaching in most universities are quite outdated; furthermore, there is a lack of job opportunities available in the country. Some have suggested that entrepreneurship is the solution to such situations but this is not always successful. The finance needed for entrepreneurship is difficult to obtain for most youths and even if the funding is obtained, the economic situation of the nation is not stable enough for adequate profit to be made. In the present circumstances of Nepal, very few entrepreneurs actually succeed. The rising taxes, the costs of materials and equipment, and the relatively high living expenses can all cause the failure of entrepreneurs in Nepal. It is due to these factors that the youths of our country fear economic and professional failure in Nepal and tend to migrate abroad.
Technology is something that has become a crucial part of our daily lives. It has been a boon in many ways. Technology has made our lives much easier than ever dreamed of before. However, it is truly a boon?

Technology also becomes a source of discrimination in Nepal. While it is true that technology is easily available in the urban areas of Nepal and is slowly becoming available in the rural areas of the country too, many Indigenous People in rural Nepal are unable to afford technology due to poverty. Their children see that their friends use such technologies and develop a desire to obtain them as well. They firstly pressure their parents, who are unable to afford it. In many cases, children turn to stealing to get it. In a sense, this creates a negative psychology in the minds of the poor. It is true that this does not apply to all Indigenous People; however, extremely poor Indigenous communities like many of the Musahar are not even able to afford electricity in their homes and such technologies are dreams like a star in the sky for them. Many Indigenous People in the rural parts of Nepal are so poor that they are not even able to have adequate housing. In such situations, if their children come in contact with such technology, will they not be psychologically affected? If technology generates such negative effects, can it be viewed as a boon to all?
I am frequently asked, “What differentiates Indigenous Peoples from non-Indigenous Peoples?”

The answer to this is simple. It is their culture and traditions. In the present day, people of all communities are busy earning a living. The modern life is such that one has no free time to do much else. At present, the younger generations show less concern regarding their cultures and traditions because they are so caught up in modern life. This is one of the greatest threats to the existence of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous communities have diverse cultural traditions and practices. As time passes, the younger generations avoid taking part in these cultural practices. They therefore do not learn about these practices and are unable to pass them on to the next generation. This process continues and eventually leads to the extinction of the culture. One example is the script of the Newari community, which is known as “Nepa: Bhasa.” The ancient Indigenous Newars had the knowledge of writing and reading this script. However, at the present time, not even 10% of the Newar population is able to understand this script. Most of the ancient texts written in this Indigenous script have been lost and only a few remain. Though efforts are being made to revive the skill of writing this script, this is happening on a small scale. In a sense, these efforts are the boundary line that prevents this script from vanishing into memories and museums.
If we look at the Indigenous Peoples of western Nepal, the Chepangs are an Indigenous community who have just recently begun to abandon their traditional forest homes and begun to live a life in the rural and urban parts of the nation. They have begun taking part in the economic activities associated with a modern lifestyle. As a result, many of them have lost their ancient Indigenous skills. Only those Chepangs living in the forest in their ancient mode of life are able to retain their skills, including the art of making wooden bowls. Such bowls are purchased by traders from various parts of the nation and even sent to India for refinement. However, those Chepangs living the modern life no longer have time to spend on making such works and are only engaged in earning money. As a result, the day is not far when such items become extinct.

Festivals are one of the most important aspects of culture. They all have something to teach and they bring us together. Every community, both Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous, has their own festivals. Festivals have been celebrated since the dawn of communities and cultures. Even today, we celebrate these festivals with great joy and energy. However, the meaning of festivals has changed over generations. For example, Dashain, one of the major festivals of the Hindu community, used to be celebrated so as to teach people the importance of good behavior. Rather, in present times, we slaughter hundreds of goats, buffaloes, ducks and chicken each year to celebrate this festival just
because we desire to eat meat during the festival and in the name of gods. Is this what we wish to teach our future generations about good behavior? We spend thousands of rupees to celebrate a festival that teaches us about humbleness. We now spend the days of the festival partying all day long and consuming alcohol. Does this teach good behavior? Is this the practice we wish to pass on to our future generations?

The Newari community also has a deep devotion and belief in the gods and goddesses. One such belief is that of “Mata” wherein a woman is believed to have the divine powers to solve problems. Such people are regarded to have been blessed by the divinity. There is a belief that the women become “Mata” when the gods send a message by the medium of dreams that they are special and that they have the ability to solve the problems of another. As the doctors examine the human body for treatments, the “Mata” examine the same person by the mediums of rice, palm and forehead reading in order to understand the problem and see the solution. As the doctor provides medicines as a cure, the “Mata” provides holy offerings and uses traditional means such as beating with brooms to scare off the evil spirits. This may seem as though we Newars are blindfolded by our traditional beliefs, yet the results have never failed. There are hundreds of devotees who have been blessed by the “Mata” and live prosperous lives.
Another such belief prevalent in the Newari community is what is locally known as “Dya-Waa,” or, in other words, the entry of divinity. In this belief, the spirits of the gods are believed to enter the body of human beings. On a personal note, I have once been a witness to such an incident. It was during the festival of “Bhimsen Jatra” that I experienced this, of which I had only heard stories earlier. Bhimsen Jatra is the festival of the people living in the ancient city of Patan wherein the great god Bhimsen is worshipped and taken around the city in his chariot. I was a volunteer helping out in the temple of Lord Bhimsen on that night. Hundreds of devotees visited the temple and suddenly people began to move aside as they worshipped one person. The person was shaking a lot but the shaking started only after he had entered the temple premises and stopped when he left the premises. This was what the Newari people regard as “Dya-Waa.” This incident occurs only during specific festivals. In the case of my experience, it was known as “Bhimsen Chadeko,” as the people believe that the spirit of the Lord Bhimsen had entered into the body of the person.

There are many such beliefs and practices in many Indigenous communities that are not known by outsiders. Them may seem to be superstitious or blind belief to many in the modern age. But seeing the results of such beliefs, what would you say it is? Can we really call it a superstition and ignore all the results?
Indigenous Peoples exist because of their cultures and, without their cultures, these communities cannot be said to be Indigenous. At present, many Indigenous communities are on the verge of extinction as they are slowly but surely losing their identity. The youths of today are no longer interested in the ancient practices and the ancestral traditions of their communities. This has led to the extinction of many Indigenous scriptures, languages, practices and traditions.

Most youths are engaged in modern lifestyles and many feel ashamed to practice the ancestral traditions. Festivals have become events for simply eating and drinking in many instances, rather than a moment to pass on ancestral knowledge. Indigenous Peoples used to take steps to support their own communities and push for their own progress, whereas now Indigenous Peoples look to others for this. What is needed is for Indigenous People themselves to take action.

The government has recognized various rights and benefits for Indigenous communities. However, Indigenous Peoples themselves are not aware of their human rights. It is necessary that Indigenous Peoples, primarily Indigenous youths, be taught and be made aware of their rights and the benefits ascribed to them. Isn’t obtaining some basic knowledge of human rights that which helps an individual in his/her struggle for existence?
In terms of culture and tradition, their Indigenous ancestors must teach the youths about the present properly. The value and meaning of Indigenous practices, festivals and traditions must be taught to Indigenous youths so that they may in turn be capable of passing on these cultures, traditions, practices and festivals in their truest sense to the generations that follow. The programs that already exist in order to promote cultural knowledge, language, scriptures and skills need to be introduced at a larger scale and also need to be supported by Indigenous Peoples themselves so that these remain vibrant for generations to come.
ARCTIC
My name is Ole-Henrik Lifjell. I am a 24-year-old Sámi on the Norwegian side of Sápmi. I am what you call an Åarjel-saemie, a southern Sámi. Sápmi is the term we Sámi use to refer to the geographical area in which we reside. This includes the countries of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The Sámi are widely spread out and there are cultural differences and differences in language between us, even though we are one People.¹

We see that the way the Sámi are treated by governments also differs among the four countries in which we live. This has historically made—and still makes—it difficult for us Sámi to stand united as one People. We do not face the same challenges in our respective countries, and the governments in each country have different histories in the way they treated our ancestors (and how that has led to the way we are treated today). This is something that, in my experience, is dividing us Sámi.

One core issue as Indigenous Peoples is the problem that arises in the meeting between the country’s majority and its Indigenous Peoples. A lot of people in Norway, for instance, struggle to see the value of promoting or positively speaking about Sámi. We are seen as Norwegians in the same sense that non-Indigenous people see themselves as Norwegians. Our physical appearance does not differ too much from them, and therefore we are what they call “white passing.” We are integrated into Norwegian society and, in that sense, I could see how the majority of people would see that there is no need to further fund or acknowledge us as minorities.

From the end of the 19th century, the Norwegian government performed phrenology on the Sámi. This involved measuring the skulls of our people in order to make scientific “discoveries” that would show that the Sámi were lesser beings, primitive, and not as evolved as the Norwegian people. In addition to this, the government also dug up graves of buried Sámi. This was also for skull measurements and to prove their racist scientific theories correct.

Assimilation policies were cruel towards the Sámi. Another tool the government used was “Wexelsens plakaten.” The goal of this was to erase the Sámi languages. It was illegal for Sámi families to use their languages, and children using their native tongues in school were punished for doing so. The idea behind this policy was to build a
Norway where the population had a strong national identity, and by erasing the Sámi culture and language, the governments hoped that they would lose their culture and it would be easy for the Sámi to develop this same national identity. The teachers that taught Sámi children would even receive financial grants if they could prove that their students could perform well in spoken or written Norwegian.  

In 1901, just over 100 years ago, the Norwegian government forced Sámi children to be sent to boarding schools. These schools housed children throughout most of the year. The purpose of the schools was to isolate the Sámi children from their language, culture and lifestyles in order to better assimilate them.

After approximately 100 years with this assimilationist policy, there was a positive change. The Norwegian government acknowledged the Sámi culture and saw the damages they had previously done towards a whole People. As a way of owning up to their previous inhumane treatment—that constituted violations of basic


human rights—they turned the previous boarding schools into institutions to regain some of what had been lost. The schools that earlier had housed Sámi children, forced to become Norwegians, were now institutions for assimilated descendants to learn the language and culture of which their ancestors had been robbed.

The structure of the institution was a given number of weeks (6-8 weeks approximately) during a regular school year, when Sámi children could come and learn their traditional languages and traditions. This could be supplemented with Skype-based tutoring at the children’s respective Norwegian schools. The child would be taken out of their classroom in order to learn the Sámi language with a teacher over a screen via Skype, and this would help the student retain what they learned at the Sámi schools. I was one of these kids.

This new policy made it difficult for a whole new generation of Sámi children to find their identity as Indigenous Peoples. They spent most of their time in regular, Norwegian schools, but still went away eight weeks per year to learn about language and culture. A lot of the kids that went had no prior knowledge of the Sámi culture, while some of them both spoke the language and belonged to families that were reindeer herders. This created a divided group between the Sámi children, where some would feel less Sámi than others. At the same time, at their Norwegian schools, they might be the only Sámi, which led them to feel neither Sámi
enough nor Norwegian enough. One result of this whole process has been that some young Sámi have neglected their heritage and “decided” to simply become Norwegians.

In December 2015, the Norwegian government decided that they would end the funding of the Sámi schools. These were schools that taught a lot of kids about their heritage, about the losses of their wealth in terms of knowledge in both crafts and language. These institutions had not only been a resource in terms of passing on knowledge, but also institutions that had given families and relatives the possibility to regain their bonds to each other. It had given people with difficulty in finding pride in their heritage a chance to feel connected to it, and to create a stronger society within the Sámi regions (and even beyond).

The argument from the government was that children could not rely on eight weeks a year of meeting and socializing in order to learn the Sámi language. With that statement, they were completely ignoring the fact that a culture is so much more than exclusively learning a language. Traditions in terms of living off the resources found in nature—for cooking, creating tools or gathering materials for use in daily life—are just some of the things one would learn at the institution. Being an Indigenous person is manifested in a mind-set as well, including how you perceive the people, the nature, the animals and the resources surrounding you. These ways were taught at the physical

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institution of the Sámi schools, and not over a screen. The necessity of meeting other children in the same situation as you was, at least for me, key in my decision to learn Sámi despite being perceived as the weird, different kid at my Norwegian school. If I had not had the opportunity to meet other kids in my situation, I don’t think I would ever have been able to motivate myself to learn a difficult language over a screen with a stranger as a teacher whom I would never be able to meet with in-person. That would be a lot of pressure to put on a 6-year-old.

Positive motivations and healthy environments are keys to success when it comes to learning and blooming. As previously mentioned, a lot of kids were and still are growing up in families that have little to no knowledge of both the Sámi culture and language. I was lucky enough to grow up in a family that acknowledged the culture and heritage, and expressed pride in them. However, neither my mother nor father knew the Sámi language, so an institution that taught language through practice in relevant situations was so important for me. On the other hand, there were some Sámi children that knew the language, but had little to no knowledge of the culture and traditions. In that sense, the Indigenous identity was amplified by learning and experiencing together as a little family at the Sámi schools.

I think for children in learning, the most important thing to further grow is seeing and
experiencing. For me this meant understanding that even though I might be the only Sámi in my (Norwegian) school, I am not alone in my culture. Not feeling alone, and seeing that the culture is alive through experiencing it, makes being Sámi feel real. You could not live out a culture simply by reading about it or hearing about it from a textbook. In the same way, I wouldn’t be able to live out the culture of the Sámi based on what I had read or heard in school.

As a bearer of culture and old Sámi knowledge, these institutional schools let the Sámi children engage in reindeer herding. The reindeer is the pillar of the Sámi culture, from the food we make of it (which basically means every part of the animal that is edible), to the tools we make from reindeer, and also to our art and clothes. Also, the language we speak, and how specific it is in terms of describing weather and nature, reveals a lot about our strong connection to reindeer herding. I believe that we have to thank our ancestors who worked as herders for keeping our language alive. The only part of the Sámi lifestyle the government did not touch was the reindeer herders. I believe the economic benefits of reindeer herding provided enough of an incentive to leave it alone. Herders have been able to actively use the Sámi language consistently through their daily lives while working/herding reindeers.

My entering politics and engaging the public for Indigenous causes is rooted in the decision of
the Norwegian government to stop funding the Sámi schools. Through mobilizing other Sámi as well as supporters from Norwegian parliament and others in Norway, we managed to receive a lot of media publicity and to move some politicians onto our side. We fought this cause for about a year, conducted interviews and published a documentary. The Norwegian government decided, after negotiations, to keep the schools running and continue to fund them. Seeing this change has indicated to me and to many others that the people actually have some power, and it made me realize that there are more issues we can deal with as Indigenous Peoples.

It is so easy to neglect minorities and, in my experience, governments tend to do so in order to make room for other priorities, as that is more economical for them. A great threat to us Sámi are the prejudices that the majority of the non-Indigenous Norwegians have against us. We are not visible in the daily life of “regular” Norwegians, even though Sámi is recognized as a national language in Norway. The children in Norwegian schools have no knowledge concerning us Sámi and there are many misinterpretations about us, our history, and our culture.

I am concerned for the future generations of Sámi. We need to see stability and that there’s positive growth in the Sámi society. The pace that things are going at right now forces us to still feel colonized and, to some extent, further assimilated.
Seeing that the Sámi are still experiencing a lot of challenges in terms of government decisions that do not take into account the experiences and input of Indigenous Peoples, I believe it is hard for young people to see the positive in choosing to both pursue Sámi studies as well as live off the traditional ways of the Sámi, such as reindeer herding and fishing.

We see that many large companies have had interest in the traditional land areas that the Sámi have used for their way of living, such as the reindeer herders to which my own family belongs. In the autumn of 2017, the government agreed to put up large windmills in areas that were home to reindeers. The consequence of this forced already-established laborers to flee the areas in order for these other, commercial interests to be established.

Other examples of difficulties Sámi have faced include the unwillingness of the government to build fences in areas that have both railways and reindeers. In the winter of 2016, around 100 reindeers were massacred over the course of one weekend. This particular area has seen great losses of reindeers over a long period of time. This is one of the main political causes I have taken up in the Sámi area where I’m from.

The rights to land seem to be the most pressing issue to the Sámi in Norway at this point. Violation of our land rights is probably also the easiest way to further assimilate us as Indigenous Peoples and force us to quit our traditional ways of
living by pressing us out of the industries to which we have traditionally belonged.

In my case, I have experienced some challenges in terms of living with being a double minority. As a gay Indigenous person, I have learned that being different from those around you does not make you weird, even though others may say so.

I grew up in a very small and safe village. As a kid, I was sometimes spared from being picked on for playing with dolls and wearing my favorite princess sweater. However, when it became clear to the other kids at school that I was a Sámi, the sparing was over. As a Sámi child in a Norwegian school, I received a lot of tutoring in school in a classroom alone. I had Sámi language and history in classes separate from my classmates and travelled every fourth week to a Sámi school. The comments from the Norwegian children at my school were that I was less evolved, and that I needed extra tutoring in order to keep up with them. I still don’t know if the attitude the children had towards Indigenous Peoples sprung from their parents teaching them these ways of perceiving Indigenous Peoples, or if it was just that children in general find others that are different from them and point them out.

In some ways, I’m happy that they noticed me being a Sámi and pointed that out. I grew up in a family that is very confident and proud of their Indigenous heritage. This also rubbed off on me
growing up. Because of that, I never felt any anger towards my cultural and ethnic heritage. I imagine that it would be more difficult for me if I was picked on for being feminine or “gay.” I see a lot of children that have been bullied for their sexuality as kids, and they often struggle even when they have grown up.

When I started high school, things changed. After years of growing up as the weird Sámi boy, that went away for one week every month when I spoke a language that no one else understood while attending the Sámi schools. At this time, my perceived identity changed. It became clear to the other students at my school that I was the gay one. I never was bullied for it directly, but sometimes gay slurs would be shouted at me, and I was even told to get out of the changing rooms before gym classes. Some of the boys were sceptical about having a gay guy “looking at them” while wearing little or no clothes.

If we compare Sámi to other Indigenous peoples and their history towards queer people, we can extrapolate that queer people would have been treated differently by our Sámi ancestors. Until the 17th century, the Sámi were nomadic people that lived in and off of nature. They had no written language or ways to make documents that generations after could read. Because of that, we really do not know what their views of queer people were. However, comparing to other Indigenous Peoples around the world, we can imagine that the
same respect for and celebration of queer people would have been the case for the Sámi. I know, for instance, that in some Native American societies the queer person was seen as two-spirited and often was well-respected as a shaman. Being queer was a strength.

The Sámi were Christianized in the 17th century. After that, their ways of living, practicing their lifestyle, and their religion vanished. We know very little of the time before that in terms of their views towards queer people. But in today’s society, the geographic areas where Sámi suffered due to oppressive Christianization still have a negative attitude towards queer people. In that sense, I think you could debate whether this is a Sámi way of perceiving queer people or an effect of colonization.

We have lost so much of our heritage due to colonization that I think many of the Sámi youth of today see it as their job to further pass on the remains of our culture. It’s quite recent that it became shameful to be Sámi. And it is also in the near past that we as a people were robbed of our basic human rights. I do believe that my generation of young Sámi is the first generation in a long time to feel proud of being Indigenous and belonging to such a vast and rich culture. In societies where industrialism and capitalism are further expanding, my Sámi family and friends and I see that we need to be an opposing front. The mind-set of us as Indigenous Peoples to act on the precautionary principle, seems to be more needed than ever. This
is not only for our traditional way of living as reindeer herders, but from an environmental and a global perspective.
Growing up as a queer Inuk girl, I have faced different problems on many fronts, although many Inuk children go through hard stuff. At the start of my childhood, I was amazed by the Inuit culture: rum dancing, singing, the clothes, the food, the language. As a small Inuk child, you could find me dancing to the drum, making small caves in the huge piles of snow, going hunting and fishing, and having my face completely dirty from eating Greenlandic food with my hands. But as I grew older, I had friends with problems I didn’t really understand at first. Three of the main problems they had were: alcoholic parents, abuse, and suicide.

Here in Greenland there really isn’t much to do for young people and us kids. Since I reached adolescence, my friends and I would walk around the city to pass the time. I remember one night after walking around the whole city with my friends, it started to get late and we decided that it was time to go home. One of my friends just stood there and didn’t move. He asked us if he could sleep at someone’s home. “Why?” we asked him. He then explained that his dad was an alcoholic and was probably already very drunk by now. He was scared to go home because he knew his dad would be
angry with him and beat him up. Unfortunately, we were just small kids who didn’t know better. It was getting too late to ask our parents if he could stay at our houses so our answer to him was just: “Sorry. It’s too late.” That boy ended up walking around the city until his dad went to work the next morning. This was his night almost every weekend.

I also know a girl—a popular girl, who had a boyfriend, and just seemed like a genuinely happy person. I knew that she was struggling at home and with school. She barely speaks any Danish, rather only Greenlandic, and it’s very hard to receive an adequate education in Greenland if you’re not fluent in Danish. A few months before our graduation, we stopped seeing her at school. One day I went to school thinking it was a completely normal day, until my teacher came in and told us that the girl was laying in the hospital after swallowing almost a whole bottle of pills. They had saved her from almost dying. When she came back to school, you could see from the look in her eyes that she was scared.

Another time I had a best friend. We would spend almost every day together and always have sleepovers. Early in our friendship, we became close and she told me some of her biggest secrets. Her dad was an alcoholic and had touched her when she was a small girl. She was suicidal and would cut herself. I felt so sorry for her and did everything to help her and be there for her. Several times, I would be hanging out with some friends and she would
call me asking if she could spend the night at my house because her dad was drinking. I gladly said yes because I didn’t want her to feel bad. One time she worried me a lot after she told me that a few weeks earlier she had planned the day she would kill herself, which explained why we had hung out more than usual. Thankfully, she decided not to do it.

There is also a girl I once knew, who was such a sweet girl. She was adopted and had two older sisters who were also adopted. She struggled a lot because of dyslexia but received a lot of help from the school. She might be one of the strongest girls I ever knew because a few years before high school graduation, her sister ended up committing suicide. Later, the same happened with her other sister. While going through grief for her sisters, her mother became sick with cancer and died a year later. Even though this girl went through so much, she stayed strong and finished school with amazing results.

Even I, as a 17-year-old girl, have experienced being mentally abused, sexually abused and having suicidal thoughts. Being a part of the LGBTQ+ community can also be extremely difficult here in Greenland. Before colonization, being LGBTQ+ was barely a problem. A part of our Indigenous culture would be, for example, men dressing up as women. Since being colonized by Denmark, the discrimination against the queer community is more visible. There are so many
youth who identify with at least one of the many sexual identities, but it has become such a taboo to speak out about it that many are too afraid or too embarrassed to come out. They feel like an outsider; they feel like who they are is wrong. In many cases, these feelings can often end with suicide.

There are so many more stories to tell. This is the reality of being an Indigenous youth in Greenland. Living as a young Inuk in the harsh climate of the Arctic, life is hard. With Greenland being one of the countries with the highest rates of suicide, it is guaranteed that every Greenlandic person you meet will know someone who has committed suicide. However, what is the real problem that is causing all of this? Taboo? Education? Or maybe, normalization?

Here in Greenland, because of colonization, we had to adapt to “the modern world” faster than possible. As a result, many people ended up with problems like alcoholism, addiction, and low self-worth. Greenland officially stopped being a colony in 1953, so both my parents’ generation and my generation have grown up surrounded by these broken people, making life as a young Inuk very hard. This is especially true because in most families, talking about these feelings is taboo. These feelings have almost become a part of our culture.

When people finally get up on their feet and say, “You know what? I have this very bad feeling and I think I should get help,” the Inuk community
usually answers: “I used to have this feeling too and I’m fine now. Just wait and it will be over soon.” This is instead of offering them help. This becomes a cycle for every generation who wants and needs help. What many people and, yes, even the politicians and municipality, forget, is the human right to attain the highest attainable standard of health, both physically and mentally.

Another important factor in this cycle is the lack of education. Just above 50% of the young people who finish primary school in Greenland have high enough grades to enter high school. Out of those young people who do get into high school, around 50% drop out before graduating. Only 1/3 of the Greenlandic population has an education higher than primary school\(^1\) and, without a good education, obtaining employment can be rather difficult. How is the other 2/3 of the population supposed to earn money for their families? What do they do to help their families? What we know of—and what we have almost come to expect—is that they will turn to bad lifestyles in order to live a life under a roof with four walls.

This is why I think it is so important that we start to help, strengthen and educate us Indigenous youth: to help break this cycle that has been going on since colonization. But what can we do? What

can we do to strengthen our self-worth? What can we do to help and guide our young people to a higher education? What can we do to make the politicians and municipality listen to us? What can we do to make sure that they respect our rights?

In my opinion, we have to first deal with taboo and normalization. When I say “we,” I mean you, me, fellow Indigenous Peoples, politicians, everyone. But changing the culture and our way of being is easier said than done. So to break this cycle, we need to accept these feelings and the problems that we have. We need to accept and acknowledge that we have this cycle. I encourage you to speak up.

It is not enough to simply talk about this destructive cycle and accept it; rather, we need to realize that these problems that we as Indigenous youth have are real and require action. It’s not enough to say, “I’ve been there, you will get over it.” You need to help us. You need to help us break this cycle, because, if you don’t, you might end up seeing your grandchildren live the exact same way. We beg you to stop blaming us for being the way we are. Take action.

One of the things we, as Indigenous Inuit Peoples, have always been very good at is being together as a community, accepting and being there for each other no matter what. We need to become better and learn to be like this again in order for us to break this cycle.
We do not even need to take huge action to help make a change. An example is: asking someone about their day, how they are feeling, and if they are going through something difficult lately. If they are, talk to them. If it is something that concerns you, reach out to someone more qualified to help them or encourage them to reach out themselves. Show someone that they can trust you and that you are there for them. If you know someone with some kind of addiction, you could find out the best way to approach this person. Offer them help. By doing this, you might inspire others and encourage them to do the same.

Is someone you know not doing very well at school? Offer to help them a bit. With LGBTQ+ youth in particular, the best thing you can do is show them that you respect them. That for you, they are just ordinary people and that it is okay for them to be who they are. But also, if you are the one walking around with the stigma of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people on your shoulders, try taking small baby steps out of this circle called the comfort zone and speak up. Reach out to a person you trust and tell them what you’re carrying around, because they might want to help you.

Like Neil Armstrong once said: “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” In this case, it is a small step for you, and one giant leap for our country and our future.
By doing these small things in our lives, other people will follow.
By doing these small things in our lives, we can break these taboos.
By doing these small things in our lives, you might change a person’s whole life.
By doing these small things in our lives, we can slowly but surely break a cycle that has been going on for centuries.

Other important issues that the Indigenous youth in Greenland face are conflicts around nationality and identity, language and racism. Due to intentional misleading and lack of education after the colonial period, there has almost always been a battle between Denmark and Greenland. Because of this, during the first years of elementary school, kids already start to put other kids into discriminatory categories. “You’re Danish, you’re white, you’re blond, you speak Danish,” etc. Already that early, you can feel the separation between kids simply because of their looks and their spoken language. This becomes rather difficult for the youth who try so hard not to be Danish that they end up barely knowing any of the Danish language, which can cause a major barrier when one is trying to enter high school.

For the youth who are lighter-skinned and grew up with Danish in their families or who are half-Danes and half-Greenlanders, they usually all end up in some kind of identity crisis from childhood that they still live with as an adult. They
question themselves: “Am I good enough? Am I Greenlandic enough? Who am I? WHAT am I? Am I worthy enough to call myself Greenlandic?” I even went through this once. It started when I was just 10 years old in elementary school. I was sitting with my friends who spoke more Danish than Greenlandic and, since I have green eyes and light brown hair, I was immediately put into the category of a Danish girl. The other kids would shout, “Shut up you stupid Danes. Speak Greenlandic. We are in Greenland.”

I started to realize that they didn’t see me as equally Greenlandic as them. I would cry and feel shame that I did not have brown eyes and black hair. I wished and begged for brown eyes and black hair. For many years I struggled because I knew inside myself that I am Greenlandic; others just didn’t see me as Greenlandic. I have seen many others go through this, and they often end up moving to Denmark. But then when you go to Denmark, what happens? The exact same happens as when you were in Greenland, but in the opposite way. You will be put in the category of a “drunk Greenlander” and will be called names. You will struggle with trying to be accepted since you couldn’t be accepted in Greenland. You will be degraded as a person, degraded inside your soul because you start to wonder, “Where am I supposed to be? I don’t fit in with anyone. I won’t be accepted by anyone.” You end up with a long, tiring battle inside you.
Despite all of the sad stories and issues we have as Indigenous young people, we try every day to do everything we can to have a good life, to be accepted for who we are, and to live with the rights we are supposed to have. I know that we are very strong and that we have something unique that the rest of the world can learn from.

In our history, we have always been degraded, but we are incredibly strong young people. We are people who are extremely proud of our country, of who we are, and of our culture. We want to show that to the world. Every day, I see more and more young Indigenous people being proud of who they are and trying to learn parts of our culture that have been lost. I think this is beautiful because wanting to take back our culture and feeling pride in our culture is starting to bring us closer as a community and as Indigenous young people.

Although Indigenous youth are becoming more and more diverse in terms of background, identity and sexuality, we are getting a lot better at holding on together, respecting each other and coming together as a community. When you open up your eyes to the world, especially if you use social media as much as us young people, you start to see that in both Europe and the United States, racism and sexism grows more and more every day, whereas here we are slowly but surely getting better at accepting each other.
I think this is something very important that the world can learn from us.

When I imagine a better future for Indigenous youth, I imagine a country where we are more open and helping. A country with everyone helping anyone who feels like they need it. A country where you can be whoever you are no matter your skin tone, eye color, hair color, ethnicity, or sexuality. A country that focuses on the mental health of the young people and tries to adapt the education system to our needs and ways of learning.

I therefore encourage everyone, all you Indigenous young people like me, to do whatever you can in life, big or small, to help create a country where we are proud of our people, proud of what we can do, and proud of our community.
CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN
Guatemala and Brazil

Chapter 7: Indigenous Youth Speaking About Their Rights: Our Stories are Guided by the Energy of the Hearts of our Grandfathers and Grandmothers

Maria Antonia Benito TOMAS (Mayan, Poqomam)
Rayanne Cristine Maximo FRANCA (Baré, Amazonas)

Growing in the midst of a story engrained in difficult paths, some blocked with the passing of time to avoid progression, burned books to erase the memory of the Indigenous communities whose elements of identity were the main objective to make disappear.

General contextualization of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean

The Indigenous communities of Latin America and the Caribbean represent 45 million people, which equates to around 8.3% of the population,¹ or approximately 642 communities of

Indigenous Peoples. The countries with the largest Indigenous populations are Bolivia (62.2%), Guatemala (41%), Peru (24%) and Mexico (15.1%). Brazil, although having a smaller Indigenous percentage of the total population, enjoys the highest community diversity, totaling 305 communities with 274 Indigenous languages.

Statistical data demonstrates this diversity of communities; therefore, they deserve special attention in public policy and representation in spaces of decision-making. Indigenous youth, in particular, have an important responsibility in carrying on the history of our ancestors.

However, neither the statistical databases nor the Economic Commission for Latin America guaranteeing-indigenous-peoples-rights-latin-america-progress-past-decade-and.


and the Caribbean (ECLAC) possesses data on the status of Indigenous youth. The fact that such data are not present does not allow for the reflection of the deep heterogeneity of this population. This situation reveals a lack of attention towards Indigenous youth, be it in the form of data, public policy with an intercultural focus, or, consequently, discrimination and prejudice.

The status of Indigenous youth in Latin America and the Caribbean

Indigenous youth in Latin America have succeeded in sharing the realities that each one of them lives via their personal experiences. Social, political, and economic barriers have not restricted them from combining their efforts and organizational processes from the community level to the national, regional and global levels. Youth from communities such as the Aymara, Baré, Charrúa, Embera, Garífunas, Guaraní, Poqomam, Kaqchikel, K’iche, Miskito, Mixteco, Quechua, Xavante and Zapoteco, just to name a few, have been coming together to make themselves heard in one single, collective voice.

Taking into consideration that each Indigenous community has its particularities based on its context and geographical environment, Indigenous youth have their own way of looking at life, of organizing, and of making decisions. When someone uses the term “Indigenous youth,” understand that he or she is referring to a massive diversity of identities. This is why it is essential for
all programs and public policies aimed at this sector to be previously negotiated and endorsed with full and effective participation, in order to address the specific needs of Indigenous youth and for them to benefit in an inclusive and satisfactory manner.

Educational and training processes have played a very important role for Indigenous youth in Latin America, resulting in their voices being heard, as well as their demands and proposals being amplified in numerous spaces of influence and decision-making.

In regards to the current status of Indigenous youth in Latin America, we can identify five primary areas of importance: migration, discrimination, sexual and reproductive health, and the lack of separate statistical data for youth.\footnote{Q”apaj Conde, \textit{Informe Perspectiva de Jóvenes Indígenas a los 10 Años de la Adopción de la Declaración de Naciones Unidas sobre los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas}, (Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean: 2017), http://www.fondoindigena.org/drupal/sites/default/files/field/archivos/Informe_jóvenes.pdf.} We will discuss these points below.

\textbf{a) Migration}

Currently, we are noticing that Indigenous youth are suffering from migratory processes—moving from villages and smaller communities to

big urban centers—in search of access to education and better living and working conditions. In the midst of these challenges, they also face an additional one: culture shock and the affirmation of their ethnic identities within non-Indigenous societies.

Thorough analyses must be undertaken around the causes for and the consequences that result from the migration of Indigenous youth from their communities to urban centers. Many of these youth choose to migrate due to the lack of support in their field, the pursuit of paid work, and access to economic assets. They also seek access to education and healthcare. Many of the youth that remain in their communities offer support in the development of their communities, voluntarily giving back in the social, economic, and political lives of their communities, as is the vision of Indigenous Peoples.

The reality of Indigenous youth is different than that of non-Indigenous youth. Due to the lack of access to higher education resulting from their geographical and economic contexts, many Indigenous youth choose to migrate to the capital city of their countries. In spite of this heavy decision and the adverse barriers they face, those who have migrated have been able to achieve the empowerment that comes with the recognition of their identity, exercising influence within those new environments.

At the University of Brasília, Indigenous youth have had a sociocultural impact, as they have
organized to defend their rights and overcome the existing cultural resistance within the academic universe. They have come together and created a space of mutual existence, making their needs known while benefiting from a physical space within the university campus to carry out meetings or gatherings. Although they are hundreds of miles away from their communities, the support and practices of their homes are always with them.

The spaces themselves, whether they be social or physical, highlight the importance of maintaining a relationship with one’s Indigenous community, which then serves to minimize the suffering of discrimination while also maintaining the community’s main wish and desire: to eventually have its youth return home.

b) Discrimination

Discrimination is one of the horizontal factors that intersects the day-to-day lives of Indigenous Peoples. When speaking about this topic, it is necessary to maintain a specific point of view in regards to the needs of Indigenous youth. Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples can have racial and cultural origins, and can even stem from their place of birth.

The greatest impact of discrimination is reflected among the youth, since this phase of biological, psychological, and social development is key to the construction of one’s being, and especially the representation of their community.
With globalization and access to technological development, Indigenous youth often experience their own identity and their ethnic and cultural belonging mainly via the usage of electronic devices and platforms, such as through social media.

Discrimination is intimately linked with the process of migration to large cities. The social, cultural and economic impacts that Indigenous youth experience upon arriving in an urban context can be considered extremely violent. In the midst of this situation, we are witnessing a denial of identity or even suicide.

*The Cultural Association of Poqomam Qawinaqel (Our People), Guatemala*

One of the efforts being put forth for the organization of Indigenous youth against such discrimination can be seen in the Cultural Association of Poqomam Qawinaqel (*qawinaqel* means *our people* in the Poqomam language) in Guatemala. Due to the constant acts of racism and discrimination directed against the Mayan population of Poqomam, the youth started to create exhibitions of the work of artisans, dance, and theater to rescue elements of their culture.

A primary school educational center was founded by the Cultural Association of Poqomam Qawinaqel in 1990, with the objective of rescuing the Mayan Poqomam culture. In this setting, the students can attend classes in their traditional attire.
and speak their native language. Having overcome various challenges throughout the years, higher educational levels were finally added. A signature establishment has been created in which education is bilingual (Poqomam and Spanish), Mayan spirituality is practiced, and weaving and agriculture are part of the curriculum.

In 1997, the same institution founded a radio station that broadcasts in both languages and allows for the community to have access to a means of communication. The institution also maintains a youth group.

Around 1989, associates of the Cultural Association of Poqomam Qawinaqel discussed extensively the issue, ‘The Disappearance of the Mayan Poqomam Culture.’ The discussions took place in the town of Palín, the only town with a Mayan population in the state of Escuintla. The discussions concluded with the creation of a bilingual educational center (Poqomam-Spanish), in order to put an end to the loss of identity, especially the Poqomam language. Many families were consulted about the proposition, which was accepted immediately and announced to begin operation in 1990.5

5 Carlos Isabel Gómez Pirique, “Radio Qawinaqel (Nuestra Gente), Municipio de Palín, Departamento de Escuintla,” Master’s Thesis, Universidad de San Carlos
No matter how much effort is put forth by Indigenous Peoples to bring awareness to the issues that they face among non-Indigenous Peoples in political and social spaces, the agenda of inclusion remains in its initial stages towards real progress. The process of colonization is still very much present in Indigenous communities in Latin America, and we cannot but keep in mind the numerous violations of rights against Indigenous Peoples. The governments in Latin America and the Caribbean need to improve their protection and security of these people, utilizing national and international bodies and mechanisms to do so.

c) Sexual and reproductive health

In the “Perspective Report on Indigenous Youth 10 Years after Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,”\(^6\) Indigenous youth identified some key areas to be observed. Sexual and reproductive health with an intercultural focus is one of them.

Not all Latin American and Caribbean countries have a health system that tends to the necessities of Indigenous Peoples. Brazil has a Special Indigenous Health Department (SESAI) with specific policies for Indigenous Peoples. Nonetheless, there are some obstacles in regards to sexual and reproductive rights. The lack of an

\(^6\) Supra note 4.
intercultural perspective in health services has resulted in increases of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.\(^7\)

We consider an intercultural focus in health services and proceedings a priority in order to execute interventions that guarantee Indigenous youth their sexual and reproductive rights, whether they be in rural or urban settings and with or without special needs.

Additionally, there is a need to promote intercultural dialogue to address both traditional medicine and western medicine with regards to sexual and reproductive health, thereby providing an adequate response to the various needs of Indigenous youth.

d) **Statistical data**

Perhaps the most problematic factor of all those listed here is the lack of separate statistical data on Indigenous youth. This data is extremely important in analyzing and becoming familiar with

the true situation of Indigenous youth. With that being said, institutional reinforcement of Indigenous youth networks and organizations would play a key role in generating this type of data, and therefore contribute to the processes of information generation and education of Indigenous youth for the construction of pertinent public policies and spaces.

This lack of statistical information about Indigenous youth is a concern for Indigenous youth, because we know that this data would enable us to put pressure on state institutions to support the development of reasonable standards of living. Data that is specifically about Indigenous Peoples has been appearing recently in various countries’ statistical databases; however, a shortage of data especially about Indigenous youth is still holding us back, especially data on the health of Indigenous youth.

**Political involvement and influence of Indigenous youth**

Indigenous youth, members of regional and national networks, and youth groups, have participated in collective projects in their communities. These projects have ranged from art and music to communication and improvement in political education for children, women, and mixed groups. The objective of these projects is to
facilitate technical knowledge\(^8\) of the demands and needs of Indigenous communities.

Indigenous youth have been able to continue cultivating their technical knowledge about these needs in order to push for change. Throughout the years, they have succeeded in exercising influence in the regional and international spaces that were created for them, thus being able to articulate the concerns of their organized groups.

Opening up spaces, whether they be local or international, in which Indigenous youth have not been included, has been a great challenge. Indigenous voices, demands, and needs in public policies continue to be an undertaking assumed by the youth, who have created alliances and spaces that have rendered positive results.

For example, the Indigenous Youth Network for Latin America and the Caribbean (The Network) has solicited spaces for all Indigenous youth that have recognition from their communities and organizations. For The Network, it is important to encourage Indigenous youth empowerment, as well as the promotion of involvement and political influence in the various spaces of decision-making.

\(^8\) Here, technical knowledge is referring to the mechanisms and the legal forms in which requests can be made to strengthen skills and projects managed by the communities according to their context and needs.
To enter into international spaces, Indigenous youth have organized with their communities and organizations to have representational support. In terms of political involvement and influence in Latin America, it is necessary to give attention to the difficulties within our own region among our Brazilian brothers and sisters, since Brazil is the only non-Spanish-speaking country on the continent. The same is also true for the Caribbean countries, in which the official language could be English or French. It is more difficult for Indigenous youth from these countries to participate in regional forums that take place in Spanish.

As Indigenous youth, we understand that our mission in international spaces is to contribute to the unity, strengthening, and visibility of local organizational processes, as well as to make regional issues known and to produce relevant proposals and collective strategies for positive change. With all of these aspects present, we will be able to effectively participate in decision-making processes that affect our communities, regions, and countries.

The Network has made an impact in different national and international spaces, calling attention to childhood and adolescent issues that are a part of the collective rights of our Peoples. As Indigenous youth from diverse regions of Latin America, we have put forth great effort to make our demands and proposals heard. One of the gatherings that The Network put together took place in Faisan
de Tutotepec, Mexico, in August 2016, in which the community organized so that Indigenous youth from Central and South America and the Caribbean could hold meetings and have true proximity to each other’s experiences. Indigenous women from the El Faisán community, Tututepec, Oaxaca, met and provided support during the development of the activities for these youth.

In The Network, we have ensured continuity in various agendas and spaces within the United Nations, such as: the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Regional Conferences on Population and Development, and the Indigenous Peoples’ Major Group for Sustainable Development, among others.

Thanks to the coordination of their organizational processes, Indigenous youth have been able to engage in horizontal dialogue with the bureaus of the United Nations and other international bodies. Alliances have resulted from these efforts that contribute to the specific rights and necessities of this sector, some examples being: the Rome Statement,9 in coordination with the Food and Agriculture Association of the United Nations, “Rome Statement on the Contribution of Indigenous Youth Towards a World Without Hunger” (2017), http://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/883684/.
the Health Plan for Indigenous Youth,\textsuperscript{10} in coordination with the Pan American Health Organization (OPS); the Perspective Report on Indigenous Youth 10 Years after Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,\textsuperscript{11} in coordination with the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC).

\textbf{The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues}

In 2015, our region began to take an important position in the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus. In this space, the support and backing of the elders has allowed for effective engagement. These are elders such as Dr. Mirna Cunningham, Ms. Maria Eugenia Choque, Dr. Miriam Wallet Aboubakrine, and Brothers Alvaro Pop and Jesus Guadalupe Blanco. This is what a true intergenerational process looks like.

Among the youth of the region that have assumed responsibility within the Global


\textsuperscript{11} Supra note 4.
Indigenous Youth Caucus, there are Dali Angel Pérez, Tania Pariona, Q’apaj Conde, Rayanne Cristine Maximo, and Jessica Veja. Other brothers and sisters have been involved in the Global Caucus as focal points or co-presidents.

Having succeeded in holding a meeting with Indigenous youth of different countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, the OPS brought back the proposal on intercultural health for Indigenous youth at the 2017 UNPFII. With the technical support of the OPS, the youth drafted the Health Plan, which was presented at the 2018 UNPFII. The plan has five working areas: Gathering of Evidence to Support Health Proposals, Intercultural Competency, Political Action, Sociocultural Involvement, and Integration of Tradition and Complementary Medicine.

Seated at a round-table meeting, the youth suggested and presented a sixth working area that concerns the region and calls for urgent attention due to the alarming data that has emerged on the topic: Sexual and Reproductive Rights for Indigenous Children and Adolescents.

Indigenous Peoples’ exchanges of reality generate new and necessary tools in bringing about significant change. The Health Plan is an example of such a tool elaborated by Indigenous youth; however, it is a plan that involves and relies on the support of the elders, which in turn results in collective development. Dialogue and alignment
with the elders are crucial, while respecting the customs and structure of each community.

For The Network, the local work that the youth carry out is fundamental, since it is important to bolster community leadership. Community leadership facilitates regional reinforcement and enables the voices of the youth to be heard as they relate their issues and experiences. The recurring themes among these issues and challenges have been represented in the “Perspective Report on Indigenous Youth 10 years after Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.”\(^{12}\)

The proper education and training of members and partners of The Network play an important role. When this happens successfully, institutional communication strategies flow much better, leading to a more fruitful exchange of ideas. The youth leaders then know how to handle themselves in spaces of decision-making, when it really counts.

When successful practices of amplifying the Indigenous youth voice are shared among members of The Network, increased visibility is provided to those who are the most vulnerable. Their resistance efforts and the human rights violations they suffer are then better shared with the world so that they can be alleviated.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.
Among numerous efforts made by The Network is the development of the Leadership School for Young Women, which aims to strengthen the leadership capacity of Indigenous Latin American women. Other sessions, such as that which was continued from Cairo 20, were linked with feminists and civil society, among others.

Coordination with other sectors in the region enables our work to be realized in a cross-disciplinary manner, such as is currently happening with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Network has been able to raise issues related to sustainable development both in Latin America and at the global level. Among these issues and objectives are Poverty, Zero Hunger, Health and Wellbeing, Gender Equality, Water and Sanitation, and Sustainable Cities and Communities.

For us, it is crucial to continue creating spaces of dialogue and to get more Indigenous youth involved. This way, consensual proposals can be presented that reflect our needs and challenges, which in turn enables us to fully exercise our rights, whether they be individual rights or collective rights. Our intention is also to highlight the range of the diverse youth affected, and to reinforce mobilizations, links, and training processes of members and partners of The Network.

**Improvements, achievements, and challenges**
In this section, we discuss the main improvements, achievements, and challenges from the perspectives of education, health, policy effectiveness, and cultural and intellectual appropriation of Indigenous Peoples.

Educational improvements for Indigenous Peoples in Latin America began to take place around the middle of the 1990s. Intercultural education is a phenomenon that continues to improve with the recognition of the necessity of bilingual schools as part of public policy, such as in the case of Brazil. In the 1980s, Indigenous education and formal training was only guaranteed in the “official” language, Portuguese. This practice was seen as a process of colonization and cultural assimilation because Brazil has the greatest ethnic and linguistic diversity out of all of the Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The persistence of the Indigenous movement in Brazil since 1996 succeeded in producing the following legislation, ensured by the Federal Constitution and by the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law of 1996, in Article 78, I and II:

The Educational System of the Union, in collaboration with the federal agencies for cultural promotion and the welfare of Indigenous Peoples, will develop integrated programs of instruction and research, in order to offer bilingual and intercultural education to Indigenous Peoples, with the
following objectives: to provide to Indigenous Peoples and their communities the recuperation of their historical memories; the reaffirmation of their ethnical identities; the valorization of their languages and sciences; to guarantee to Indigenous Peoples and their communities access to information, and technical and scientific knowledge of the national society as well as of other Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies.\(^\text{13}\)

Even with this massive improvement, there are still many hurdles to overcome in regards to the demand for formal education among Indigenous Peoples. Higher education has always been limited to the elite, and the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in universities is only a recent phenomenon. This inclusion is still in its constructional phases for mechanisms of access and retention, as well as for the dualist education—between western knowledge and traditional knowledge—which must not be lost.

In Brazil, in order to foster access to higher education for the first time, affirmative action policies were created by universities and organizations such as the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), who signed agreements with institutions of higher education, thus making

\(^{13}\) Law n. 9.394, National Education Guidelines and Framework Law of Brazil, December 20, 1996.
possible the access and retention of Indigenous Peoples in higher education.

The presence of Indigenous Peoples in universities raises questions originating in the legitimacy and hegemony crises. The university constantly faces confrontation because it is in the midst of a culturally dynamic and versatile universe, and therefore needs to adapt to the agendas and demands of its student body, including Indigenous youth. This confrontation arises from a mass culture that questions the monopoly of the academy in the process of cultural production and knowledge. Nonetheless, higher education and academic culture itself reflect the privilege of certain social groups, fueling the social and economic elite. In this manner, institutions cease to be centers of excellence in production and become the construction grounds for mechanisms of social justice and democracy.14

In 2012, after 10 years of Indigenous Peoples’ diverse experiences and struggles in Brazilian universities, the National Congress approved the quota policy, which, in Law No. 12.711/2012, ensures admission of public school students, Afro-descendants, Indigenous Peoples, and Quilombolas in Federal Universities of Higher Education (IFES) and Federal Technical Schools.

This breakthrough legislation was celebrated as a historical milestone for these populations.

In 2013, the Brazilian federal government launched the Indigenous Students Retention Program through Ordinance No. 389, of May 9, 2013. The ordinance offers financial assistance via scholarships to minimize social inequality and contribute to the retention and graduation of undergraduate students, as well as those who are in vulnerable socioeconomic situations but are still enrolled in these institutions. We consider this ordinance a wonderful advancement and a good practice to be implemented in other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that have a considerable representation of Indigenous Peoples.

The question of higher education as a permanent agenda for Indigenous youth is a significant one, for the sake of their vocational training and for their qualification to be able to work in their own communities and territories, especially as health professionals. Today we have a great number of Indigenous youth who have graduated from college and are working in their communities as doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers, and community health agents, among other professions. They are professionals in their fields who also value intercultural practices.

Another matter that needs to be improved upon is the health of Indigenous youth. We are aware that in our communities, this matter is directly linked to the subjugation of traditional
medicine, Indigenous Peoples’ traditional practices, and intergenerational dialogue. Health services for Indigenous Peoples have not improved in the region. In fact, Brazil is the only country that has public policies specifically directed towards Indigenous Peoples, in which traditional medicine is recognized as an integral part of the health system. The lack of attention to the health of Indigenous Peoples brings about dire consequences, such as the increase of unplanned pregnancy rates in youth between the ages of 15-24, the increase in youth suicide rates, and migration to cities as young Indigenous People search for healthcare options.

In regards to sexual and reproductive rights, there is a need for intercultural dialogue on health, because Indigenous women in particular have their own way of taking care of their bodies, which does not necessarily mean that they seek out chemical drugs. Data from the OPS show that Indigenous youth become sexually active before non-Indigenous youth,\(^\text{15}\) which indicates a necessity of knowledge about their sexual and reproductive rights. This knowledge will ultimately serve in decreasing the rates of unplanned pregnancy and maternal mortality, while promoting the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and the

empowerment in one’s right to free will, from an intercultural perspective.

With respect to sexual and reproductive health, it is crucial to promote intercultural dialogue between traditional and western knowledge. Educational spaces should be opened up for the family and community, including for traditional authorities. Indigenous youth have empowered themselves by learning to use certain devices, such as phones or the internet, to carry out all of their communications. However, one of the great challenges remaining in this space is having resources to be able to create audio/visual material to share Indigenous knowledge beyond one’s immediate community.

As mentioned earlier, one challenge confronted by Indigenous youth is high suicide rates. Suicide originates from many factors, be they social, physical, or biological. Dialogue with appropriate health services is necessary for suicide prevention. Discrimination has been one of the main reasons for suicide among Indigenous youth, in addition to territorial conflicts and rights violations in Indigenous territories. However, it is worth noting that ancestral and spiritual aspects are intrinsically associated with suicide prevalence among Indigenous youth of Latin America and the Caribbean. Few health professionals know how to deal with this situation.

Nevertheless, it is intended that the Health Plan for Indigenous Youth of Latin America and the
Caribbean\textsuperscript{16} be implemented in other countries, thus guaranteeing their rights to health, wellbeing, and a good life for all.

Traditional means do not create spaces for Indigenous Peoples, and when they do, they are limited and contain biased information. This has forced Indigenous youth to create their own communication strategies to inform their communities through local radio stations, alternative filmmaking, and online information pages, thus bringing about change from the local to the regional level and beyond.

When voices are given the space to be heard and allowed to be disseminated via communication platforms, the community begins to make a change. All of a sudden, these substantial and generational changes are documented through videos, pictures, and audio. This is exactly what facilitates information sharing and education, which shows that people are collectively seeking out solutions to the problems affecting them. Not only do these communication mediums succeed in transmitting information about daily life among Indigenous Peoples, but they also open up spaces for Indigenous Peoples to thrive by using their maternal language and their cultural attire anywhere and everywhere. It is important for these cultural elements to exist freely and without discrimination.

\textsuperscript{16} Supra note 10.
Documentaries and photographs have transcended borders. Presently, the struggles of Indigenous Peoples in defense of elements of their identity and territories are being documented and shared globally. As a result, regional efforts are being united for the implementation and respect of the articles detailed in Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO).17

For example, *People of the Sea and the Wind* is a communications experience. It is a feature film that presents the story of two towns, Álvaro Obregón and La Venta, in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, that struggle to defend their territory against the invasion of transnational corporations who seek to construct wind turbines on their land. “According to the map of wind parks shown on the website of the Mexican Association of Wind Energy A.C. (AMDEEE), the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, for this year of 2016, will have 27 wind parks, with more than 1,500 wind turbines.”18 Jorge Perez, an Indigenous youth of the Zapotec community, was a part of the team that documented

the story, which went on to be recognized both nationally and internationally.

**Effective engagement of Indigenous youth**

For years, the Indigenous youth of Latin America have put forth great effort and have shown tremendous dedication in ensuring their presence in spaces like that of the United Nations and other global institutions and bodies.

One of the proposals that we consider as an advancement for Indigenous youth is the creation of a scholarship program for Indigenous Peoples in bureaus such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Brazil. Both bureaus have dedicated themselves to incorporating Indigenous youth in their work spaces so that the youth can have an experience in the United Nations and cultivate their professional skills in favor of their Indigenous communities and organizations.

While these initiatives are certainly seen as positive steps forward, it is still important to understand that more work needs to be done in these areas. These initiatives must be built upon so that Indigenous youth can better integrate into the work environment. There is much difficulty among youth in accessing their first job, be they Indigenous or non-Indigenous.
When thinking about border zones and Indigenous Peoples, more delicate attention ought to be given by the states and protection organizations that represent the rights of Indigenous Peoples. In Latin America alone, Indigenous Peoples have suffered from numerous factors related to territorial processes, violence, and discrimination, among others. Consequently, in the day-to-day lives of Indigenous youth, we see connections to drug trafficking, sexual exploitation of children, teenage pregnancy, and the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections. This reality is directly linked to territorial conflicts. For Indigenous Peoples, their land represents their existence. Fortunately, we have been able to obtain lawful entitlement of these lands in many countries. In spite of this progress, many Indigenous Peoples still live in unmarked territories. These territories are zones of conflict, where Indigenous Peoples suffer from toxic monoculture (such as in the case of Brazil), exploitation of mineral resources, and, mainly, large infrastructure projects of the state.

Some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have made progress in demarcating Indigenous territories, however we cannot say by any means that these issues have been completely resolved. To recognize the land is to recognize the existence of Indigenous Peoples, yet many governments seem to have no interest in granting this recognition.

In Uruguay, Indigenous organizations of the Charrúa community put pressure on the government
for recognition, principally for recognition of their right to their land and ratification of the International Labor Organization Convention 169. Data taken from the 2011 census from Uruguay’s National Institute of Statistics (INE) show that there is growth in the self-identification of Indigenous Peoples, which marked a four percent increase in the Indigenous population from the 2006 census.\(^{19}\)

The youth of the Council of the Charrúa Nation (CONACHA) aim to bring awareness to the authorities for the recognition of their identity. The elders have used a very distinct strategy to get the youth involved. For example, they try to have ceremonies, celebrations, and other cultural events with music that combines traditional and modern styles. For us, it is also very important to implement art in our work with youth, which allows us to preserve the most traditional aspects of our cultures while fusing them with modernization. Another avenue for cultural strengthening for the CONACHA is in the campsites in the woods and mountains, where ancestral knowledge is passed on. This medium, in particular, is all about recovering the meaning of plain existence, when there was no technology, just human beings and nature. This is the main mechanism to maintain the memories of our people.

In Mexico, it has been a bit tough to obtain coordination among its 68 communities of

Indigenous youth. One of the key weaknesses is the inability to open up spaces for them. Yes, they do have a national youth institution, but the issue of Indigenous youth in particular is complicated. Yet we see once again that even in the face of adversity, efforts are still being put forth and progress is still being made. Grassroots organizations, such as Indigenous Women for the Conservation, Research, and Use of Natural Resources (CIARENA), have opened up spaces and have trained leaders. The youth have been able to create alliances among themselves, which have gone on to pave the way for them to address Indigenous issues in spaces that count.

Currently, the Charrúa people of Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil are trying to unite themselves separately from the states to which they currently belong. In the words of Martin, an Indigenous young man from the Charrúa Nation: “The state has settled on our land, yet we are a nation bigger and greater than the state. It is understood that we are one people and we know no borders.”

In Brazil, for example, there are iconic cases in which Indigenous Peoples succeeded in gaining official recognition of their land, such as in the cases of the Raposa-Serra do Sol community in the northern state of Roraima, and the Xukuru do Ororubá community in the northeastern state of Pernambuco. In the case of the latter, their cause was brought before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the community would go on to
be compensated with more than one million reals from the Brazilian state.

Recently, Brazil has been expelling Indigenous Peoples from their lands, such as in the case of the Guaraní-Kaiowá community in the central-western state of Mato Grosso do Sul. This community lives and experiences extreme human rights violations daily. They live in small campsites along the federal highway of the region, without access to clean water, sanitation, education, or health facilities. These atrocities are due to the conflicts with agribusiness in the region, which is represented by the majority of the legislators in the National Congress.

In Colombia, Indigenous Peoples and their organizations have united with other movements, such as that of the Afro-descendants, in their fight against the humanitarian crisis where armed groups clash with drug traffickers, often on lands of Indigenous Peoples. This conflict has brought about dire consequences, such as the forced conscription of Indigenous youth into these armed groups and the inevitable abandonment of Indigenous land in an attempt to escape the crisis.

When discussing human rights violations, not only are we talking about Indigenous Peoples’ relationship to their lands, but we are also talking about water. For some communities, water represents a spiritual reference as a part of their ancestry and identity. In 2015, Brazil recorded its
worst environmental disaster in history with the collapse of the Samarco dam in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais, which unleashed mining waste across more than 528 miles. This disaster resulted in 17 deaths, leaving entire villages submerged and depositing a little less than 16 trillion gallons of mining waste in and along the Doce River. The main people impacted by this event were members of the Krenak community, who live on the margins of the Doce River and depend on it heavily for subsistence and survival. The river represents not only a means of subsistence, but also a part of ethnic, cultural, and ancestral identity. From this angle, it cannot be denied that the collapse of the Samarco dam resulted in a grave genocide.

In regards to the impacts of the great infrastructure projects on Indigenous lands, the Mapuche community, among others in South America, have been fighting against the separation process of oil refining, which is known as one of the most aggressive processes of energy production that exist. This process contaminates the ground as well as ground water. Peru is one of the countries that

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has been suffering from the presence of oil refineries on Indigenous lands.

Tragedies such as these bring to light the inefficiency of the state in relation to Indigenous Peoples, as it continues to allow numerous violations to go unaddressed and unaccounted for, including Indigenous Peoples’ rights to exist on their land. When thinking about the great infrastructure projects, they do not consider the ancestry, continuation of life, and health of the Indigenous youth that are to come in the future. In many cases, Indigenous Peoples are considered as barriers to development, and so we ask ourselves: What development?

The way in which globalization accompanied by neoliberal capitalism facilitated the wave of social inequalities, environmental imbalances, and social sustainability has caused irreparable socio-environmental impacts. The main damage inflicted by neoliberal capitalism is rooted in inequality, be it social or economic. If all of the acquired knowledge throughout the years had been used coherently, it would be easily understood that Latin America is not by any means underdeveloped. If the state was willing and able to understand Indigenous Peoples’ ancestral and traditional knowledge, then they would know the development that we are talking about.

**Conclusion**
The knowledge of our grandfathers and grandmothers constitute the seeds that, upon germination, reap engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean. Education starts at home and in the community, which in turn serves as a fundamental beginning of influence.

In order to strengthen the capacity of the newer generations, communities have organized in various ways. For example, communities cultivate their elements of identity by passing on knowledge to younger generations, which acts as real support in the facilitation of learning in daily life. This daily life consists of transmitting collective values and caring for Mother Earth. There is a special bond with Mother Nature, a bond that promotes balance and comfortable coexistence with our surroundings.

The support of the elders in the process of learning new knowledge is key, due to their wisdom and acquired experiences. The elders in particular serve as examples in reproducing positive works within Indigenous communities. Traditionally, knowledge was passed down orally because there were no technological tools of communication. Currently, the knowledge gap is still considerably wide since there are still communities without access to technology.

There is more work to be done with respect to public policies aimed at the Indigenous youth of Latin America. We do see countries that have adopted policies for Indigenous Peoples, yet they still lack a focus on the youth. For us, it is of utmost
importance that we continue to build spaces of dialogue and get more and more Indigenous youth involved. Together, consensual proposals can be brought forward that reflect our needs and challenges, enabling us to fully exercise our rights, whether they are individual or collective. In addition, we aim to highlight the range of the diverse youth affected, and strengthen the mobilizations, links, and education of Indigenous youth. This is our goal.

We must strengthen the link between Indigenous youth’s organizational processes and collectively analyze the achievements, strategies, and improvements among the newer generations. We must follow the example of the Indigenous youth scholars who have gained visibility in their universities for having offered reflections and discussions in search of the valorization of cultural and traditional knowledge of Indigenous communities. They are seeking out ways to connect Indigenous and scientific knowledge.

Right now, we are being recognized by our leaders who truly want to understand more about the aspirations and concerns of Indigenous youth. We always talk about the importance of our ancestors, who are our living encyclopedias. Like them, we must resist and continue the fight. We must be ever more prepared to occupy spaces with our culture, songs, and attire to make our presence felt.
We are immensely grateful to have been able to participate in the writing of this book. To paraphrase the words of the young Brazilian Indigenous woman Celia Xabriaba, of the Xabriabá community: “To recognize Indigenous participation in epistemic formation is to contribute to the decolonization process of minds and bodies.”

EASTERN EUROPE, RUSSIAN FEDERATION, CENTRAL ASIA AND TRANSCAUCASIA

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Chapter 8: Indigenous Youth in Russia:
Challenges and Opportunities

Varvara KORKINA¹ (Kumandin People, Western Siberia)

Acknowledgements

Many people contributed to the writing and publication of this chapter. This chapter is the epitome of my eight years of working experience with Indigenous youth in Russia.

To begin, I am deeply grateful to Andrey Petrov, without whom the project would not have been possible. I recognize his respect for Indigenous Peoples and his strong belief that the Indigenous voice should be delivered by Indigenous scholars. I thank him for giving me so many opportunities to work on this research.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all interviewees who brought their problems and hopes to this chapter. Despite the help I have received, I am responsible for the content and I apologize in advance for any inaccuracies this text may contain.

¹ The author is grateful for the editing of this text by Andrey Petrov from Russian to English.
Introduction

Russia is the largest country in the world. Approximately 76% of its territories were historically Indigenous native lands. According to Russian legislation, the Native lands are called the “territories of traditional land use of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East.”\(^2\) The Russian government specifically recognizes only Indigenous “numerically small” Peoples, or nations with populations totaling less than 50,000 persons.\(^3\) There are approximately 250,000 Indigenous Peoples and 41 nations living on their tribal lands in Russia. Indigenous nations in Russia are very diverse in respect to livelihood, cultures and languages.

\(^2\) Federal’noe Sobranie RF (1999), constitutionrf.ru.
\(^3\) Ibid.
Among Indigenous Peoples in Russia, there are forest people who live in the Siberian settlements, such as the Selkups, Kumandin, and Udege. Their traditional economic activities are gathering, fishing, beadwork and hunting. Also, there are sea hunters who live on the coasts of the northern Pacific Ocean, such as the Yup’ik and Aleut. However, the majority of the Indigenous

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nations in Russia are nomadic reindeer nations. That includes such large ethnic groups such as the Nenets, Chukchi, Evenk, Even, and Koryak.

Thirty percent of all Russians live in the Asian part of the country (east of the Ural Mountains) and 75% of Russians are urban residents. In contrast, based on the Russian census of 2010, Russian Indigenous Peoples mostly live in the rural areas; only 30% of Indigenous Peoples live in urban communities. However, the census does not include data on how many Indigenous Peoples live in Russia’s largest cities: Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Novosibirsk and others.5

Indigenous Peoples in Russia are one of the most vulnerable groups based on socioeconomic criteria.6 In Russia, educational and economic opportunities are heavily concentrated in urban centers.7 This means that most Indigenous

communities do not have access to these resources, and many residents subsequently struggle with high unemployment, alcoholism, domestic violence, suicide, and food insecurity.  

In the report on his mission to the Russian Federation, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Racism, Mr. Doudou Diène, concluded that the small-numbered Indigenous Peoples of the North have a higher risk of extreme poverty, low life expectancy, unnatural death and other unfavorable conditions than all other Russian residents.

Johannes Rohr analyzed the current situation of Russian Indigenous Peoples and wrote, “The Indigenous Peoples of Russia have extremely high adult mortality rates. Just over one-third of Indigenous men (37.8%) and less than two-thirds of Indigenous women (62.2%) in Russia reach the age of 60. At the national level, the figures are 54% for men and 83% for women. 36% of northern Indigenous people die prematurely from unnatural

8 Ibid.
10 Ibid, 32.
causes, which is more than double the national average of 15%.”

The Indigenous nations in Russia face many challenges, including climate change and struggles with extractive industries.\textsuperscript{11} The Russian North is warming faster than other territories around the world.\textsuperscript{12} Additionally, the amount of natural disasters in Russia is increasing dramatically, such as forest wildfires in Siberia or flooding in the Far East. The result of exploitation of the Indigenous lands by extractive industries or the effects of climate change is the shrinking of Indigenous lands. What do people do when they have lost their homelands, their reindeer? They migrate to the cities, hoping to find a job or any opportunities for survival.

\textbf{Encountering the experiences of urban Indigenous youth in Russia}

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 31-32.
According to the 2010 Russian census, most urban Indigenous youth in Russia live in the regional capitals of the Northern cities. The largest population of young Indigenous Peoples live between the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous district, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District, Sakha Republic and Chukotskiy Autonomous District. However, proportionally, the biggest number of urban Indigenous Youth (in particular, aged 15-29 years) live in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District.

Figure 2: Map created by Varvara Korkina and Anna Pestereva.

One of the reasons for this rural-to-urban migration is the pursuit of education for children
and adolescents. This was true for my nation, the Kumandin people. We are a small Altai nation; our population is about 2,800 people around the world. Our core settlement is the city of Byisk (Altai Territory). About 45% of the entire Kumandin population live there. According to the testimonies of Kumandin elders, they left Indigenous rural communities because there were no high schools there and the parents did not want to be separated from their children if they had to be sent to boarding schools. As a result, they migrated to the closest city with a well-organized education system.

My understanding of the role and place of Indigenous youth in cities stems from my own work experience in the State Polar Academy, Saint Petersburg. This university was created for the development of the cold and remote territories in Russia. The main idea was to provide higher education to Indigenous youth and then facilitate their return to their communities. This idea did not work well because none of the faculty members and staff understood the specific requirements for working with Indigenous youth in big cities.

The main problem was the mismatch between western knowledge and the students’ homeland experience. This gap, created by the education system, was further propagated when these newly trained Indigenous youth went back to

\[13 \text{“Akstat” (2010), http://akstat.gks.ru/}\]
their small communities and their professional skills did not match the real life where they were from.

Indigenous youth are dramatically affected by globalization, climate change, cultural and social changes. These profound changes have occurred largely over the past fifty years, and have resulted in significant behavioral health disparities for young Indigenous people. In particular, these health disparities affect young men, who frequently suffer with substance abuse, violence, and youth suicide, as is profiled in research on this topic.\textsuperscript{14}

Youth in the Arctic today find themselves searching for ways to put traditional native values and teachings into practice in the context of dominant Russian, American, Norwegian, and Euro-Canadian culture, and find themselves largely constrained by structural and institutional obstacles.\textsuperscript{15} In the face of pressures and challenges, youth are developing specific capacities to navigate successfully. However, as case studies describe, successful transition to adulthood is possible only if a young person has access to the necessary social and economic resources critical for movement through the key developmental stages.


\textsuperscript{15} Barry Scott Zellen, \textit{On Thin Ice: The Inuit, the State, and the Challenge of Arctic Sovereignty} (United States of America: Lexington Books, 2009).
Interviews were conducted by the author as a part of the Arctic Youth and Sustainable Futures project with the Russian Urban Indigenous Youth (RUIY). Three sets of focus group interviews were conducted with young Indigenous people between 20-26 years old in different parts of Russia. The first focus group was held online and consisted of eight young respondents from five different Indigenous groups. Twelve additional interviews (three male and nine female) were conducted in Moscow. Finally, 25 mature Indigenous artists were interviewed in Moscow and the Altai Republic to illuminate the role of Indigenous youth and cultural economy in Indigenous societies.

The following issues were identified by the young people in the first and second focus groups:

Remoteness and lack of transportation
- No access to medical services (they must order a helicopter for a tooth removal surgery or childbirth).
- Less transportation availability (e.g., they cannot go on vacation because of limited time and they can become stuck at the airport without transportation to their home communities).
- Feelings of isolation are prevalent.

Education
- Most former students who received high levels of education have had problems implementing their knowledge and
experience at the local level in their communities. Their relatives, neighbors and coworkers usually reject city life experience. For example, one of the respondents indicated that she does not try to use her knowledge she retained from university because people tell her: “You came in from the city and show off here.”

Language

- The majority of the respondents do not speak a native language. They reported that they feel disconnected from their native language, that they are losing the touch with their culture, and some worry that they will disappear as a nation soon.

- Some of them told us: “Language is the soul of a nation,” or “No language, no people. We need to learn language, because we are losing it,” and “Language helps to connect to previous generations. Information is transmitted more easily through language.”

- Conversely, speaking one’s native tongue can be an assertion of cultural identity in which a sense of belonging is articulated in explicitly oppositional, territorial, and boundary-defining terms.

Jobs and lack of career aspirations

- All interviewees mentioned that the government does not provide any job opportunities for Indigenous youth even if they have a better education than locals or newcomers from the central parts of Russia.
They complained that they cannot find good jobs in their communities or in the cities near their homelands.

- Employers do not want to hire Indigenous youth because they lack work experience. Some young people believe that this is part of everyday racism and colonialism. They do not feel respected in their local communities without employment. One of the participants lamented: “Local people who received educations don't get jobs because they are already taken by teachers from other regions. No jobs for educated Chukchi.”

Other frequently raised issues were disconnectedness, split identity and social problems, including drinking, and marginalization. Also, the interviewees mentioned a lack of entertainment and self-actualization. To the question: “Why do you think Indigenous youth drink alcohol?” they responded that youth do not have enough knowledge, self-resilience, or faith for personal growth without resorting to substance misuse. One of the reasons for drinking is the relative absence of parental pressure, a lack of discipline, and what sometimes seems to be a lack of interest in the lives of children and teens by parents in Indigenous communities; these are often viewed as the source of youth boredom and mischief.16

16 Olga Ulturgasheva et al., “Arctic indigenous youth resilience and vulnerability: Comparative analysis of adolescent experiences across five circumpolar

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Based on my research, I analyzed urban Indigenous youth who live in the big industrial Arctic cities. According to the second focus group of urban Indigenous youth, I found that Indigenous youth are not focused on their sacred and traditional meanings and beliefs. They are more interested to express themselves as Indigenous and popularize their cultures for others. They recognize assimilation as a problem for them and their children, and would like to have an occupation connected with their heritage. Also, respondents reported lacking opportunities to obtain business skills and expressed their willingness to learn trades from the business classes.

**Indigenous youth entrepreneurship: A possible solution?**

Many Indigenous communities, especially in the Arctic, demand the “new money” which should stay in Indigenous communities, instead of “oil” money. Petrov, in his paper “Exploring the Arctic’s ‘other economies’: Knowledge, creativity and the new frontier,” \(^1\) discusses the role of cultural economy for the remote and cold territories. He points out that elements of traditional knowledge, such as arts and crafts, are not only important components of communities,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51, no. 5 (2014): 735-756.

Indigenous culture, but are also commodities that can bring economic profit.

In the last set of interviews with 25 practicing Indigenous artists, most respondents said that they received an income from selling their crafts at least once. However, they also indicated that the main problem remains the lack of access to customers. There is a gap between the market and Indigenous communities. They need to have an intermediary who will manage market demands, bring this demand to the communities, and help sell Indigenous items on the market. Indigenous urban youth could serve as such an intermediary.

I think developing entrepreneurial skills is a path to a sustainable future for urban Indigenous youth and rural Indigenous settlements. The Russian urban Indigenous youth are a poorly studied group of people and currently, their role in society is undervalued. Nevertheless, their potential is very important for the modern cultural survival of all Indigenous Peoples in Russia and beyond. More studies should focus on understanding the conditions, human capital and potential futures of the Indigenous urban youth in the context of the sustainable development of Indigenous societies.18

18 This research was partially supported by PLR #1338850 RCN-SEES Arctic-FROST: Arctic FRontiers Of SusTainability: Resources, Societies, Environments and Development in the Changing North and 1441381 RCN Arctic-COAST: Arctic COASTal Community and
Environmental Resilience International Interdisciplinary Research Coordination Network.
Crimean Tatars: today, this small number of people is known all over the world. The history of the Crimean Tatars is full of complicated moments and tragic events, as well as the centuries-old history of Crimea itself. On repeated occasions, representatives of the Indigenous Crimean Tatar Peoples were persecuted and repressed—their territories were seized, they were deported to Central Asia in cattle wagons, and they were not allowed to return to their homeland. Because of such inhumane policies, the number of Crimean Tatars has decreased significantly over the years. In an interview with the author of this chapter, historian Gulnara Abdullaeva stated that there are only about 300,000 Tatars who live compactly in their historical homeland—in Crimea (more than 100,000 still remain in Uzbekistan). The events of recent years served to be a true tragedy for them. Because of their disagreement with the occupation of Crimea by Russia, they are continuously subjected to pressure and repression by the Russian authorities of the peninsula. This is recognized in resolutions made by the United Nations General
Assembly.\textsuperscript{1} However, the Tatars’ extraordinary ability to unite and their centuries-old experience of non-violent struggle for their rights makes it possible to keep Crimean issues on the agenda at the international level. Crimean Tatars sincerely believe that soon things are bound to improve and people will live freely and will be able to return to their homeland. The older generation often repeats: “We survived deportation in 1944, heat and cold, hunger and death, inhumane conditions of life in a foreign land. After nearly half a century, we were able to return to our homeland. We will definitely survive this, too.” And trust me, they are right. Their great desire to live freely on their land will overcome any obstacle.

\textbf{Who are Crimean Tatars? What is their origin?}

Crimean Tatars are the Indigenous Peoples of Crimea; they are Eastern European Turkic people, who historically came from the Crimean

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peninsula. The ethnic history of the Crimean Tatars originates from ancient times and, around the 16th century, the state of the Crimean Khanate was formed. This process took place in different ways (through migration, integration, assimilation, resettlement, and the conquest of some ethnic groups by others). Crimean Tatars are descendants of different peoples from Asia and Europe who came to Crimea at different times. The Tavras, Cimmerians, Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans, Hellenes, Goths, Huns, Khazars, Pechenegs, Kypchaks, Italians, Circassians, and partly the Seljuk Turks all took part in the formation of this Indigenous People. Consolidation of this diverse ethnic conglomerate into a single Crimean Tatar people has been happening for millennia. The connecting principles in this process were the community of the territory, the Turkic language and the Islamic religion. Crimean Tatars, having acquired their main features as a nation in the 15th century, flourished in the 16th to the 18th centuries. However, it was as early as the thirteenth century that, as a result of favorable geographic locations and massive migration of different peoples from across Europe and Asia, one of the youngest European ethnic groups was formed.

The Crimean Tatar state, Crimean Khanate, existed from 1441 to 1783. For most of its history, it

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was an ally of the Ottoman Empire. On April 8, 1783, the mighty power of Gerais, the Crimean Khanate, ceased to exist. In all cities and large settlements of Crimea, a manifesto on the annexation of Crimea to Russia was read. In St. Petersburg, they did not care that the document was adopted illegally. Crimean Tatars refused to take the oath of annexation to Russia and this marked the beginning of an era in the history of Crimean Tatars called the “Black Century.”

The policy of subjugation of the Crimean Khanate, which led to the invasion of Russian troops in Crimea, was a direct violation of the Kyuchuk-Kainarji peace treaty between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. This peace treaty was signed on July 21, 1774, and it proclaimed the independence of the Crimean Khanate.

Empress Catherine's annexation of Crimea turned into a catastrophe for the Crimean Tatars. The Crimean Khanate completely lost the remnants of its independence. The traditions of Crimean Tatars, their cultural and spiritual life, their morale, and their economy, all received devastating blows. The annexation of Crimea to Russia caused hundreds of thousands of Crimean Tatars to flee and

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seek refuge in the Ottoman Empire. Crimean Tatars became a minority in their homeland.⁴

At the end of the nineteenth century, a reform movement arose, headed by Crimean Tatar intelligentsia. Crimean Tatar revival is connected with the name of an outstanding cultural figure, the educator Ismail Gasprinsky (1851-1914). He made great efforts to revive and educate the Crimean Tatar people. He urged his compatriots not to leave Crimea. On the pages of his newspaper Terzhiman (the first Crimean Tatar newspaper, which literally means Translator), he explained to Crimean Tatars that they are a nation whose roots are in the Crimean land, a nation whose history reaches back to antiquity. The emphasis was on the fact that they are a secular nation that has the right to their homeland. Gasprinsky acted as an enlightener of the whole East, a democrat and a politician, who called for unification to solve urgent problems. He put forward the slogan “Dilde, fikirde, işde birlik” (“Unity in language, deeds and thoughts”).⁵

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The Civil War in Russia had very serious consequences for Crimean Tatars. After the February Revolution in 1917, the first Kurultai (National Government) of the Crimean Tatar people was convened, which proclaimed a course for the creation of an independent multi-ethnic Crimean People's Republic.6

Noman Chelebidzhikhan, a Crimean Tatar politician and public figure, was elected as Chairman of the Directorate (National Government) and simultaneously as the Minister of Justice. “Our task,” he said, “is the creation of a state like Switzerland. The peoples of Crimea are a beautiful bouquet, and for every people, equal rights and conditions are necessary because we must go hand in hand.”7

However, the October Revolution in Russia and the Bolsheviks' refusal to acknowledge the Crimean Tatar government resulted in the jeopardizing of the existence of the young Crimean People's Republic. On January 26, 1918, Bolshevik armed detachments from Sevastopol switched to active military operations. The Crimean Tatar government was overthrown and control of Crimea was temporarily passed to the Bolsheviks. The Chairman of the Crimean Tatar government,

6 Andriy Ivanets, The First Kurultai: From the Crimean Tatar constituent assembly to the national parliament (1917-1918) (Ukraine: Klio, 2018), 160.
Noman Chelebidzhikhan, was arrested and detained for 27 days in the Sevastopol prison. On February 23, 1918, Chelebidzhikhan was shot, and his body was thrown into the Black Sea.

In 1944, the Crimean Tatars were deported from the Crimean Peninsula through state-organized and forcible actions, ordered by then-Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. Deportation began on May 18, 1944, in all Crimean-inhabited localities. More than 230,000 people were deported, mostly to Uzbekistan. This includes the entire ethnic Crimean Tatar population, at the time numbering about a fifth of the total population of the Crimean Peninsula, as well as a smaller number of ethnic Greeks and Bulgarians. The lack of adequate accommodation and food, the failure to adapt to new climatic conditions and the rapid spread of diseases, all took a heavy demographic toll during the first years of the Crimean Tatars' exile. According to surveys conducted by Crimean Tatar activists in the 1960s, more than 109,956 Crimean Tatars of the 238,500 deportees (46.2%) died between July 1, 1944, and January 1, 1947, because of starvation and disease. From May to November 1944, 10,105 Crimean Tatars died of starvation in Uzbekistan (9% of those who were deported to this area). Nearly 30,000 Crimean Tatars died in exile during the first year and a half after deportation, according to Soviet secret police data. As Soviet dissident information attests, many Crimean Tatars
were forced to work in large-scale projects implemented by the Soviet Gulag system.8,9

“It” would seem that all of this would inevitably lead to the complete assimilation and disappearance of the Crimean Tatar people, but that did not happen. On the contrary, in exile, a new generation grew up with an extremely developed national identity and dreamed of returning to their homeland.

In the second half of the 1950s, a national movement for the restoration of the rights of the Crimean Tatar people was born in the places of expulsion. Young people, as the driving force of the nation, played an important role in the struggle of Crimean Tatars to restore their rights and return to their homeland. Over the decades, representatives of Crimean Tatar youth have worked actively and creatively to return to their homeland.

On April 28, 1956, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued a decree “On lifting restrictions on special settlements with Crimean Tatars....”10 This decree equalized Crimean Tatars, who had the status of special settlers from 1944 to 1956, with other Soviet citizens, but

8 Ibid.
forbade them from returning to Crimea. The Supreme Soviet of the USSR was the most authoritative legislative body of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics beginning in 1936, and the only one with the power to approve constitutional amendments. After this decree was passed, the partisans, participants in the Great Patriotic War, became active. They held meetings with the other Crimean Tatars in their regions and explained that it is necessary to fight for a return to their historical homeland: Crimea.

In the early 1960s, the youth movement “Union of Crimean Tatar Youth” was established. Representatives of the organization were actively working to return to their homeland. Unfortunately, the history of the Union ended with the arrest of two of its leaders. In August of 1962, the court hearing over Marat Omerov and Seit-Amza Umerov was held in the Supreme Court of the Uzbek SSR. After four days of a closed trial, the sentence was announced: Omerov Marat was imprisoned for four years in a corrective labor colony, while Umerov Seit Amza was sentenced to three years in a penal colony. In Marat Omeroy’s trial, it was asserted that “in 1958 he tried to create an illegal organization to fight for the restoration of the national rights of the Crimean Tatar people. ... At the illegal gatherings held from February until April of 1962, Omerov called his supporters to fight for the restoration of the alleged national rights of the Crimean Tatars
and slandered Soviet reality.”¹¹ Seit Amza Umerov was charged for similar reasons. One of the accusations against him were poems he had in his possession, which the investigation regarded as “anti-Soviet and nationalist.”¹²

After the 1960s, young people such as Mustafa Dzhemilev, Yuri Osmanov, Ayshe Seitmuratova and others began to surface as leaders, and take the baton from the older generation and continue the non-violent struggle of the Crimean Tatar people for their rights. In the 1970s, representatives of the Crimean Tatar youth repeatedly made attempts to return to Crimea, but many were deported again. The peak of repatriation occurred in 1989-1991. In the 1980s, young people took an active part in various international events, including actions in Tashkent and in Moscow.

One such example of an action taken by a young Tatar during this period is in November 1980 when Ayshe Seitmuratova, speaking at the Madrid Conference as an authorized representative of Crimean Tatars in the West, addressed the participants of the Final Act of the Helsinki Accords. Seitmuratova made the request to support the aspirations of the Crimean Tatar people to return to Crimea, and to defend the convicted members of Crimean Tatar national movement: Mustafa Dzhemilev, Seidamet Memetov, Eldar Shabanov,

¹² Ibid.
Mamed Chobanov, Reshat Dzhemilev, Rolan Kadyev and others.\textsuperscript{13}

For the 1986 Vienna meeting of representatives of the participating states of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ayshe Seitmuratova prepared a brochure in English, dedicated to the protection of Mustafa Dzhemilev, who was imprisoned in Magadan during that period.\textsuperscript{14} The brochure, which contained various facts and photos of Dzhemilev and requested assistance for his release, was distributed among foreign ministers of all thirty-five states participating in the conference.\textsuperscript{15} Crimean Tatar writer Riza Fazyl wrote that the Vienna Conference launched the liberation of political prisoners of the USSR. After the conference, at the behest of the USSR Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev, Sakharov was returned from exile to Moscow and Dzhemilev was released from the camp where he was being held.


\textsuperscript{14} Mustafa Dzhemilev and the Crimean Tatars: Story of a Man and His People. Facts, Documents, How to Help (New York: The Center for Democracy, 1986).

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Supra} note 13.
To raise the global public awareness of the plight of the Indigenous Peoples of Crimea, Ayshe Seitmuratova spoke about the Crimean Tatar question in the parliaments of Canada, England, Italy, Turkey, France and at the US Congress; she spoke on the radio station “Voice of America” and others; and met with leaders of different countries of the world. She was twice invited to the White House by American President Ronald Reagan (in 1982 and in 1988).16

It is clear that the contribution of the youth representatives of the Crimean Tatar people to the national cause was of great importance.

In 1991, the second Kurultai (National Parliament) was convened and a system of national self-government of Crimean Tatars was created. Every five years there are elections for a new Kurultai. The Kurultai elects a representative-executive body: the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people. Since the establishment of the Mejlis, the Chairman of that body was Mustafa Dzhamilev. Since November 2013, the Chairman of the Mejlis has been Refat Chubarov.

In 1994, the fourth Kurultai of Turkic youth was held in Crimea. At that time, there was no organization that represented the youth of the Crimean Tatars. After this, the process began to unite Crimean Tatar youth and create an

16 Ibid.
organization under which to do so. In December 1994, the first provisional council was created, which included students from different universities in Crimea and representatives of youth from the places most densely populated by Crimean Tatars in Crimea. For half a year, representatives of the temporary council traveled around Crimea, met with youth, held meetings and elected delegates of the first Kurultai of Crimean Tatar youth.

On May 14, 1995, at the first Kurultai of Crimean Tatar youth, it was decided to create the first Crimean youth organization, called the “Crimean Tatar Youth Center” (CTYC). After that, the Kurultai developed a Crimean Tatar youth policy with a charter and identified direction of work.

Over time, the CTYC became one of the leading organizations in Crimea to actively support the rights of Indigenous youth. For example, in 1995, the CTYC conducted an action against the war in Chechnya near the Russian Consulate in Simferopol. In 1996, representatives of the organization brought 102 children from Chechnya to Crimea for further rehabilitation in Crimean Tatar families. In addition, the activists organized the collection of medicines for the Chechen people. After the earthquake in Turkey in the late 1990s, representatives of the CTYC also organized a collection of medicines for those victims.
In 1995, representatives of the CTYC held a hunger strike in protest against the adoption of the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Each member of the organization hungered for three days and sent a telegram to the President of Ukraine stating that they do not agree with the adopted Constitution. In 1996, the CTYC took part in the elections of the Kurultai. The Chairman of the organization, Eskender Bariiev, became a delegate to the Kurultai of the Crimean Tatar people. In an interview with the author of this chapter, Mr. Bariiev said that the CTYC's goal was to unite Crimean Tatar youth to raise and develop the intellectual, spiritual and cultural potential of the Crimean Tatar people. According to his words, the representatives of the organization set themselves the task of developing socially active representatives of the Indigenous People and preserving the identity of the Crimean Tatar people.

**Crimea and Crimean Tatar youth: The human rights situation**

In February 2014, Russia occupied Crimea. The rejection by the majority of the Crimean Tatars of the annexation of Crimea to Russia set the tone for a protracted conflict between the community and its leaders against the new Crimean and Moscow authorities. Since the beginning of March 2014, Crimean Tatars have been subjected to constant repression and discrimination by the de facto authorities.
The last four years under the conditions of the Russian occupation have become very dangerous for the Indigenous Peoples of Crimea, as they face violations of the principles embodied in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). However, it worth noting that in September 2007, Russia abstained from voting on the UNDRIP.

According to Freedom House, “the occupation government severely limits political and civil rights, has silenced independent media, and employs antiterrorism and other laws against political dissidents. Members of the indigenous Crimean Tatar minority, many of whom vocally oppose the Russian occupation, have faced particularly acute repression by the authorities.”

Searches and detentions, interrogations and arrests, disappearances and forcible abductions of people have become regular practice on the peninsula.

According to information provided by the human rights organization Crimean Tatar Resource Center, 17 people are considered missing since the occupation began, about whom there is no information. Of these 17 people, 13 of them are representatives of the Indigenous Crimean Tatar People. Out of these 17 people, six are youth representatives (from 13 to 30 years of age), while

four out of these six are representatives of Indigenous youth. Most arrests follow the same scenario: persons in the law enforcement services uniforms force a victim into a car and take him or her to an unknown destination. Surveillance camera records or statements of witnesses have not brought any results in the search for these people.18

Since the beginning of the annexation on the peninsula, 16 people have been found dead; 11 of them are representatives of the indigenous Crimean Tatar people. Out of these 16 people, six are youth (again, between the ages of 13 to 30 years old) and of these six, five are representatives of specifically Indigenous youth.19

The first victim of the Russian regime in Crimea was Reshat Ametov. The President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, mentioned this case in his speech in the U.S. Congress on September 18, 2014. On March 3, 2014, father of three Reshat Ametov came out to picket the building of the Ministers’ Council in Simferopol to protest against

the Russian invasion of Crimea. During this protest action, several representatives of the so-called Crimean “self-defense” tied his hands, violently dragged him into a car, and took him to an unknown destination. On March 15, 2014, Ametov was found dead near the village of Zemlyanychne, in the Bilohirsk area. The body of the man was found with numerous traces of tortures, and his hands were handcuffed. The cause of death was a stab wound to the eye area. Despite the fact that his capture was recorded on camera, the investigation has not produced any perpetrators, and in 2015, the investigation was suspended indefinitely.20

Since the illegal annexation of Crimea, the number of such murders has increased. In October 2014, the bodies of two young Crimean Tatars were found with signs of torture. In the summer of 2015, another three young Tatar men died from stab wounds and head injuries sustained under suspicious circumstances. In May 2016, a student named Dzhokhar Melyasanov was killed under questionable circumstances. In June 2016, a 35-year-old Crimean Tatar named Mumine Aliyeva was raped and killed. 83-year-old Vedzhie Kashka died during a detention by authorities. The appeals to Russian law enforcement bodies to protect human and civil rights go unanswered.21

To date, more than 70 political prisoners of Crimea are being held in Russian prisons. More

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
than half are representatives of the Indigenous Crimean Tatar People. A number of human rights organizations agree that these cases are politically motivated and criminal, and the arrests of Crimean Tatar activists are an example of xenophobia towards the Indigenous Peoples of Crimea. The international community has repeatedly appealed to the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, to release the prisoners of the Kremlin, but they have been kept in custody for a long time.22

These illegal actions turned into real tragedies, firstly for the families of the repressed people. More than 100 children in Crimea have been left without fathers and/or family breadwinners as a result of these disappearances and murders. They saw how the armed soldiers in masks used physical force, insulted and took their fathers from their homes. Being minors, they felt the pain and bitterness for the loss of their family, and they were deprived of paternal care and affection. Every child needs psychological and material assistance. Today, there are a number of initiatives that support the repressed families and particularly their children. Every year, there are various actions, charity fairs and concerts in support of families of Crimean political prisoners.

In addition to the disappearances and murders, according to the Crimean Tatar Resource Center, in 2017 there were 62 searches of homes belonging to Crimean Tatars; 286 detentions of Crimean Tatars; 340 interrogations; 46 arrests; 104 fines for over five million rubles ($75,000); 515 violations of the right to a fair trial and due process of law assistance; 80 violations of freedom of peaceful assembly; 33 cases of violations of freedom of movement; and 38 violations of the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Out of 104 total penalties meted out (either monetary fines or sanctions of some kind), 99 of these were imposed on representatives of the Indigenous People.23

Representatives of the Indigenous youth also fall within this same cycle of repression. They are often subjected to detention and interrogation. They are inclined to cooperate, and to be intimidated. For example, in September 2017, officers from the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation detained Renata Paralamov; at the time, he was only 21 years old. The day after his arrest, Paralamov was found at a bus station with signs of torture on his body. Paralamov himself, in an

interview for “Crimea: Realities,” said that the FSB officers persuaded him to cooperate, applied electric shocks to his body, injured his jaw and threatened him with further violence. After the incident, Paralamov was forced to live on the mainland of Ukraine.24

In October 2017, representatives of the Crimean Tatar youth took action along with older Crimean Tatars throughout the territory of Crimea. They urged the Russian authorities of the peninsula to stop the repression of Crimean Tatars. Following this mobilization, more than 30 people were detained. After collecting fingerprints, taking photographs, conducting interrogations and removing the posters put up by detainees, these detainees were released. Over December 18th and 19th, 2017, over 70 Crimean activists were fined for holding solitary pickets on October 14th of the same year. Everyone was charged with Part 5 of Art. 20.2 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of Russia.25

In the first half of 2018, the Crimean Tatar Resource Center recorded 66 searches, 73 detentions, 89 interrogations and warnings, 98

arrests, 22 fines for 529,500 rubles ($8,000), 286 violations of the right to a fair trial, 30 violations of the right to the highest attainable level of physical and mental health, five violations of the right to peaceful assembly, and seven illegal transfers. Most of these violations affected representatives of the Indigenous Crimean Tatar Peoples, including young people. Cases were recorded in which representatives of Crimean Tatar youth were subjected to searches and detentions, interrogations, arrests and fines for the alleged spread of “extremist materials” on social networks. For example, in January 2018, Russian security forces detained 27-year-old Geray Kulametov. He was accused of “propagating paraphernalia or symbols of extremist organizations” and was arrested and detained for 10 days for publishing a video (of unknown content) in 2012 on a social network. This is not an isolated case. In June 2018, Russian security forces conducted a “search of the premises” where a 27-year-old Crimean Tatar woman named Elina Mamedova lived. They seized two phones, two tablets, a laptop, a computer system unit and hard drives. A criminal case was opened against Elina Mamedova for three reposts she made on the social network “VKontakte” under Article 282 Part 1 of the Russian Criminal Code (“inciting hatred and enmity, humiliation of human dignity”). In June 2018, Mamedova had to sign a written statement not to leave her home.

26 Supra note 23.
27 “I have a gold medal, red diploma and criminal case’- Elina Mamedova,” Realities, August 1, 2018,
It is also worth noting that, since 2015, Crimean authorities have forbidden holding an annual mourning rally dedicated to the memory of the victims of deportation of the Crimean Tatars. On May 17, 2018, in Simferopol, in an area densely populated by Crimean Tatars, Russian security forces detained approximately 20 representatives of the Crimean Tatar youth who held an action called “Light a spark in your heart” to mark the Day of Remembrance of the victims of deportation of the Crimean Tatars. The youth were interrogated, fingerprinted, and their phones were seized and checked. In addition, DNA samples were taken from the detainees. Among the detainees were several minors.

According to the experts at the Crimean Tatar Youth Center, these repressive actions against Crimean Tatars and pro-Ukrainian activists are acts of deterrence and intimidation of people disloyal to Russia's actions in Crimea. A number of human rights activists believe that the actions of the occupation authorities are a blow to Crimean Tatar identity and a response to the attempted unity of the Crimean Tatar people. However, many Crimean Tatars are convinced that the occupiers are creating unbearable living conditions for the native Crimean Tatars on land and squeezing them out of their historical homeland through systemic oppression.

As already mentioned, representatives of Indigenous youth are also falling under this wave of repression. Increasingly, young people face a violation of the right to education in their native language. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (both of which are ratified by Russia) impose obligations on Russia to realize the right to education without any discrimination; however, in practice, Crimean residents have faced discrimination based on ethnicity and language in the realm of education.

On August 27, 2018, Eskender Bariiev, member of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, said on the air of “Crimea: Realities” that in the annexed Crimea, there are only seven schools with Crimean Tatar as the language of instruction out of an original 16 schools. He noted that, according to the 2017/2018 official data of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Crimea, there are seven municipal educational institutions with Crimean Tatar language of instruction, four with Russian and Crimean Tatar languages of instruction and five educational institutions that have changed the status of the school to a “general educational institution,” meaning that it has no defined language of instruction.28

28 “In Crimea, out of 16 schools with the Crimean Tatar language of instruction, there are left only seven,” Realities, August 27, 2018, https://ru.krymr.com/a/news
There are some cases in which the administrations of educational institutions in Crimea, under various pretexts, have created obstacles for people applying for education in their native language, for example by reducing the number of hours for studying Crimean Tatar language and literature. In August 2018, it became known that in the village of Orlovka in the city of Sevastopol, the director of a school refused to open a class with Crimean Tatar language of instruction, referring to the fact that she had fulfilled the state mandate for the number of classes in the spring and would not make any changes. Additionally, this director said that she did not have free space for another class and that there was no primary school teacher with the ability to teach in the Crimean Tatar language. This situation undermines respect for the basic principles, including language, that define the Crimean Tatar community. It should be noted that the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2017 on “The Situation with Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol, Ukraine” calls on the Russian occupation authorities to ensure that the educational process takes place in both the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages.29

Another important problem is the illegal call of Crimeans to the ranks of the armed forces of the

iz-16-krymskotatrskih-shkol-v-krymu-ostalos-7/29456110.html.
29 Supra note 1, at A/RES/72/190.
Russian Federation. In 2018, the seventh conscription campaign for the Russian army was held in Crimea. These acts of the occupying authorities violate Article 51 of the Geneva Convention, which states that “[T]he Occupying Power may not compel protected persons to serve in its armed or auxiliary forces. No pressure or propaganda which aims at securing voluntary enlistment is permitted.”\textsuperscript{30} In addition, the UN Resolution on Crimea calls on Russia to stop the “practice of coercion of the Crimean residents to serve in the armed or auxiliary forces of the Russian Federation, including through pressure or propaganda.”\textsuperscript{31}

During an interview with the author, Eskender Bariiev, member of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, noted that today the occupation authorities specifically try to intimidate representatives of the Indigenous youth to create a break in continuity between the older generation and the youth. In his opinion, in spite of these

circumstances, it is important to preserve one's identity and continue the non-violent struggle for Indigenous rights.

**The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) as an opportunity for diplomatic advocacy for Indigenous youth**

The youth are an important element in the social structure of any society. The present and the future depend on the actions of the youth. I often notice that young people are well aware of the need for active participation in the political and other public areas of the life of their People and their country, both locally and internationally. I am also aware of this as I conduct my activities and participate in the work of various international organizations and platforms. For two years in a row, in 2017 and 2018, I had the honor of representing the Indigenous Crimean Tatar People at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). In my speeches, I repeatedly spoke about the problems that the youth of the Indigenous Crimean Tatars face in Crimea today. Based on personal experience, I can say that this topic has always been of interest to other participants.

In 2018, as part of the Project Access Training Workshop and the UNPFII session, I managed to get to know and establish friendly relations with representatives of Indigenous youth from all over the world. I am convinced that working together and maintaining links between the
young representatives of different Indigenous Peoples is an investment in the progress of all the Indigenous Peoples of the world. I believe that together we can achieve prosperity for all of us.

For Crimean Tatars, who have always been supporters of non-violent forms of struggle, the UNPFII has provided a new opportunity for diplomatic advocacy for our interests. During a global meeting of representatives of Indigenous youth, I was able to talk with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, and discuss with her the human rights violations of Crimean Tatars in 2017. Speaking at the UNPFII in 2017 on item 10 of the agenda, “Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Chairman of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” as a representative of the Crimean Tatar people, I asked the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to visit Ukraine in the near future.

In July 2018, Eskender Bariiev, member of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, also extended an official invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to visit Ukraine. Additionally, a proposal was made to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, within its mandate, to assist in an expert consultation on the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the national legislation of Ukraine.
The visit of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to Ukraine will contribute to a deeper understanding of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by Ukrainian politicians, experts and society, and will make it possible to more effectively implement the Declaration in the national legislation of Ukraine.

Today, the Indigenous Crimean Tatar People are going through hard times, but, as mentioned at the beginning, their great desire to live freely in their historical homeland will overcome any obstacle. After their deportation in 1944, it took our ancestors almost half a century to return to Crimea. How much struggle and labor, sweat and blood, joy and suffering fell to the lot of the older generation. However, despite everything, they managed to return and continue their life in their homeland. And they not just continued, but also developed their culture, their way of life, their language and the Crimean Tatar people as a whole.

I believe that the future of my people will be bright and prosperous. We, the younger generation, must make every effort to ensure this bright future, where the rights of all people regardless of color, creed, language, political or other beliefs, will be respected.
NORTH AMERICA
Chapter 10: America’s Forgotten Minority: Indigenous Youth Perspectives on the Challenges Related to Healthcare Access, Widespread Poverty and Public Misinformation Regarding Native Americans

Marcos A. Moreno (Pascua Yaqui Tribe)

Introduction

Contrary to the beliefs of many Americans, Indigenous Peoples within the United States of America are not a relic confined to the colonial past or Western films. A look at recent history tells us that quite the opposite is true, as Native American populations have seen steady growth into the 21st century, with the most recent data accounting for over 3.7 million Indigenous Peoples, spread out among 567 federally recognized tribes in the United States.¹ Every one of these federally recognized

tribes operates as a Nation unto itself, sovereign groups that bear the rights of self-governance and self-determination. It is important to note that, though they share a common identity as Indigenous Peoples, each of these Nations is unique, all with their own histories, customs, cultures, and a wide variety of experiences both past and present.

Though far from a homogenous group, over the years national statistics have revealed troubling information about the status of Indigenous Peoples within the United States. On average, Native Americans are the poorest racial group in America, with the lowest per capita income, and the highest rates of poverty. Persistence of these socioeconomic trends, particularly for those residing on federal reservations, has been indicated as a key reason why Indigenous Peoples in America also experience incredibly high incarceration rates (38% higher than the national average), and the lowest high school graduation rate of any group in the country.

But of the many issues that highlight the adversities of Indigenous Peoples in the United States, there are perhaps none so stark as those pertaining to Native healthcare. Poverty aside, there are a multitude of factors that have led to a variety of public health issues plaguing Native communities throughout the country, many of which could be preventable if given the proper attention and care.
Yet despite treaties that extend back over 100 years with the United States—including agreements in which tribal lands were exchanged for federal healthcare—the government has come up short on its end of the deal. Partly due to these shortcomings, Native Americans have long been one of the most medically underserved groups in the country, with these issues only being exacerbated by factors such as social stigma and continued marginalization.

Perhaps most disappointing is that outside of regions like the south-western United States or the Great Plains, regions where Indigenous Peoples are heavily concentrated, most Americans are hardly cognizant of the fact that Native Americans still exist, let alone the struggles they still endure. For example, few Americans might be able to tell you that as recently as 2015, there was a county in the United States with a lower life expectancy than India, Sudan or Iraq; in fact the residents of Oglala Lakota County, home to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, held the title of the second shortest life expectancy in the entire Western Hemisphere, behind only Haiti, at 66 years old.4

Less access to quality medical and health education services on Native American reservations leads to many health-related issues that, when left unchecked, spill over into the social realm. Well documented are Native Americans’ woes with

diabetes in the 21st century, but, in addition, issues such as substance abuse, ‘accidental deaths’ (e.g., car accidents, homicide), and a mental health epidemic, have caused many reservation health systems to be overwhelmed with needs they are unable to meet. While circumstances vary from tribe to tribe, the distraught image painted here is the reality for many Indigenous communities throughout the United States.

Native healthcare pre-Indian Health Services

Beginning in the early 19th century, the United States government began taking an increasingly active interest in health matters pertaining to Native Americans. By this point in time, European diseases such as smallpox had decimated populations throughout the Americas, completely wiping out some tribes, while reducing others to fractions of their pre-contact numbers. Remaining Indigenous populations were predominantly interned to federal reservations where United States Army Surgeons provided minimal care, as the primary interest of the government at this point, as stated by Jedidiah Morse in a letter to the US Secretary of War, was “determining where the ‘Indians’ are in North America and how many are left.” Fast forward to 1849, and all matters regarding Indian health are

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moved from the US department of War to the newly formed Department of the Interior; Native Americans are increasingly being relocated to reservations, signing treaties in growing numbers that, in exchange for cooperation, guaranteed food commodities to account for loss of hunting lands, as well as healthcare services. Between 1883 and 1916, in response to increasing resistance and armed uprisings by tribes throughout the United States, the government decided that new measures were needed to combat the “Indian Problem.” Off-reservation boarding schools were established to assimilate Native children into White-American culture, in hopes that removal from their communities would quell parent uprisings and lead to more Americanized generations in the future.

**Indian Health Services begins**

As time progressed, it became increasingly obvious that America’s “Indian problem” was not going away. An independently funded study published in 1928 that became known as the Meriam Report, detailed horrid conditions on federal reservations and Native healthcare facilities alike: “They live in such abject squalor it is no wonder their resistance is low... in winter they use green wood for heating; they never have enough blankets...populations are extremely undernourished.”6 The Meriam Report highlighted

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the United States’ neglect of Native Americans for all the world to see, and, as a result, its publishing set in motion a series of policy changes that led to the eventual reorganization of Native healthcare, to finally come under control of the present-day umbrella known as Indian Health Services (IHS).

Native healthcare during the 20th and early 21st centuries

Since its inception in 1955, there have been many changes to US-tribal relations regarding IHS, as its perception within Indian country is one that varies from tribe to tribe. On one end, IHS facilities are often the only care available to Native Americans who find themselves unable to afford healthcare in the private sector. In addition, Native Americans are frequently geographically disadvantaged in their options, particularly those on isolated reservations, so as a result, IHS becomes a critical aspect of care for these groups. On the other end of the spectrum, some tribes have decided to forgo IHS clinics, having instead opted for separate health services altogether, either by way of contracted third party clinics or by autonomously run tribal clinics.

At present, IHS provides services to approximately 2.3 million of the 3.7 million Native Americans in the United States, at 170 services

sites, predominantly in western states. Of the people who access IHS healthcare, most are Native Americans who live on or near reservation communities. Based off data that IHS collects from these populations, there is still evidence of overwhelming health disparities. Compared to other groups, Native Americans experience mortality from all disease categories tracked by IHS at 30% higher than the national average. To many people, this is not surprising, while others might even go as far as to say this reflects vastly improved rates given Native Americans’ long history of lower health status than the rest of the American population. However, when we dig a little deeper, the numbers begin to look very troubling as the specific causes of deaths are identified.

On average, Native Americans die by homicide at twice the rate of all other Americans. In addition, they are three times as likely to die by suicide, with individual rates on some reservations up to 10 times higher. Additionally, Native Americans

9 Sari Horwitz, “The hard lives—and high suicide rates—of Native American children on reservations,”
Americans are twice as likely to die from unintentional injury (e.g., auto accidents); three times as likely to die from diabetes complications; and over six times as likely to die from alcohol-induced complications. Conversely, Native Americans experience lower rates of Alzheimer’s disease and, though it varies greatly by tribe and region, nationally they experience heart disease and cancer rates that are about in line with the rest of the United States. Essentially, the trends we see regarding Native American mortality are not those of natural or uncontrollable causes like we see in the general population. Indigenous peoples in America are dying at uncontrollable rates from health issues that are nowhere near as prevalent when we move away from reservations and Native communities. Homicide, suicide, alcoholism and even diabetes are all health issues that have foundations in the social realm and in turn, these components of health extend far beyond the reaches of traditional western medicine.

Many of the historical disconnects between Indigenous Peoples and Europeans have persisted on to their descendants, in the form of the disparities we still see today. However, these disparities are no longer a point of contention, as

studies going all the way back to the Meriam Report, as well as those recently conducted by the National Institute of Health (NIH) and IHS, have continuously acknowledged the presence of such disparities. But why exactly have they persisted so long? Some point out that Native American communities have been economically stagnant so long that they have not benefitted from the same advancements that the rest of the United States has, and this almost certainly has made some contribution to the gap in health status between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples across the United States. On the economic front, funding to IHS is severely lacking; in 2016, the United States allotted $4.8 billion to IHS, which, as a breakdown among approximately 3.7 million Native Americans, works out to $1,297 per individual annually.10,11 In comparison, government per capita health spending for all other Americans in 2016 was $10,348 annually. As if this were not disparaging enough, National Public Radio (NPR) revealed in 2016 that the United States also spends more than five times as much on federal prison healthcare than it does on Native American healthcare, at $7,000 per federal inmate annually. What message is being sent to Indigenous Peoples, if from a pure numbers

10 Supra note 7.
standpoint, they can receive better healthcare as a federal inmate than they can on the reservation?

**Hopes for sovereign tribal healthcare**

Between the many Native tribes across the United States, you will find varied opinions regarding the role IHS should play within tribal healthcare. In addition to funding constraints, many tribes have long lamented the bureaucratic issues that can be tied to federal dollars. It is a very complex problem, as tribes can strongly disagree on aspects of spending, allocation, and potential solutions to health issues within their communities. As previously mentioned, this has resulted in a full spectrum of Indian Health Services usage for different tribes across the country. Some have relied on IHS as a primary source of healthcare, while others have opted to rarely use these services.

Dr. Donald Warne is a member of the Oglala Lakota, one of the largest Native Nations in the country with over 50,000 enrolled members, based heavily in South Dakota. Born in South Dakota before moving to southern Arizona with his family as a young boy, Warne later went on to Arizona State University as an undergraduate, then to Stanford University, where he received his medical degree. The Lakota are one of many Indigenous groups across the country who rely more heavily on IHS for medical care and, as a result, Dr. Warne has experience in this system as both a patient and a provider.
“As a young boy, much of my experience with IHS was actually in the Phoenix metro area because that’s where my family had moved. Overall, outside of some very long wait times, my experience within IHS as a patient was relatively positive, but unfortunately, I think that was a major exception…our clinic had great consistency, my pediatrician actually worked at the same clinic for over 30 years, which is extremely atypical for IHS.”\textsuperscript{12} Atypical indeed, and as someone who has seen the IHS system operate for years now, Dr. Warne outlined some of the major issues that have still yet to be fully addressed. “Understaffing and dramatic staff turnover are some of the bigger issues plaguing the system. For many reasons, Natives are a population that need a lot of medical care, yet there are many IHS clinics that simply don’t have enough trained staff to efficiently operate. Sadly, over the years, I think this situation has gotten worse, simply because it’s harder to recruit physicians and health staff who can pretty much work anywhere they want. The funding constraints that plague IHS means that not only are these places asking physicians to work in more rural locations, but that they are often paid much less…so you end up with an endless cycle of temporary workers, and it’s extremely hard to develop good patient relations and consistent care with that kind of turnover.”\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Dr. Don Warne, interviewed by Marcos Moreno, October 2018.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
Obviously, fixing a system such as this is an extremely complicated matter, but when asked how to begin unravelling these problems, Dr. Warne has noted a method that seems to yield incredibly positive results. “As more tribes move towards autonomous control of their health systems, it leads to better outcomes and improved standards of care…the problem of course is getting tribes to the level where they can manage this. Running a health system even for a few thousand people is a very intricate process that requires a lot of moving pieces…quite frankly, many tribes are afraid of the unknown elements and potential risks, however there is no doubt that when tribes assume control, the system greatly improves”. 14 This makes sense on many levels, as it would stand to reason that tribes would know the greatest threats to health and wellbeing in their communities, and how to best incorporate modern practices with cultural competence in mind.

Dr. Warne is far from alone in the belief that autonomy improves tribal healthcare. Irene “Honey” Moreno is a proud member of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, a small Nation with roots in the Sonoran Desert of Northern Mexico and Southern Arizona. She is a family matriarch, described as a stoic, strong woman by her 10 adult children and 27 grandchildren. But Irene’s prominence extends beyond her family, as she represents one of the last remaining members of Yaqui Tribe’s first

14 Ibid.
assembled Arizona council, and one of the tribe’s most senior members. The Yaqui Tribe has always maintained goals of operating autonomously in all aspects, and tribal healthcare has been no exception. Despite only becoming federally recognized in 1978, this tribe has experienced relatively rapid progress in matters pertaining to tribal healthcare. Irene witnessed these changes first-hand from both a policy and patient perspective, as she has had a front row view of the Yaqui Tribe’s evolving healthcare landscape through the 20th century and into the 21st century. “Before we were federally recognized, there wasn’t an organized [healthcare] system for our people… in many ways we felt alone and it was something that the [first] council wanted to make a priority…but we had heard stories about IHS from other tribes in Arizona and hardly any were positive…simply put, we thought we could do better. IHS kind of seemed like a nice gesture that just missed the mark”.15 As of now, the Yaqui Tribe contracts its health services through a partnership with community health centers in southern Arizona, and is rapidly moving towards operating their own autonomous tribal clinic. As told by Irene, many tribal members believe that contracting services has been a better alternative than receiving care solely through IHS. “Early on, when some of us did use IHS it just seemed so much more disorganized…there was always a long wait and you never saw the same provider…I think the staff

15 Irene Moreno, interviewed by Marcos Moreno, August 2018.
tried, but they just seemed so overwhelmed because they had to learn as they were going along”.

**Indigenous youth perspectives: How do we improve the current state of Native healthcare?**

We have spoken at length about some of the historical shortcomings and issues within Indigenous healthcare in the United States, however in fixing some of these issues, Native peoples will have to rely heavily on their youth for future guidance. For one, Native Americans are the youngest racial demographic in the United States, with a median age of 28 years old; additionally, 34% of the total population of Indigenous Peoples in the United States are under the age of 18. For comparison, those same demographics for the rest of the US is a median age of 35 and a total of 25% of the population under the age of 18. Secondly, education opportunities have only recently become accessible to larger proportions of Native Americans. This suggests that younger generations are those more likely to be college-educated, allowing them to attain useful skills that they can then bring back to Native communities. While Native Americans are still vastly underrepresented in the world of higher education, there have been significant increases over the years in the number of

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16 Ibid.
these students at the undergraduate college level and beyond. As a result, many have used their education as a platform to raise awareness for Indigenous causes, as well as helping improve their Native communities.

Tamee Livermont, 23, is a member of the Oglala Lakota who grew up near the Pine Ridge reservation. She attended South Dakota University, receiving Bachelor’s degrees in Biology and Native American Studies, before attending Vanderbilt University for her Master’s degree in Public Health Policy. “Our Nation is one that unfortunately relies heavily on IHS [for medical care]…I was pretty lucky that I myself did not have to use the clinic too often, but that is a luxury most people in my Nation didn’t have. The times I or my family did use it, the wait time was terrible and I know some people who would show up, wait all day and end up not even being seen.”\(^\text{18}\) In addition to these barriers to access medical care, Livermont also discussed issues with the standards and quality of care her people would receive should they get past the long wait times: “In short, it’s bad…very understaffed, inefficient, seems very unorganized. There are some people there that want to help, but most of the time they just seem lost. The ER department for our Nation actually was shut down because of failure to adhere to health code…people now have to get transported hours away for emergency situations.”\(^\text{19}\)

\(^\text{18}\) Tamee Livermont, interviewed by Marcos Moreno, October 2018.
\(^\text{19}\) Ibid.
Sadly, what Livermont describes is the reality for many IHS clinics throughout the country. At best, it would seem as though IHS is still experiencing many of the same issues that it has dealt with in generations past. At worst, some clinics have even managed to regress. Outside of some of the more overt drawbacks and issues within IHS, Livermont was keen to point out another, more subtle issue that has negatively impacted both Native healthcare and the US health system. “I think it’s great that medicine is moving towards a more holistic approach, but our people have been doing that and advocating for that for hundreds of years…it’s about people. That’s what medicine should be about. America and western medicine has got wrapped up in the field as a way to make big money and that shouldn’t be the focus. We’re trying to take care of people, just as our ancestors did for years even before European contact was made. It’s frustrating because I think the healthcare system could learn a lot from Native American culture and the Native youth wanting for roles in healthcare…we come from cultures of caretakers, and it’s something that hasn’t been valued enough.”

Fredrick ‘Fred’ Blaisdell holds similar beliefs. As a member of the Oneida Nation, Blaisdell grew up deeply connected and involved with the Haudenosaunee culture, one that places a

20 Ibid.
premium on community and caring for their people. It is in large part what compelled Blaisdell to go into the field of medicine, with hopes of serving as a physician and advocate for Native Americans across the country. Currently a medical student at the University of Minnesota, Blaisdell is hoping to eventually serve as a resource to Native healthcare and correct some of the issues he has made note of over the years. “Native healthcare in the US obviously has its problems and some are a little deeper seeded than others. Yes, it’s underfunded, it’s understaffed, but it’s much bigger than that… it’s a reminder of this country’s colonial past. A reminder that since European contact with Native peoples, there has been an ongoing struggle for equality and survival.”

Given these great issues, Native youth in the health field are very much aware that they have their work cut out for them. As both Livermont and Blaisdell have described, the issues facing Native healthcare go beyond funding constraints and untrained staff. From both a policy and cultural standpoint, there are many clashes that make solving issues pertaining to Native healthcare an even more complex problem.

Though there are many different ideas as to how to best correct some of these issues, there are some consistent themes that Native youth agree will go a long way in improving their healthcare system.

21 Fredrick Blaisdell, interviewed by Marcos Moreno, October 2018.
Blaisdell is very much of the belief that increased cultural competence plays a major role in improving the quality of care people receive: “Improving quality of care for Native people comes down to increasing cultural understanding by health staff…increasing the number of Native American physicians would be nice, but it can also be done by increasing the cultural education of those from outside the community…a lot of research supports the notion that increasing cultural competence leads to better standards of care, and better health outcomes. When health workers are more invested and culturally in tune with the communities they practice in, the quality of care improves, and health outcomes of their patients improve with it. They don’t have to necessarily practice traditional Native American medicine or things like that, but knowing and respecting the existence of those practices is important.”

In addition to improving cultural competence, health policy is something about which many Indigenous youth have grown immensely passionate. Livermont is someone who has found herself on the frontline of this battle, as she has seen issues even within her Master of Public Health program that reflect the broken system currently in place for Native Americans. “It’s sad, but I feel like many times Native Americans are an afterthought…I didn’t realize until I came to school here [at Vanderbilt] how little people—mind you,

22 Ibid.
educated people—understood about where we stand on many issues, or the problems facing our communities. We are a graduate level program, yet we learn little to nothing about federal health policies regarding Indian Health Services, even though we have a whole section of our curriculum covering other federal health programs. It’s no wonder IHS has an issue recruiting MPH students when many may not even know it exists or that there is a major need there. Because we are such a small minority, politicians and other systems very rarely give us [proper] attention. We are this country’s first peoples, yet somehow many forget, and I think a lot of that is tied to policies towards Natives which need to change, if we truly want to see improvement.”

Native American gaming: Debunking the misconception of casino riches

Because many Americans do not have consistent interactions with Native Americans due to their sparse numbers and commonly isolated locations, there are many misconceptions regarding Native Americans that far too often go unchecked as fact. One of the major misconceptions is the idea that tribal gaming has made Native Americans wealthy. While gaming has had benefits for a select few tribes, the reality is that many tribes have gone into debt with financing organizations to start and continuously fund gaming operations. One should

\[23 \text{ Supra note 18.} \]
keep in mind that not every tribe even has a casino, nor does every tribe’s location cater to one being successful. The idea that money from casinos ends up directly in the hands of tribal members is pure myth; the truth of the matter is that federal law has strict rules in place for how exactly net profits from casinos can be used. The Indian Gaming and Regulatory Act (IGRA) stipulates that net profits from casinos must be used to fund tribal government operations or programs, provide for the general welfare of tribal members, promote tribal economic development, donate to charitable organizations, and help fund operations of local government agencies. Essentially, for tribes who do have casinos, profits are meant to fund things like local police and fire departments, schools, and other tribal government organizations. In addition, not all profits from casinos even make it to tribes since, contrary to popular belief, Native Americans are subject to taxes, generating $6.2 billion in federal taxes and $2.4 billion in state taxes in 2009 alone.24

Native American equals free ride? The myth that just won’t die

Another major misconception is the idea that Native Americans receive free college education. There is only a handful of colleges, like Fort Lewis College in Colorado, that offer tuition waivers for accepted Native American students. Additionally, for the few schools that do have such programs,

24 Supra note 2.
they are based on treaty agreements between states and local tribes; as a result, the majority of Native Americans do not even qualify for these programs if they are not within a state that has these provisions in place.\textsuperscript{8} There is a Native American college fund to which Native students can apply for scholarships, but these are merit-based and are extremely competitive. Livermont, like many Native students, has had to deal with this issue personally, since revealing that she is Native American commonly comes with the assumption that she has not had to pay for her education like everyone else. “It’s frustrating…I constantly have to correct people that ‘no, I do not get anything for free’ and ‘yes, I pay the same tuition that you do.’”\textsuperscript{25} Blaisdell has had similar experiences: “I get annoyed because as a doctoral student, I find myself around some pretty educated people, yet I’ve still had to correct people who make reckless comments or assume that I’m receiving some kind of federal money to pay my way through school. I have federal loans just like you, the free ride you’re referring to doesn’t exist.”\textsuperscript{26} Indeed, it does not, as Native Americans are the most underrepresented racial group on college campuses, with even greater disparities at the Master and Doctoral levels. This has improved greatly over the past 20 years; however, Native Americans still trail behind even other minority groups in terms of presence at higher levels of education.

\textsuperscript{25} Supra note 18.
\textsuperscript{26} Supra note 21.
Indigenous Identity: “What’s your blood quantum?”

As we have discussed, the persistent narrative that the US government is handing out money to Native Americans is simply false, yet part of this same misconception has served to fuel perhaps one of the greatest insults to Indigenous identity in the 21st century. Under the false notion that claiming Indigenous ancestry can lead to benefits or additional opportunities, there has been a surge of people self-reporting themselves as Native American in a variety of venues. Census data gathered in 2010 saw a major increase in people self-reporting they were Native American, at nearly 7 million, almost double what most experts believed the true number to be.\(^{27,28}\) Now, numerous genetic testing companies advertise being able to identify Native American ancestry, based on interpretation methods that are shoddy at best.\(^{29}\) As someone with experience in the field of genetics, Blaisdell takes special issue with this: “I spent time in the Summer Internship for Native Americans in Genomics (SING) and now knowing the process for testing and interpretation, it’s funny to me when people want to point to a genetic test as marker of Native-ness…culture and race is not a biological construct,

\(^{27}\) Supra note 7.
\(^{28}\) Supra note 11.
no matter how much the Western world tries to make it one. For those of us in the medical field who know how genetic testing works, it’s laughable to draw some conclusion about Native identity from these tests.”

Known colloquially as “checking the box,” this type of activity has made it to the national level with numerous scandals involving people who exaggerated their Native American affiliations, or flat out lied altogether. This brings up a contentious issue that has heated up over the years as to who qualifies as Indigenous, and who is able to able to claim a true Indigenous identity. In America, given tribal rights to self-determination, every individual tribe sets their own parameters as to who qualifies as a member of their Nation. Some tribes require a certain blood quantum to be an enrolled member, while others base it off things like clan systems and maternal lineage. But, federal enrollment aside, there are many who believe that communal affiliation is another, perhaps more crucial component to membership. Livermont is among those who believes that this is very crucial: “What’s your blood quantum? It’s probably the most common question I get from non-Natives…Native Americans are the only race of people where actually proving a blood quantum is so important to everyone. We should be asking ‘Are you connected to your community?’ …I think striving to maintain some type of connection to your

\*\* Supra note 21.\*
people is very important. I’m not saying you have to be involved in every tribal ceremony or be fluent in your Native language, but for the people who want to point to some distant family relative who may have been Native American, and then claim an Indigenous identity, is kind of insulting.”

The topic discussed here is, in a sense, a reclamation of Native identity, giving power back to individual tribes as was customary prior to European contact. In doing so, it recognizes that the identity for Indigenous Peoples goes beyond the over-simplified mechanisms the Western world has tried so hard to enforce, with reliance on things such as checking a census box, genetic testing, or an arbitrary blood quantum. Real Indigenous identity speaks to the idea that having ties to a Native community and culture is of the essence in what it means to truly be Indigenous. It means more than simply discovering a long-lost Native American ancestor, but it encompasses things like maintaining a connection with the community, and proudly representing the Nation as a part of you. As said by Blaisdell, “It’s one thing to claim you are Native American by lineage; it’s another to actually live and grow as a Native American.” Simply put, Indigenous identity is not only about the Nation you claim, but also who claims you in return.

**Intergenerational choices**

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31 *Supra* note 18.  
32 *Supra* note 21.
Among the difficult challenges that Indigenous Peoples face are pressures of the Western world, intergenerational traumas, and maintaining pre-colonial traditions and language while having access to health and education. Speaking to this is Victor Lopez-Carmen, a 23-year-old young man of the Crow Creek Sioux Nation and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe:

I am a son of two Indigenous Nations. I’m a member of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe on my father’s side, and am Yaqui on my mother’s. Like many Native American youth, I grew up in an environment with its fair share of chaos, and beauty. My mother worked hard and fostered a loving family, but we lived paycheck to paycheck. My schools offered easy access to drugs, alcohol, and gang-life, and I got involved in that too. Almost all of my best friends from middle school ended up in prison or jail. What kept me strong and made me who I am was intergenerational resilience, in the forms of both beauty and trauma. It was the stories my elders told me about my ancestors. Being on my traditional territory, walking the same land, and loving it like my ancestors did. It was our traditional ceremonies, passed down thousands of years. The Sweat Lodge, Sundance, songs, and many other forms of ancient beauty. It was hearing my grandmother, a fierce
woman, say she was sad because our Dakota language was at risk and knowing I carry a responsibility to protect it for future generations. It was watching my relatives struggle with alcoholism, suicide, and drug addictions, and knowing this was intergenerational trauma. Lastly, it was the stories of our wars. I was told that in the 1500s, when the Spanish first arrived in our territory, a Yaqui warrior drew a line in the sand, and proclaimed to the invaders, “Up to this line and as far as you can see in these three directions, is Yaqui land. No one will be allowed to enter.” For 500 years, we have battled three separate governments, lived through massacres, deportation, slavery, and policies of extermination and genocide. In the 1800s, my great-grandmother survived by hiding her and her baby brother behind a rock while the Mexican army slaughtered her village. If one of those soldiers found her, I would not be here. These are some common experiences, stories, and realities that Indigenous youth around the world live with. They give us an intergenerational way of being, a cultural obligation to live our lives for others. We are strengthened by the obligation to live up to the examples set by their ancestors; we have a responsibility to build on past dreams and visions that came with great sacrifice so that future
generations know that we loved them, the way our ancestors loved us.\textsuperscript{33}

**Fighting to keep the way of our people alive**

For many Native Americans, the history of our people can be a difficult subject to venture into. Doing so reveals trauma after trauma with hundreds of years of war, bloodshed and cultural fragmentation that has persisted into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. In many ways, these traumas and adversities have been woven into the very fabric of our people. This is sad for some to hear, but fret not, for it is important to remember that along with this interwoven trauma, comes an interwoven strength, a persistence exemplified by our Peoples’ continued existence to this very day. Historically, the Yaqui tribe was referred to as a group small in number, large in spirit, and some of the fiercest warriors the world had ever seen. So fierce that even with a fighting force of only two thousand warriors, they defeated the much larger Spanish Empire that had successfully colonized present-day Latin America and most of the southern United States, wiping out millions in the process. For nearly 300 years, the Yaqui resisted Spanish encroachment while their surrounding allies perished, and then for 100 years survived attempts of genocide and slavery at the

\textsuperscript{33} Victor Anthony Lopez-Carmen, interviewed by Marcos Moreno.
hands of the Mexican government. All this resistance, so that our people and culture could live on.

Painful as it can be to look back, it brings me great pride knowing how hard my people fought to keep our culture alive, and it is because of them that I am here today. It is because of them that I was able to be born, raised, and molded within my tribe’s culture, in a village that I will forever consider my home. But, as proud as I am of my people, and Indigenous People everywhere, the reality is that the fight is far from over. To this day, we face daunting disparities in education, health, threats to our livelihood, and the added challenge of maintaining cultural customs and traditions, in a world that is becoming increasingly homogenized. It pains me to see my people, friends, family, fellow Natives, struggling with the highest rates of depression, substance abuse, unemployment, and a vicious cycle of poverty that is keeping the odds increasingly stacked against them. Indeed, some remnants of the world’s colonial past have persisted on, scarring Indigenous societies throughout the world; but while history may be out of our control, the future is not. It is our duty to carry on, with the same resilience of our ancestors, to rebuild, improve, and make sure that our Peoples’ sacrifices were not in vain. The torch has been passed, and it is now our turn, to keep our culture alive.

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Caught between two worlds

The difficult reality that many Indigenous youth face is the paradigm of being caught between their Native culture and the rest of Western society. Certain aspects are more overt than others, but in any sense the case stands that the more we are forced to adapt to aspects of the dominant American culture, the more we end up risking aspects that connect us to our Native identity. Though this is not always the case, it can be a very complicated balancing act for youth, as they are not only the life source of their Nation’s continued culture, but they are the ones who need to usher in the new era of tribal development. This requires training, skills, and an education that is not always readily available within Native communities. Balancing this tug-o-war, between maintaining a cultural connection and adapting to the demands of the Western world, places additional demands on Indigenous Youth that are extremely complicated to navigate. It means that some will need to go out into the world, learn, and bring back as much as they can to assist in building up their Nations for the better, all while trying to stay culturally grounded in the communities in which they were brought up. In some ways it is paradoxical that, for many of the Native youth hoping to better their communities, they may first have to leave these same communities, all while maintaining a strong cultural connection along with the desire to one day return.
Reasons for hope

Poverty and finances no doubt have a role in the problems Native Americans presently face, but they are far from the only culprit. Perhaps, however, there is light at the end of the tunnel: in recent years, there have been positive signs emerging that Indigenous Youth are learning to navigate this duality, in part due to Indigenous Peoples’ greatest asset. That asset has been the strong and invigorating series of movements led by its youth, including the national protests of the Dakota Access Pipeline and the beginning of the Native Lives Matter Movement, to bring attention to the fact that—like African Americans—Indigenous Peoples in America face unjust treatment by law enforcement. Taken together, what we are seeing is increased social activism and a broader presence that has, for the first time since the American Indian Movement (AIM) of the 1960s, catapulted Indigenous Peoples into the national spotlight. As more Indigenous Youth find empowerment and become increasingly active in these causes, the rest of the country will have no choice but to take note of these resurging, resilient societies.
Canada

Chapter 11: Gwayakotam, She Finds out the Truth

Shanese Indoowaaboo STEELE (Nipissing and Métis)

Where I was...

I started writing these stories and poems around my identity at 18. Lost in who I was and where I was going as a little brown girl with no language to understand what that means. Sometime I believe we enter the world knowing who we are and it’s society who convinces us otherwise. At 18, living with my boyfriend, another young Indigenous person, a man of Haudenosaunee heritage, surviving through abuse and intergenerational trauma, I reflected on the girl I used to be, and the girl that I felt I was.

Who am I?

Who am I? I find myself asking this question constantly, and with each passing year the answer seems to change. Being mixed or multiracial has not always been easy for me and it has been a struggle to try and find out exactly where I fit in.

A recent conversation with a friend brought up some feelings that I have to admit I was too afraid to say out loud. The term my friend used to
describe her feelings towards identifying as an Indigenous woman was “fraud.” She felt as though because she did not appear to look Aboriginal and because she was not a certain percentage Indigenous, then how did she have the right to call herself Aboriginal? It was as if she was reading my mind, because for so many years I have felt the same way.

See, this friend and I have very similar backgrounds: both our fathers are Trinidadian, and both of our mothers have white and Aboriginal backgrounds, more specifically Métis backgrounds. I also have Venezuelan, Irish and French lineage and yet identifying as any of them feels fraudulent. While I have always loved my diversity, over the years, I have at times tried to be one of these ethnicities more than any other.

At nine years old, living and going to school in Toronto for the first time, all I wanted to do was fit in. For the first time I wasn't the odd brown girl out, and I so desperately wanted to be black. I was “Trini de Bone” and nothing could change that. Oh, how I hated to be called white-washed or portrayed as anything but black, and that's how it was until I was 15. I tried to immerse myself into “black culture” as much as I could. I listened only to soca, hip-hop and dancehall and wouldn't be caught dead listening to “white music.” I started wearing extensions and acting “ghetto” and only having black friends. Growing up without a father, I didn't know that this wasn't what it meant to be black, and
it wasn't what it meant to be Trini. As I looked around, I realized I didn't fit in with the other “black kids”; I never felt “black enough,” or that I belonged.

When I turned 15, I took a sudden interest in my family history and heritage. We were just finding out that we had some kind of native heritage in the family and we also came across some Venezuelan heritage on my father's side. I was so excited, I had just made some Latinx friends and oh, how I wanted to fit in with them. So I became “chickita,” half-Trini and half-Venezuelan, once again forgetting completely about the heritage on my mother’s side. I loved the Latin culture, the music, the dancing and of course the boys back then. I started hanging out with mostly Spanish kids and slowly began to move away from being “black.” I hated being seen as black or white because that wasn't me, that wasn't who I was.

No matter what the “phase,” I never found myself wanting to be “white”—I hated the idea of it. Even to this day, I catch myself making comments like “I ain’t white” or trying to distance myself from whiteness by saying “that's what white people do.” And, if I do something that I perceive as white, I’ll apologize by saying “sorry, that’s my white side coming out.” Over the years, I have questioned my distance and sometimes hatred towards my white heritage. I grew up in Milton, which used to be a predominantly white town and, due to this, there was a lot of racism. So when I
begin to contemplate my anger, I wonder if it could be because, at the age of three or four, I was taken down to the basement of my babysitter's house by the other children, stripped half-naked and beaten; or maybe it's due to the fact that on the first day of kindergarten, I was told by another student that I couldn't play with the toys because of the color of my skin. Could it have been the bullying in elementary school, when other children called me “buffalo hair” and ignored me at recess? Or maybe the final tipping point was when my best friend in the third grade stopped being my friend because the girls at her new school didn't think she should be friends with a black girl.

It wasn't really until I turned 18 that I began to get more involved with my mom’s side of the family. We had always been close but I had no real interest in where they came from or who they were. But the deeper I looked, the more I began to love and embrace what they were. I was proud to be French; my family served as the personal guards to one of the kings of France, they had been in Canada since 1506 and they were among some of the first Métis families in the country. I loved that I was Irish too, and I began putting the Irish flag on everything and even got a four-leaf clover tattoo. And oh, how I loved the Indigenous history, the stories of Indigenous women ancestors, the Cree, Ojibwa and Métis. I fell in love with the culture and the beliefs and for the first time in a long time, I felt like I found who I was. Shanese Steele, an Indigenous woman.
Looking back, I remember being 15 years old and convinced that I was going to attend the University of Georgia for psychology when I got older, and I remember my mother being so against it. She feared for my safety in the south and I remember saying, “Come on mom, it's not the 1960s anymore. I'm not going to get lynched, plus I’m mixed.” She looked at me and said, “But Shani, when a racist person looks at you they don't see a half-white girl, they don't stop hating you because you are half-white, they will always see you as a young black girl.” At the time, I brushed it off and laughed but, as I got older, I realized she was right—to the rest of the world, I will always be seen as black. So how do I have the right to claim anything else?

This very question is what brings me back to that earlier conversation with my friend. How can I identify as an Aboriginal woman if I don't look like one? If I’m only a small percentage in the eyes of others? How do I have the right? It’s the same question I asked myself when I identified with my Latina heritage, with my white heritage. I mean I am French and Irish, I am Venezuelan, I am Cree, Ojibwa and Métis as much as I am Trinidadian, and yet I always feel like I’m a fraud. Although I look black, I don't feel black enough to identify as black. Although I can pass as Latina, I don't feel as if I’m enough. Although I know so much about my Aboriginal culture and I do identify as Aboriginal, I never feel like it's enough. And although I have a
rich French and Irish heritage, because I don't look “white” I feel like I will never be enough to identify. So I guess the question I am left with is: will I ever be enough? And are myself and my friend the only multiracial people that feel this way?

Two women

Two women, two generations of shame, and another two of ignorance, explains how my family went without knowing who they were. It is this ignorance that's fueled my search for the truth and has allowed me to gain a sense of reassurance in who I am. To Carry The Ceremony is my spirit name and I've spent the past six years trying to figure out what that exactly means. The ceremony involves five rocks that represent obstacles I need to overcome. The search for my cultural identity has been one of my biggest obstacles because I grew up thinking that there was only black, white and in-between, and for the majority of my life that in-between fueled a hatred for who I was. I constantly tried to fit in with both my Trinidadian heritage and my white one by playing mass in caribana and dancing highland. Yet neither seemed to work. For my white side, I was always too dark, my hair was always too big, and the name “buffalo hair” followed me as a child. It was ironic that I was an outcast for being too black for one side and was viewed as too white for the other. It wasn't until I came across Magdeliene Pewadjiwonokwe and Archange La Hirondelle, both Aboriginal women and both forgotten names in my family trees, that I learned that I wasn't the only one that had felt in-
between. I came from two long lines of “mixed breeds” and became proud of my Métis, Ojibwa and Cree heritage. It’s this pride that's allowed me to begin the search for where Magdeliene and Archange came from, giving my family the chance to also know who they are. So in my own way, I am carrying the ceremony of educating along my way.

What I discovered …

Finding oneself is always described as a journey. Especially for youth. As an Anishinaabe youth, we are told about the importance of the medicine wheel and specifically the colors, directions, animals and medicines of that medicine wheel. Being a youth means that for now I am experiencing the teachings of the red, Misko, south, Zhaawanong, where Cedar, Giizhik, lies, and Waawaashkeshi, the deer that teaches us kindness. It is said in this space that we are in a place of searching, searching for creator, searching for ceremony, searching for culture and searching for ourselves. During this time of searching through identity this is what I found…

Not your typical Métis [Shanese Indoowaaboo Steele, Nipissing and Métis]

I am not your typical Métis
I do not fit in the confines of the images
Found in newspapers
On walls
In pamphlets
In media

I'm not your typical Métis

Faces filled with blue eyes
and covered in blond hair
where women are erased
because for some reason
for some reason
men were the only people
who could be Métis

As if our very existence could not happen without
an Indigenous woman
lives given to children who would always walk two
paths
breathing their souls into a people so vibrant
that we refuse to be forgotten

I am not your typical Métis

I do not fit the stereotype
this hair ain’t so blonde
and this skin
this skin is touched with a color
that could never be called white

stained with the blood of those who came before me
what those books forget to say
is we have never laid dormant,
birthing a fire so bright
that this nation could not ignore us
I am not your typical Métis

I won’t be found in coloring books
Given to children by their teachers
Métis men and women whose faces are stripped
making way for societies
colonial ideals of what we should look like to take
hold
Leaving faces chained by prejudice
Lives lost by ignorance
voices forgotten in conversation
and lost forever

I am not your typical Métis
Those features you think you know
Building barriers for me to climb over
Constantly defending who I am
Who I was meant to be

I am not your typical Métis

Indian Enough [Shanese Indoowaaboo Steele, Nipissing and Métis, and Dawn Martin, Kanienkehaka and Mohawk]¹

¹ Dawn Martin is a Kanienkehaka kanonkwe (Mohawk woman) from Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve. She has recently finished her Bachelor’s degree in Indigenous Studies at Trent University and her Bachelor’s degree in Education from Queen’s University this past May. She is currently studying Kanienké:ha (Mohawk language) in her home community of Six Nations where she hopes to become a language teacher. Dawn hopes to create accessible resources in the Mohawk language for youth in her community. She also
You called me out by the color of my skin and said I wasn’t “Indian” enough
You said my people are too watered down to really be “Indian”
You said my people were too savage to be human
Well let me tell you
I was “Indian” enough when my peoples way of life was infiltrated and deemed as uncivilized
when we showed you how to live off these lands
shown you medicines you now practice
kept you from starving
I was “Indian” enough when you labeled my people “half breeds”
    Using our Indigenous knowledge
    Stripping our women of their identity
    While denying our existence
I was “Indian” enough when you killed my people based on indifferences
    taking men taking women taking children
    burning down villages that kept food
    trying to erase our culture
I was “Indian” enough when our settlements were burnt down
    Making us flee from our homes
    As you killed our men
    And raped our women
I was “Indian” enough when you cut my peoples hair off trying to make us look “Proper”

is working towards becoming completely sustainable: living, growing and being in her home community.
making us go back and pick up every last
strand
before leaving to our resting stop
reliving traumas that you set in our
paths
I too, was “Indian” enough when our children were
stolen from their homes
   No matter how “pale” they were
   Or how “blue” their eyes were
   Or how much they looked like you
I was “Indian” enough when you banned our
languages our culture our traditions
   strapping us leaving welt marks down backs,
down our legs, on our hands and feet
   sticking needles in tongues to stop us from
speaking
   trying in your every power to control what
you didn’t understand
I was “Indian” enough when you sterilized our
women in the hopes to end us
   To break us
   To erase us
   To “assimilate” us
I was “Indian” enough when you made it an
everyday struggle to get up in the morning
   facing racism
   facing injustices
   facing prejudices
I was “Indian” enough when you hunted down our
hero, our leader
   When you killed him
   When you murdered his dreams
   Our dreams
(RE)Membrance [Shanese Indoowaaboo Steele, Nipissing and Métis]

Our life sources were offered
the men and women of our next generations
enlisted, volunteered or conscripted
we were ONE of the driving forces
for this movement

we fought with pride (pause)
we fought with courage (pause)

we fought for peace... (longer pause)

Over four thousand men sent for these wars
Our men, the life givers of our nations
The men who carry the burden
Of histories left or forgotten

4000 men
of First Nation descent will fight in a war that is not theirs
wives sending husbands, mothers losing sons
and children growing up without fathers

Three hundred and twenty-three
The number of men offered
From ohswe:ken
The place of the willows
The place where my ancestors’ voice
Sing loudly through
Waters,
Through trees, 
and through skies 
The place of alliances
The place of the Grand River

Unknown 
The number of Métis men 
Who enlisted 
Lives given but not returned 
Hands holding guns 
Instead of sashes 
Weaving stories of rebellion so instilled in our blood
That when called to the front lines 
The only answer given 
was yes

The panting of Longboat 
Thomas Charles 
The boy who ran 
Ran, and ran 
Message carrier 
The connection between community 
Kokwake (cogwagee)

Henry Louis Norwest 
Canada’s most famous Métis sniper 
Whose story was rewritten to hide an identity 
Only to be retold 
Through the eyes of a nation who could not see him 
Who could not see us.
The number of men killed in battle
Where their bodies lay rest
In lands foreign to their own
Buried in the soil of
Homelands not our own

July 1917
My great grandfather is choking on gas
Using clothes covered in urine
Trying to breathe
Feeling as though his lungs were on fire
Fighting to stay alive
Fighting for his family
Fighting for a home so far away
That the only real thing in this moment
Are his lungs
Fighting a battle of their very own

Men and women lost
Men that give life-rakaniha
And that women give power-akehnistenha
Blood mingled with yours
Sons and sons together

The untold war
The war not spoken of
But heard by the communities they returned to
Fighting in foreign lands
Only to return to a fight at home

Broken promises
From a country
Who will not see their right to live
But will sign their approval for their choice to die

Sights of rifles flashing (Everyone)
And canons that roar
Carriers of the shields
Loyalty to the flag
Nations efforts to restore peace

I hope you will remember

Where I am going...

Genocide. It changes the way we find who we are and where we come from. It cuts ties and threads woven through sashes and sewn through beads and hide. Grandparents who can’t or won’t pass down the knowledge of our ancestors. When our elders cannot teach us the way of our people, then where do we go to learn? Colonial institutions have only watered down versions of the teachings of our people. So it’s up to us. Well, me. To fill in the blanks, to trace the footsteps and to find the words to speak our truths. Nokomis, Grandmother, Mishomis, Grandfather, will you understand the language I have learned when I speak it you? Or will it fall on blocked ears that forgot the sounds of our words when the ships brought the sounds of guns?

Ships
Ships. The story always begins with ships. Big ships arriving by the ocean onto shores where they do not belong. Ships that take and give. Ships that bring death, always death. I often wonder what my ancestors thought when they first saw these ships. Were they filled with awe and wonder at the massive jiimaans or obontos that arrived on the St. Lawrence or the shores of what is now Ghana? Or did they know? Did fear fill their hearts and minds? Did they run or does the image of Pocahontas standing on the mountain edge ring true? Either way, the ships came, and they took, and they gave.

*Anishinaabe Mukaade kwe niindaw.* I am an Afro-Indigenous woman. For me, ships will always be vessels of death and destruction. A cage my ancestors could not escape and a tool to bring diseases and genocide to others. Everything about me should not be here, should not be alive, surviving or thriving. A system was created to extinguish the very light of people, let alone generations to come after. As an Indigenous youth, I am constantly reminded of this as I walk the streets of cities and towns in what is now known as Canada. They scream, “You do not belong here.” The concrete sometimes suffocates the voices of my ancestors trying to reach through and wrap me in an embrace of their love. At times, I picture their hands clawing at the cement, the weight of the buildings crushing them as they try. And they do try. They try with all their might to push past the colonizing roads, to reach the grass and clouds, to hear the eagle sing. Sometimes though, if you listen closely,
you can hear them. Their whispers on the wind of sweet nothings, stories of white buffaloes and fields of sage and semaa.

At least, that is what I like to tell myself on the days when their genocide and this colonization becomes too heavy. When the shadow of those ships darken the sky and I remember that I am not supposed to be here. It’s a strange feeling, I will admit. As an Anishinaabe Kwe, feeling as though I don’t belong on the land that my ancestors walked on for thousands of years. Where their bodies are buried, where they lived, laughed and prayed. Where creator came to them and brought them teachings and ceremonies. Where Nanaboozhoo played his tricks, and where he stole fire from the summer people for the winter tribe so that they could stay warm. On these lands, the great flood happened, and muskrat and turtle gave their lives so that we could be. These same lands where mnoomin grows tall and the Haudenosaunee plant their three sisters. It’s strange to be displaced without being removed from the land itself. At least, not physically. Maybe it’s displacement on a spiritual level? Is that even a real thing? To have your spirit displaced from the land?

Being the descendant of slaves too means that I know what physical displacement looks and feels like. It’s a visceral state of being for me. It's something that I cannot escape no matter how hard I try. There is no way to hide from this displacement. I can delve into my “Africanness” as deep as I want,
but the result will always be the same. Displacement. The Diaspora. And even still, I am doubly—no—triply displaced. Who knows? Maybe even more so than that. What I do know is that my ancestors were taken from what is now Ghana on those ships of death. Shackled, put in the bottom of boats and sailed across the middle passage to lands not their own. They landed in what is now called Carriacou. The name comes from another Indigenous Peoples whose blood surely runs in my veins. It comes from the Carib word *Kayryouacou*, meaning land surrounded by reefs. My family worked these lands and when slavery ended, when there was no more land to work, they were forced to move to Trinidad. Another island devastated by ships and the people they carried. And when the genocide, colonialism and racism became too much there, they fled and came to these lands. Turtle Island, Kanata, Canada, the land of my ancestors and the nation of their genocide.

So where does that leave me? A child displaced more times than I can count? Whose connection to land, *Aki*, and water, *Nibi*, the things that give life to my people, has been tainted? Will I ever look at ships the same? Will my eyes fill with wonder at the sight of their sails? Will my mind move to images of faraway places to explore? Or will ships, *jiimaans* or *obontos*, always fill my heart with fear and my nose with the stench of death?
Where am I…

*Aaniin, Boozhoo, Boujou, Shanese  
Ndizhnaakaaz, Indoowaaboo digoo  
Anishinabemong, Jijaak ndoodem, Anishinaabe  
Mukaade kwe niindaw, Niizhtana ashi indapiitz,  
Nipissing dongeba miinwaa Dibenjige-Ni-Naakwiya Omàmiwinini. Can you understand me?  
Do the long o’s and double a’s make sounds that you are used to? Do you know that Aaniin means hello or that Jijaak is the Crane Clan I call family? I now have the language to introduce myself, my tongue no longer feels as heavy in my mouth, weighed down by loss and colonization. Being a youth in this world means to fight for your voice to be heard by those older than you. Being an Indigenous youth means not only fighting that fight but also fighting to stay alive. And I am alive.  
Breathing and moving. Being the wildest dream of my ancestors, and the biggest fear of the people who killed them. Who am I? What have I discovered? Where am I going? Where am I? I am me, I have discovered the world, I am going forward and I am here on the land of my ancestors still fighting in their footsteps.*
PACIFIC
Chapter 12: The Indigenous Youths in Micronesia, Pacific: The Movers and Shakers

Sylvia ELIAS (Lien Madolenihmw, Pohnpei)

The Island Nations scattered throughout the northern Pacific that make up the region of Micronesia were discovered by various foreign navigators, and yet the lives of Indigenous Peoples from these islands have remained largely unknown to the outside world. Our tiny island nations and territories are comprised of the Kiribati Islands, Nauru, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk, Yap), Palau, the Northern Marianas Islands, and Guam. Micronesian Indigenous youth from across the region share common values, beliefs, and practices in terms of gender roles, economic disparity, social pressures, resiliency to trauma, access and appreciation of nature, and profound belief in the spiritual. First, we will begin with the geographical, physical, and historical makeup of Micronesia. Then, we will discuss each of these themes.

The word Micronesia is derived from the Greek words mikros (“small”) and nesos (“island”). Therefore, our region means “small islands.” Sometimes, we’re confused with Polynesia, which means “many islands,” or Melanesia which means “black islands.” And although, like Polynesians and Melanesians, we live on islands, how those islands
are formed, their size, and the lifestyles within can be as different and distinct as comparing the lifestyle of an American person in New York versus a Japanese person in Tokyo. In other words, we are who we are—and who we are is not anyone else.

Do you know how large New Guinea is? New Guinea is the second largest island in the world—so it’s not part of Micronesia. It’s larger than Texas. Do you know how large New Zealand is? It’s the size of Colorado, about 280,000 square kilometers. It’s also part of Polynesia—so it’s not part of Micronesia. Do you know how large Hawaii is? Hawaii is often considered to be a small place, right? Hawaii is about 30,000 square kilometers. Hawaii is also part of Polynesia—so it’s not part of Micronesia, either. Do you know how large Pohnpei—my island—is? It’s the largest island in the Federated States of Micronesia. It’s 334 square kilometers of land for the island proper. That’s half the size of Washington, DC. And we’re the large one! This is because Pohnpei State is 343 square kilometers, and the four states that make up the Federated States of Micronesia have a grand total of 702 square kilometers of land area.

What is Pohnpei State? Pohnpei State refers to the main island of Pohnpei and the outer island atolls of Pingelap, Mwoakilloa, Sapwuahfik, Nukuoro, Kapingamarangi, And, Pakein, and Oroluk. (Technically it also includes Minto Reef, but that’s an atoll without any islands.) In Pohnpei, we speak Pohnpeian. It’s not the same language that
is spoken in Mwoakilloa (Mwoakillese), or in Pingelap (Pingelapese), or in Sapwuahfik (Ngatikese), or in Nukuoro (Nukuoroan) or in Kapingamarangi (Kapingese). Most of these outer island atolls are smaller than one square kilometer. If you don’t understand metric, let us put it to you this way: there are no cars on these islands because there is no room for them. If you walk end-to-end on the island Touhou (meaning “New Island” in Kapingese), you will have walked for five minutes. Less if you’re faster.

Our islands are more than our homes. They are as equivalent to our identity as a child is to its mother. Our land is of so much importance to who we are that it is embedded in our language; it is embedded in all of our customs; it is at once the single most important part of familial pride and, for the foreigners who wish to control us, the bane to whatever development is supposed to be. One may claim we’re foolish for not wanting to build here, on this perfect spot, but that perfect spot is the same place where family from generations past lie forever.

What do I mean when I say the land is embedded in our language? Do you remember the name of my island? Pohnpei. Pohn ("upon") and pei ("an altar"). Upon a Stone Altar is not only the name of David Hanlon’s PhD dissertation, but also the name of my home. Where does the English word green come from? I’m sure it comes from somewhere; I can tell you that in Pohnpei, we say
pohndipw, meaning “upon the bush.” Where does the English word brown come from? I’m sure it comes from somewhere; I can tell you that in Pohnpei, we say pohnpwel, meaning “upon the earth.” Where does the English word blue come from? I’m sure it comes from somewhere; I can tell you that in Pohnpei, we say pohnmei, meaning “upon the clear.” What do I mean by upon the clear? Well, have you ever seen the ocean? It looks blue, right? Have you ever seen a glass of water? It’s clear.

All of this discussion about the size of islands and the names of words is to make it clear that Micronesians, like any group of people, are not a monolith. Yes, we have similar cultures; yes, we have similar languages; yes, we have similar problems; but where one may see a group that looks the same, we see endless diversity. And it is that very diversity, I believe, that provides us both strength and, at times, many of our challenges.

Allow an example to clarify what I mean. I want you to imagine three American teenagers who wear glasses and khakis and are in the Science Fiction Club at their high school. To an outsider, these individuals are the same. They look the same, right? They like and talk about the same things, after all. But it’s possible, perhaps even likely, that one of them has particularly heartfelt opinions about Star Trek, while another has equally profound views on Star Wars, and yet another feels strongly regarding The Martian. Diversity can, and
frequently does, include what we look like, how we talk, how we behave, what we value, and what we like—but diversity can also be, or rather is also, more than these things. That’s what I mean when I say Micronesians are not a monolith. Four is a sacred number in all of our islands and cultures; it is part of us, but it does not exclusively define us.

With this is in mind, while we now discuss the issues mentioned at the start, let’s note that these experiences are mine and those of people I know. Are these Micronesian experiences? Well, I’m a Micronesian; but as truthful and transparent and real as I promise to be, and as truthful and transparent and real as those who spoke to me are, I can only say for sure that this is what I know, and what I have seen as opposed to this is what Pohnpeians see.

Let’s talk about gender roles in Micronesia for Indigenous youth. For Pohnpei, gender roles are something that we’re born into; we’re classified; they’re fixed. Girls do the chores, from laundry to cooking to caring for the children. It’s as if we were born and we have a mission to prepare our minds, bodies, and souls to be given away to potential buyers—rather, men, our future husbands. I don’t say this aggressively; men are fine. I say this because what I mean is we don’t own our bodies; the men do. When I say we raise the children, I mean the men can abandon us to raise them by ourselves—and that’s “fine.”
What about gender roles in Chuuk, one of the islands of the Federated States of Micronesia? Chuuk is, by the way, where my grandfather is originally from on my mom’s side; and if that sounds like trivia to you, then I haven’t been clear enough when I told you before about the importance of our land and its relationship to family. *Family is everything*, which is why *land* is everything; but I digress. Gender roles in Chuuk are like Pohnpei if they were magnified, heightened, strengthened, and so on. I want you to imagine that you are a man, that you are sitting in a chair and you are watching a movie on your television. I am your wife, and I need to walk past you so I can, say, grab you the beer you asked for. What do I do? If you thought I just *walk past you*, then you’re wrong. That would be disrespectful. You could beat me for that. You probably would, too. I have to say *Tirow*, which means, “excuse me,” and then crawl on my hands and knees not because I might block your view but because, as a woman, I can’t be purposefully making myself taller than you because *I am inferior by nature and by design*.

The main idea to get across here is that—whether it’s Guam, Saipan, Yap, Palau, Nauru, Tarawa, Pohnpei, Chuuk, Majuro, or Kosrae—if you’re a woman, it’s a question of what degree of inferior you are to a man, not if you are inferior or not. It’s rather a question of how is this inferiority emphasized and shown by the culture.
So, what about boys? Do men have perfect lives, then, as the “superior”? Like girls, boys are born into their roles—and you know what I notice, and what I see? Bear in mind I am a woman—but if I see that boys want to do girls’ chores, like clean and cook and sweep? They’re really not allowed to do it. A boy cannot do a girl’s work; if you do, you’re labelled. And, yes, we have enough Americanisms these days that the label is *faggot*. However, if you’re a girl, and there aren’t enough boys to do the men’s work? Climb that coconut tree, girl—we’re thirsty.

Boys frequently, maybe *always*, need to be mindful of their masculinity. This is measurable. What it means to be masculine is to fish; what it means to be masculine is to plant yams; what it means to be masculine is to plant sakau; what it means to be masculine is to have as many children as you can, and it really doesn’t matter who the woman is. Have four children with four separate women? Congratulations, you’re normal here. Therefore, perhaps it’s worth saying then, that if you *don’t like fishing*, or if you *want to be with only your wife and no one else*, that can be perceived as weird. I don’t know this for certain, but I suspect—and my friends and colleagues suspect—that perhaps that’s why many of those men, then, seek membership in the church. In other words, the men we see—and the men we speak to—who have what the West, and myself, define as a healthy relationship with their partners, are terrifically religious.
Before we move on, I need to share what a friend of mine—we’ll call him Sdohsa—said regarding his thoughts on gender roles with Indigenous youth today in Micronesia. “When I take a taxi, nobody messes with me; if it’s the morning, they offer me donuts and if it’s evening they ask me if I want to drink sakau. But girls, women? If it’s my wife and she wants to take a taxi at night, there’s a good chance the driver will take her to Dekehtik and try to have sex with her. After this happened twice, I told her to stop taking taxis at night; if she needs to stay with her family after consuming sakau, that’s fine.”

Now let’s talk about economic disparity for Indigenous youth. Because Pohnpei is so small, if I use real first names—and someone from Pohnpei reads this—they might know who I’m talking about. So we’re going to change the names. The word serapein means girl, so our examples will be Sera Pein, Sarah Payne, Cera Paing, Jarah Pein, and Jera Payne. And we’ll only care about the first names.

If you drive down the road in one of the villages, you come to a section where, on one side, you have Cera. Cera’s house is two stories tall; it has a metal gate; it has windows; it has air conditioning; it has multiple large flat screen TVs; it has fast internet, well, relatively speaking; it has a patio; it has multiple cars, none of which are rusted or filled with cockroaches. On the other side of the road, you have Sarah. Sarah’s house is about the
size of your living room, or maybe it’s even smaller. It’s one room. It’s one story. It’s made of thatch. It has no power. It has no electronics or other goods or materials that anyone in the West—or most of Asia, or maybe in most places in general, I would guess—would classify as high quality or otherwise improving one’s quality of life. Cera has five children and they all go to private school, where the average reading score on the 8th grade standardized test is 34/40 reading questions correct per student. Sarah has five children and they all go to public school, where the average reading score on the 8th grade standardized test is 15/40 reading questions correct per student. Cera and her family work in the government and own a business. Sarah works on the land. Cera’s food comes from markets—they have ice cream, steak, and cereal, in addition to our local breadfruit, taro, and fish. Sarah’s food comes from the land—they have bananas, sometimes, and breadfruit, sometimes, and canned tuna when times are good.

Let me tell you a true story about a young girl I taught and mentored for some years. Her name is Jarah. Jarah lives in an enclosed compound, with a fence, behind a store. In school, she knew who the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were and she frequently streamed Korean dramas on her computer with her friends. They’d talk on Facebook about school, their dreams, maybe even boys—she may as well be American or British or Australian, right? Jarah had a short walk to school each day, and could walk on sidewalks. In the same class was
Sera. Sera lived miles up in the mountain, deep in the land. She didn’t know what the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were, though she had seen some movies, and she didn’t have a computer or internet. She had heard of Facebook, but didn’t really know what it was. Sera had a five-mile hike down the mountain, the woods or forest or jungle, to get to school. She was in all respects as bright and as capable as Jarah, but her experiences—and capacity to experience experiences—were more limiting. Jarah came from money. Sera came from wahu, meaning respect, meaning the traditional lifestyle and the traditional structure of living. I cannot tell you if one of these lifestyles is better than the other, but I can tell you that they are different experiences, and I can tell you that they are equally Pohnpeian and equally Micronesian.

The GDP per capita in the Federated States of Micronesia is about $3,000 USD per person per year.¹ Of the ten million dollars in the Pohnpei Education Department’s budget, all but about $7,000 come from the United States of America in the form of assistance via the Compact of Free Association.² We don’t buy our own chairs, our own books, or even our own toilet paper; well, we do, but we do it with American money from the Americans themselves. One of the components of

the Compact is that Micronesians in Palau, the Marshall Islands, or the Federated States can apply for PELL Grants. For Cera, this means she can go to school for free. I went to school for free, too. Our national and state scholarships? They also come from America. But for Jarah, she enrolls in the College of Micronesia not to go to school but to get the refund.\(^3\) Her family bought a car with the refund. And if a family has more than one child attending college, that’s amazing grace. They get a lot of money. It isn’t ours, and every penny we steal hurts us in the long run. But like an addict, it feels good. Why not? Do we have any other choice?

Social pressures. I am talking about my experience as an Indigenous youth, and as an Indigenous woman. If you’re young and you’re a guy, it’s a different story than being young and being a woman. I think the pressure doubles for men, because I’m already dealing with being young\(^4\) in general with limited rights and privileges—and I went to school, received both Bachelors and Masters degrees, and have trouble finding work. And a boy, from the same village? No school—but he gets more respect. He doesn’t have trouble finding work. He knows more than I do, prima facie, and by virtue of his being a male he is

\(^3\) These are the excess funds from your PELL Grant after your tuition; so, if Jarah received \(X\) number of dollars for school, and tuition was \(Y\) number, then \(Z\)—the remainder—is what she gets as a refund.

\(^4\) At the time of this writing, I’m 27 years old—or for fans of numbers, I’m just over 10,000 days old.
simply more qualified for any office job. I’ll give you a real example: Sen applied for a job. She got 58 points out of 60 in the interview panel. Dio applied for the same job. He got 46 points. Dio got the job, because the boss in the organization said to his staff, “She’s a woman, so in my book she gets a zero.” The minimum score was 10. I say all of this to suggest that Indigenous youth, and Indigenous women, have a social pressure to conform to social standards. They cannot possibly measure up to the standards set for men. Let’s talk about Pohnpei schools and their principals, for example. There are six private schools in Pohnpei of which three principals, 50%, are women. There are thirty-four public schools; again, there are three female principals, but this amounts to only 8% of the total amount of principals. In our traditional culture, women have the social pressure to not be successful in the Western sense of the term.

Social pressures are, above all else, the movers and shakers on all the Micronesian islands. Girls can’t go to school because they have to take care of sick children. Instead of going into the nahs—the community house⁵—learning about our culture and history, they prepare the uhmw, the earth oven, where they spend hours cooking the taro, the breadfruit, the pigs, the whatever. Instead of studying, they’re pounding sakau (kava) for their elders. Instead of bidding farewell to their loved ones at funerals, they’re the ones serving water to

⁵ This is a U-shaped structure where people gather for feasts, sakau, funerals, and other events in the village.
the visiting public. Instead of enjoying their youth, they’re already working to provide for their family. Instead of learning to identify and express their feelings, they’re sweeping the floor. Instead of choosing what they want to become, who they are is chosen for them.

And yet, we Micronesians—boys and girls, men and women—are resilient. The Indigenous youth in Micronesia can go on a field trip to the tallest mountain and, because their mother told them not to get their shirt dirty because church is tomorrow, can get there clean and sweat-free. We Micronesians can learn to survive on the island and on the ocean, learn our native tongue on our island, as well as English and other languages at school, and then enter the world at large beyond our homes. We persevere despite the pressures and problems; we, both men and women, are more formally educated (in the Western sense) now than we’ve ever been in the past, and we survive challenges big, small, and obscure to those who don’t understand us. The Spanish gave us religion, and turned our land—our identities—into economic crops. But we’re still here; they’re not. The Germans changed ownership of our lands—that’s why the Mortlockese live in Sokehs⁶—and turned us into slaves. But we’re still here; they’re not. The

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⁶ Sokehs is a municipality on Pohnpei largely comprised of Mortlockese (people from the Mortlock Islands) on one side and Mwoakilloa and Pingelap on the other side; to learn why, I recommend you research Soumadau and the Sokehs Rebellion.
Japanese came with their Imperial Navy, turned Chuuk into their Pearl Harbor, Kapingamarangi into an airbase, Pohnpei into a city, Saipan into farms, and we were incredibly outnumbered. But we’re still here; they’re not. Then the Americans came, and they told us we’d be part of a Trust Territory—and we told them we trusted them, but that this is our territory. We’re still here, and that’s why the Republic of Palau is the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands is the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia is the Federated States of Micronesia. We’re still here. We’ve always been here. We’ll always be here. And it is up to us to manifest our own destiny.

So, what is our destiny, then? I’m not sure that I know, nor that any Micronesians I’ve spoken with know, and perhaps no one can know. Geography changes over time. Chuuk was once bigger than Pohnpei, but it’s 100 million years old and some of the land has eroded or sunk. Pihl tik kak audeda pillap: “a small river fills a big river.” Youth are the future, our destiny perhaps, and just as geography changes, so too does culture. But while culture, like a river, is ever flowing and ever changing, easy to see and difficult to control, it is the combination of tiahk (“tradition”), kamarain (“enlightenment”), and pihl (“water”) that makes us who we are. And, if nothing else, we Micronesians know how blessed that makes us with our land.
Our land, as mentioned, is our identity—it’s part of our family. Our land is also our food and our medicine. We have dozens of counting systems to determine if an object is long, short, small, fat, tri-cornered, spiky, moving, and so on. This is because before the foreigners came, we required the language to differentiate plants from one another. One may think they’re all merely green appendages sticking out of the earth so as to touch the sky, but a Micronesian will know, almost instinctively, as in we learn it so early it’s natural, which trees and which flowers have which names, bear which fruits or medicines, can grow in which soil or demand how much sunlight. Those who laugh at us see the naked children running in the jungle calling us, as so many authors in the 1800s once did, savages at best and prospects for salvation at worst. We believe in God, and take God very seriously; but Anelap, the “great spirit,” is more than just God as a figure, but also the earth and every fiber and pebble and leaf and root itself. In other words, we take nature very seriously.

Micronesian youth believe in magic. Sometimes this magic is taken very literally; a spirit has possessed you, and that’s why you act out or misbehave. You avoid going to a certain place at night, because a woman in red will offer you fruits—and if you eat the fruits, you’ll die. I heard from a very good friend in Kosrae that the Kosraens, through Jesus, banished black magic from their island. The magic went to Yap, which is the home of black magic; after all, Pohnpei has the
waterfall *Lihduhdhuniap*, meaning “a Yapese woman bathing,” because of its magical properties.

But increasingly when we say that we believe in magic, we mean that we believe in ourselves. We have pride in our history, culture, and geography; we have courage in the face of adversities from foreign intervention to economic disparity; and we have hope that we can determine our own future, and that such future will be for the better of the Micronesian family at large.

So, what does it mean to be a Micronesian? It means everything, and it means nothing. It is both *something* and *not a thing*. No person is a monolith, and no group of people are a monolith. We are not a monolith. We are many things, and I can attempt to tell you what I have seen and what the people I know have seen, and even what we believe, but to summarize it all up in a coconut shell: we are who we are, and we are *from* here, we’ve *been* here, and we are *still* here.
For millennia, my people have been the stewards of this land. Coming from a place rich with everything one could want for, my ancestors lived by a strict and binding law which dictated that each individual would look out for the collective and the collective would look after each individual. A circle of balance, with this knowledge and responsibility, passed from one generation to the next. With a governing core philosophy which stressed the importance of individual responsibility for the betterment of each other, my people created a balance with themselves and the world around them. The arrival of Europeans and the Western identity changed this world forever, and now the modern age has heralded changes for us which we must look to overcome, to adapt to, to survive and to thrive alongside in this new world. Although split into many tribes and clans across the country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a whole constitute the longest continuing culture on the planet, with my people being here over 50,000 years. However, it is important to stress that for this time, we have not remained fixed in time as some of the Western stereotypes may depict the image of the unchanged “noble savage.” No, we have been able
to survive and thrive as long as we have due to the fact that we are the most adaptive people on this earth. As circumstance and necessity dictate, so we adapt, and so we overcome. Today this same principle applies, and although we have a drastically altered and different experience ahead of us, drawing upon the same core philosophy of our past we indeed shall not only survive but thrive, adapting to a new world and once again showing why we indeed are the longest continuing culture in the world to date.

My personal ancestry walks in three worlds: that of Torres Strait Islander, Aboriginal, and Western. My father is an Eora and Yuin man from Sydney and the south coast of New South Wales, and my mother is a Wagadagam woman from the Torres Strait Islands hailing from the St. Paul’s community on Moa Island. Tied in through this cultural identity is a Western identity with origins across Europe, as indeed some of my ancestry has hailed from shores far from home. The dominant paradigm of Western culture and identity has been placed on Indigenous Peoples and, over the last two centuries, we have been influenced by its presence. However, where once I saw only difficulty in trying to reconcile a life walking between these different cultures and worlds, today I see an opportunity as I have witnessed my people once again adapt to a situation beyond our control. Today we have adapted to a world which has been geared against us as, through decades of racist government policy (where once we were not so much classed as people
but rather placed alongside flora and fauna), we have endured and overcome decades of social experimentation by the Australian government with everything from protectionism, segregation, assimilation and self-determination, all policy flags flown by the Australian government over the last century. Moving forward to the situation in 2018, we now sit in a place in which we have the opportunity to take back our own destiny despite the numerous socio-economic and political challenges which lie ahead of us.

Today, my people face massive hurdles and obstacles on our way towards equity and empowerment. After the crippling effects of colonization and apartheid on generations past, today we are left to pick up the pieces and begin to rebuild this fractured world we inherited. The chaos which now ravages our communities through justice issues and incarceration (we have the highest rate of incarcerated people in the world today; with only 3.3% of the total population of Australia, we constitute over 27% of the prison population\(^1\)), chronic health conditions including major issues with diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and

substance abuse issues, a housing crisis (in some regional and remote communities, overcrowding is a reality with lack of accommodation or adequate housing), and a myriad of other socio-economic hardships which rampage through our community. These issues have ramifications both circular and perpetually in domino, in that as one issue takes effect, it inevitably leads to others. These issues, however, whether they be incarceration, poor health, substance abuse or poverty, are only symptoms of something much larger; tackling the root of these issues is what we, as the next generation, must confront if we are to walk towards a brighter future.

As a young Indigenous man, I sought to change the fortunes of my people through blending ancient traditions and law with the realities of the 21st century, and utilizing constructs which govern the way civilization operates today. With the state having far-reaching and governing powers, the dismantling of previous traditions and methods of conduct and operation was first and foremost a priority for the state to ensure and legitimize its power. The onset of capitalist notions of production and societal construction have meant a dramatic turn for a society where individual responsibility

2 Ibid.
towards the collective and not only oneself was paramount. Walking with an understanding of both realms, the challenge today is how in a globalized world do we hold the balance between the two? To walk the line between the differing philosophical and ideological governing methods, I as a 19-year-old established an organization which would assist in caring for my community. Since I could not see the state nor any institutionalized body assisting my local community, I instead set up an entity which would operate under the premise of helping to address some issues we faced as Indigenous youth, utilizing all methods of modern state accountability and transparency. This organization, however, has one major fundamental difference at its core: this entity would adhere to an ancient philosophy of social responsibility which my forbearers enacted. The core of this modern age institution would be grounded in Indigenous knowledge and law and thus we would put into motion a strategy to ensure, as in the previous millennia, that we would not only survive in this new world, but that we would thrive.

The organization I established is named The Streets Movement organization (TSM), a community development organization and social impact initiative with a primary emphasis on youth, education and positive pathways. The projects developed from this entity would range from health promotion projects like community gymnasiums and centers, to drop-in centers and spaces for youth, music and arts programs, school initiatives, and academic and cultural exchanges, all of which
would assist our people in crafting a better future for themselves and for our communities. From this grassroots beginning, I was fortunate enough to be able to construct a community center when I was in my early twenties which served as a community boxing gym, a place where we could teach our ethos and begin to give back simply in a way and format with which we were familiar.

Initially, our philosophy was taught through the medium of boxing and fitness. Boxing and fitness are prime conduits for teaching the lessons of our philosophy and ideology in a very practical sense. The mere fact that I was given these lessons growing up in a cultural context, along with the fact that I was taught and able to relate these attributes through the medium of boxing, was enough to provide justification to pass these same teachings on through this particular medium. Additionally, boxing and Indigenous Peoples have always had a great relationship. Particularly in the days of racist government policies and apartheid of Indigenous Peoples in Australia, boxing was a space in which one had equality with anyone whom they stood against, irrespective of color. Therefore, with a solid historical relationship and a spirit within the sport itself which breeds strength over adversity, boxing was a prime candidate and medium through which to help my people. Training and fighting taught resilience to suffering, strength over weakness, unrelenting commitment to a purpose or goal and the idea of “the fight.” These lessons and attributes were learned through the very real and practical
implementation of boxing and its associated health and fitness techniques. For example, one cannot expect to become stronger and subsequently fitter unless one trains. The physical aspect of these actions requires maximum physical effort and pushes one into a mental state of “I push myself to my physical limits,” which in turn also ensures that my mental state is pushed to break my own barriers and I am forced beyond what my current physical limitations are. Within this space, I build an understanding and appreciation of what hardship brings, in that through this suffering and exertion I am able to find myself—that is, the strongest version of myself. What I am taught in this space is that through hard work and dedication, I am able to better myself and that I should embrace the hardship or “grind,” as it is only through this that I am able to strengthen myself both physically and mentally to various kinds of hardships. Therefore, training was used as a microcosm for life.

In our lives as young Indigenous men and women, just as in training, hard times will come; however, what is in your control is how you respond to these events. If you embrace these challenges and use them as motivation to better yourself rather than caving and crumbling to the challenge, you can and will exceed and thrive in this world. These examples are drawn from ideas on evolution or adapting to one’s situation, rather than letting circumstances or situations break us and destroy us. We use this as motivation and reason to stand up and do more, ensuring that we as
individuals are empowered enough to be able to take the necessary steps in our lives to make a change not only for ourselves but for our communities and for the world as well. Being born into difficult socio-economic circumstances, coupled with the dynamics and teachings of my own people, has shaped this thinking. Additionally, I have drawn from the resilience of my people against the myriad issues which have afflicted my people—everything from genocide, on to apartheid policies, through to the crippling effects of post-colonial society which afflict Indigenous communities today. Our philosophy was a way of drawing upon that intergenerational trauma and pain and directing it to something which would empower us. We suffered; however, because we suffered, we should be stronger—stronger to face the issues we have today. Those who have not faced our challenges are not as equipped to handle the hardships and complexities that life throws at all of us. Although we have started behind the rest of society due to theft of land, loss of wages and life and a host of other social and economic determining factors (e.g., lack of intergenerational wealth, systemic destruction of languages and culture by the state, forced removal of Indigenous children by the Australian government to “breed” out Aboriginality, among others), we are able to overcome the harsh reality of the world today because we have endured so much hardship and pain before. In this sense, our philosophy teaches us that this pain that was meant to break us has forced us to adapt and we have now used it as fuel for our proverbial fire; therefore, we
can achieve more, we can do more, and we can be more because of where we have come from. This is our “fighters’ mentality.”

My mission was to change the social narrative of my people and to enact some sort of social and economic revolution through which we would be able to cast off the shackles of poverty and dispossession and the control over our culture by non-Indigenous entities. For example, many non-Indigenous companies sell tourism packages where I live and across Australia; however, funds from these do not go towards Indigenous communities but rather back towards the non-Indigenous entities which control these particular markets and NGOs which have major control over Indigenous funding sources and community development opportunities. I looked to begin to create and maintain our communities and culture in our own way. Growing up, I experienced a particular narrative about Indigenous Peoples, namely that my people were alcoholics, drug users, criminals, poor and a problem for society. Growing up, I experienced very real racism from kids who felt that because I was Indigenous that, somehow, I was less than they were. I can recall remarks from other youth on the subject of my Indigeneity; this included everything from open mockery and ridicule to the typical degenerative slurs. The most confrontational incidents, however, came from the police. During one particular incident, I was walking my friend home (who was a young non-Indigenous woman). I was but 17 years of age at the time and walking
with my friend, my two younger brothers, and one of their friends. It was around 9:30 pm and we were around 400 meters from my home when a police car drove by us. After the car drove by, the police car lights came on and the vehicle turned around and proceeded to pull up in front of us. We were confronted by two white male police officers who asked our names and what we were doing out. We told them everything they asked for and explained that it was late so we were walking our friend home so that she was safe. One officer then proceeded to demand that we empty our pockets and asked what we had on us. Growing up with a criminal defense lawyer for a father (he worked for the Aboriginal Legal Service in Sydney), I knew my rights when confronted by police, so I replied to the officer that it was not a legal requirement for me to do this. He then pulled out a baton and threatened to, and I quote, “beat the s#*t” out of me and “put [me] in the back of the wagon.” What followed was a tense few moments with only the intervention of the other officer stopping his colleague from hitting me. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident and on the rare occasions as a youth, if and when I had encounters with law enforcement, they were not always of the kindest nature; unfortunately, the experience of harassment and “stand over” tactics were common elements. Needless to say, experiences such as this have left an impression on me and have helped mold my views of society and politics in this country.
Walking in-between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds growing up was a confronting experience and has shaped my thinking to this day. The issue and challenge, as I perceived it, was the fact that we were living under a dominant discourse imposed by Western colonialism and the ideologies related to race and place which this brings. The “white fella” today has economy, position and privilege, systems of operation and control, institutions and political and social cohesion. In contrast, we have been robbed of our standing and have been forced to believe for generations that we are less through ideological brainwashing and racial apartheid tactics. We have no economy of our own, no social cohesion or unity (given the hundreds of tribes across the nation, this has always been a major issue) and the societal and political issues we confront through our dealings with the state and its institutions have left a mark on our communities that we are still dealing with to this day. For us to move forward as a people, we need to begin to address some of these very critical community development issues. Our philosophical disposition coupled with the socio-political situation of Indigenous Peoples in Australia has made for a “perfect storm”; now we must build our own organizations, and our own institutions with an ideological premise and approach based on empowerment and independence, one which can reconstruct the narrative around how Indigenous Peoples are seen and how we see ourselves in this world.
Working within the community development and charity space has taught me that societal perceptions of charity and Indigenous Peoples are predominantly based around “handouts,” poverty and providing aid relief for those in need. However, this altered perception of what constitutes assistance has been detrimental to the way in which community organizations and indeed community itself looks to address complex socio-economic issues. The premise of assistance must center on opportunity and the ability to look holistically at issues which have arisen in the community. These issues are not only socially based, but also cross into the realm of economic, political and cultural issues. The fact that these issues are so intrinsically linked means that initiatives designed to address them must be flexible and encompassing enough to deal with all types of hurdles. Examples of these types of hurdles can be seen at our community centers and are often related to disengaged youth. Whilst the youth involved at the space may be there for a multitude of different reasons, if a particular youth has come in because they are in trouble with the law or experience school disengagement, the reasons for their current situation must be explored. Upon deeper analysis, the deeper root of this criminal justice contact or disengagement may stem from a vast array of reasons. For example, this may have stemmed from the youth’s home situation, where issues such as domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse and physical abuse may be prevalent. If such issues are further analyzed, it may come to light that the
reason this situation has worsened is lack of employment for the individual’s parents or caregivers, which has caused significant financial pressures and stress to the point of a loss of meaning and purpose for these individuals. This may have impacted the parent(s) or caregiver(s) to the point where they have lost hope of looking for a better future. Some then give up on themselves and others, self-medicating these issues with alcohol and mind-altering substances. This in turn has a domino effect as these symptoms further go on to impact other areas of life, until the path of damage has reached into the youth’s life, who further perpetuates the cycle, as they too must try to confront these issues that spill over and consume their identity. Whilst only a rudimentary and very basic example, this is a reality we have confronted, with a fractured social and identity base and underlying symptoms at its core—including the effects of intergenerational trauma and the individual’s own personal grievances and issues—all taking hold to further harm themselves and others in the cycle. This destructive and crippling cycle is far-reaching and goes beyond just the social realm. It entails cultural identity and responsibility, economic disposition and political standing, hence the holistic approach is the only way to address some of these critically complex issues.

The current model of looking to address singular issues or symptoms has a critical fault as the system looks to address the infection but not the disease. For example, many homeless services
provide accommodation, but little to nothing in the way of looking at the reasons for initial homelessness, such as mental health issues, poverty and economic deprivation, and abuse. Diversionary Centers provide bedding and meals, however, they may not provide adequate if any actual programmatic intervention and diversion from alcohol and other substances. The socio-political economy of the social services industry remains a significant barrier to community development for Indigenous Peoples and, as long as these issues are circulating within society, they will continue to shape and formulate the narrative around how charity and assistance are developed. This is significant for Indigenous Peoples, as each year billions of dollars of charity and social assistance money are allocated to be spent in Indigenous communities across the nation. However, the actual percentage of these funds that reaches the people it is intended for is questionable, as great numbers of non-Indigenous bodies are given Indigenous funding to address issues in Indigenous communities or relating to Indigenous Peoples. State and non-state institutions continually run ineffectual, inappropriate or limited-scope socioeconomic programs with Indigenous earmarked funding. This leads to the continued disempowerment of Indigenous communities and individuals, while they are simultaneously used as excuses for spending the economic capital provided for the NGO sector continually looking to “save” these people. While I cannot deny that indeed some people do come through this system and are able to
better their lives, and indeed some NGOs (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) do tremendous work, these examples are disproportionate compared to the amount of NGOs who claim they are assisting Indigenous Peoples each year and yet are doing nothing of the sort. The issue remains that whilst there is economic incentive in the politics of poverty and dispossession, the social services sector approach is limited in its scope and in its education of the wider community around what indeed assistance should look like or what it is to be a charity and provide “a hand up” over just “a handout.” Through these lessons on both local and international levels, we look to begin a transition away from conventional charitable thinking and look to expand into a holistic portal of community and individual empowerment rooted in the Indigenous law of social responsibility. The emphasis is on self-autonomy and education, building up our people and our community so that we can begin to manage and create a narrative which reflects who we are, and we can begin to create a future determined by ourselves rather than by others.

Economics is another crucial and fundamental factor in building a future for my people and it has a significant impact and influence on young people as the inheritors of the future in this country (as it is with all nation states around the world). As part of a globalized and increasingly connected world, we too are subject to the international forces and pulls of economic power.
Within this sphere, economic independence ensures a base from which to allow social, political and cultural survival and growth. The current situation in Australia sees many Indigenous Peoples sitting on land and resources that are valuable both economically and culturally, however due to the way in which Australian law and politics are established, coupled with local community dynamics, the actual profit and revenue from these holdings is a minimal percentage of what it could be. This is particularly significant for younger people as we are increasingly shut out of our own potential for building enterprises of which we should hold significant capital and say. Instead, this situation is one in which we are given the promise of lower-end opportunities working for these multinationals that control our economic base. Mining conglomerates and the political influence they acquire ensure that the profit and investment which should go into the local community are instead siphoned off, paying the bare minimum in “royalty” payments provided by the mines to local people. Many Indigenous communities in these positions who sign off on these deals with multinationals do so on an imbalanced negotiating field. Mining companies forgo the offer of any major or significant agreement in regards to profit and dividend sharing and unfortunately, in some instances, all they will provide to the local community is the token gesture of jobs and minimal or limited-impact community development initiatives. In regard to jobs, the nature and value of the roles provided through these arrangements is
minimal, as all too often quotas on these jobs are for labor work and are nothing in the way of executive management nor any shareholding positions. This is particularly significant for young Indigenous men and women, as we are increasingly given the illusion of opportunity when the reality of the situation sees us given no pathways towards future white-collar management or ownership within this realm. If we cannot break into this market or are given access to the opportunity to take some form of authority and control, how does our future look? Mining magnates in Australia are guilty of this method of operation of illusionist opportunity, continuing to offer the narrative of justification that they are “helping provide jobs” and not simply providing “corporate cash welfare.” Despite reaping billions of dollars from Indigenous lands, they do not see fit to provide adequate financial investment back into the community. Attitudes and actions such as these are a form of economic apartheid, as Indigenous communities are given the “crumbs from the table” as powerful non-Indigenous individuals and companies continually reap the land and community of their economic value. These attitudes are also incredibly detrimental in that any non-Indigenous community would not be subject to the same legal conditions of ownership as are placed on Indigenous Peoples. The ideas that powerful individuals and corporations have around “corporate cash welfare” and the provision of jobs being good enough for the local community are racist to their core. This is a double standard, because Australian companies would be forced to
provide adequate compensation or even partnership if working with other non-Indigenous groups around the country. What perhaps adds insult to injury is the fact that in one instance in particular, one of these well-known mining magnates works in tandem with the government to write policy for Indigenous Peoples. The fact that economic power has now leveraged its way into the creation of policy that affects Indigenous Peoples, is justification enough to begin to search for ways to take back our own livelihoods. When looking at this issue from a youth perspective, this is extremely relevant as we look to inherit this situation from our current leadership and any stalled action or inaction on our behalf will only serve to further the struggle we and the generations to come will face in the future. The lack of intergenerational wealth, the theft of land and stolen wages by the state through previous government policies (Indigenous Peoples were wards of the state, with their lives controlled by mission managers) have meant that a situation exists today in which we have very little economic capital or base from which to work. We must also remember that land is sacred and while some tribes are happy to develop particular industries, others do not intend to do so and this is a wish that should be respected in tandem with other viable economic options (e.g., cultural/environmental tourism, etc.). Whether through the mining example or other industries, we must look for the opportunities within these spaces not only for ourselves, but for the future generations who come after us. Today, we, the next generation, face many challenges because
of our peoples’ past. However, while economic disparity and unethical and imbalanced situations such as these do exist, we as young people must look at securing what is ours and building local, national and international partnerships based on respect and balance rather than continuing with the economic situation that exists today.

The future for Indigenous empowerment and independence has great potential. However, overcoming hurdles of community perceptions, stereotypes and the current low standard which the state and its institutions have placed on us are barriers which must be broken. While the system presents many challenges, we have internal and local issues we must confront in our own communities as well. The realities of life as an Indigenous person means we face a number of issues for which we are directly responsible, and addressing the faults in ourselves is something which must not be overlooked either. As a young Indigenous man, confronting the standards we place on ourselves and confronting the ideas that others have placed on us is a constant pressure and a battle that must be addressed. An example I have encountered on this matter appears in the case of a program we established through our community organization, entitled the Mulumulung International Scholar Initiative. In the case of the Mulumulung International Scholar Initiative (an international academic and cultural exchange initiative), we, as an organization, approached a vast array of state and non-state actors and institutions such as
schools. In this particular situation, having the engagement and cooperation of schools was fundamental in spreading information around the initiative, since the vast majority of students we intended to engage with this initiative are between 15 and 18 years of age (between the tenth and twelfth grades). Under this program, academic success is not the primary prerequisite (grades are not the only or even the primary criteria for selection); community, culture and even interest in the international community, personal resilience, character and local impact are all important factors in the selection criteria. This message was communicated to schools across the region as well as to the education department so as to cast a wide net in looking for willing applicants. Despite these efforts, however, gaining traction proved to be a difficult endeavor. When we began to notice a lack of applications, we made an effort to go and talk to the schools and find out what the issue was in relation to the lack of applications. At first, we thought maybe a lack of interest with the student cohort was the reason; however, upon discussion at the various schools, a particular theme began to emerge. This lack of applications was not due to lack of interest from students, but rather a failure and lack of communication on behalf of the teachers and staff who were not passing on program information or details to students within the school. This became apparent on a particular trip to a local high school. At a meeting with staff at the school, I stated, “We are looking for Indigenous students who want to make an impact, be inspired and could
see a future in attending university. We are taking them over to Oxford and Cambridge in the U.K.” The teacher responded with dismay and stated, “Oxford and Cambridge, huh? We don’t have Indigenous kids like that. I can give you some Asian or white kids though.” This short response showed me the disconnect we were having and unfortunately this rhetoric was not isolated to one school; rather, I received similar responses from staff members from schools across the region. The issue did not lie with the youth, but rather the perceptions and attitudes of certain teachers and staff. Whether through incompetence, laziness, lack of prioritization or preconceived prejudice and underlying racist sentiments, limitations were placed around what opportunities Indigenous students may undertake in comparison to non-Indigenous students. In situations where staff were supportive and communicated the message effectively, application numbers flowed. However, our results were too sporadic from school to school depending on which staff member we were talking too. We were forced to re-strategize and find a way to engage with students without having to work through these confines. The preconceived notions about education and opportunity for Indigenous students, coupled with a lack of care or incompetence in relation to something as simple as passing on the information around an opportunity which did not involve the teacher but rather the interest of the student, was where we confronted a major barrier. To address this issue, we took to explaining the program in-person to students rather
than only through emails or promotional materials. This new approach was successful and, through direct engagement, our numbers swelled and applications grew tremendously for this initiative.

The path ahead for young Indigenous men and women is not easy. We have a dramatically altered and changing world beneath our feet, however, while we still have a firm conviction in and knowledge of our own culture and identity, we can begin to shape a future for our communities. The issues which exist irrespective of where they sit across the social, cultural, economic or political sphere, can be corrected provided that we can educate, empower and, importantly, unify. While we may constitute hundreds of differing tribes with our own languages, traditions and laws, we have a common and shared experience which has now allowed for a common identity to emerge, that of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in this country. The shared history of dispossession and oppression is a unifying force and one which can help solidify and consolidate a national force to go forth and represent our interests. Leadership within this space is a critical issue, as today no elected or legitimate authority to lead our people from our people has been given to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. While we have leaders in every community, we do not have a leader representing a national voice, identity and interest for us all. The current makeup of assumed or perceived national leadership among Indigenous Australia is a significant hurdle, as all too often the Indigenous
voices given credibility to speak on behalf of Indigenous Peoples are government-sponsored representatives and others who advocate for the government on policy and legislation (usually based on personal funding arrangements between the parties). These individuals receive positions, funding and state support to further their agendas under the guise of Indigenous representation both domestically and internationally. This kind of assumed leadership and voice is given a substantial amount of mainstream media coverage and attention from non-Indigenous Australia. However, this assumed position of authority is not in any way, shape or form representative of the broader voice of Indigenous Australia. The voices of our young people—particularly those from regional and remote areas—are lost in this political arena amid the jostle for rank, position and title from the current Indigenous hierarchy. The Indigenous “bourgeoisie” are a voice in Indigenous Australia, but they are not the only voice. To build true unification and solidarity, a system must be established where our people are able to appoint their own voice rather than having it given to them. Indigenous leadership is a complex issue and one that varies from tribe to tribe in terms of how they believe putting forward their representative and leader should occur. However, while we continue to fight for a system which works for us, what is clear is that the current national government will not support this kind of leadership or advancement. This would be against the national interest of the Australian government, as they maintain that the
current representatives are representatives of all Australia, with Indigenous Peoples falling under this category. However, this plays more to an uneven power relationship rather than to the idea of representation. The government does not see any form of legal or political pluralism with Indigenous Australia as a way forward, as this would have significant legal, economic and political ramifications for the government. Our culture, issues and our place as first on this land, put us in a unique position as we do not look to assimilate to Australia. We have our own culture and identity, one far older than the current dominant culture that was forced onto us. It is inconceivable that the government will ever let go of their control of Indigenous Affairs (the Indigenous Affairs Minister in Australia is not Indigenous nor has there ever been an Indigenous Minister managing Indigenous Affairs in this country). As a young Indigenous man, the only recourse and action I can see to take us forward and out from this perpetual limbo is for us to take back our own political destiny by working around their system. Institutions and systems have power insofar as there is faith, legitimacy and trust placed in them. Therefore, if we place this same aura of legitimacy and trust in our own institutions and systems, what will be the result? This might look like establishing our own bodies which we fund and work within; agreeing to principles and treaties between differing tribes rather than focusing our attention in these agreements towards a relationship with the government; or building our own representative
chamber where we have our own representatives, leaders and delegates chosen by our people from community to community, where we are free to come and raise matters of concern or interest about our communities. Rather than look to work within a constitutional framework designed to uphold the current status quo, we need not concern ourselves with the hypocrisy of the democratic goodwill of a flawed and geared system which seeks our assimilation rather than our empowerment. We have seen the true nature of this beast with their social experimentation on our Indigenous Peoples and, for us to move beyond this, we must not seek permission from this system for change but rather we must take it ourselves. We will not tear down the system others rely on here (as the reality is we too are subject to this system), but we can build our own and operate parallel to this system and begin to operate in a way which is cultural, politically and economically responsible for ourselves and for our communities. Our operation as our own sovereign entity operating with political pluralism in this nation, with a leader from our people, chosen by us, is a future I hope to see in my lifetime.

The path ahead for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is a significant and monumental challenge. However, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, we are the most adaptive people in the history of this world with the oldest continuing culture. Providing the necessary opportunities through education and economics will ensure we are on a level playing field with the rest of the
globalized world. However, upholding and honoring our own cultures, traditions, laws, lore and history will ensure we stay true to our own unique identity. While education, economics, social development and opportunity as well as political strength will take us far, this means nothing without holding true to the strength of will of our people. We must tackle our own demons and confront our own faults relentlessly, just as we look to address the problems which come from the outside. We must seize our opportunities and chances and not be afraid to fail. Our path ahead will take many decades. As the destruction and dismantling occurred over 220 years, we too shall take time to truly heal. Fighting today for a better tomorrow is a staple and ethos of our ideological disposition, whether this fight is in the social realm by helping build up our people and communities from the grassroots (such as with community organizations), in the economic realm (building companies, partnerships and an economic base), in the political realm (changing the political paradigm) or in the cultural realm (ensuring our culture is represented by us and in our way). Our will to act must be unyielding and ever-consistent, but what is important here is not what is possible or impossible in relation to our rise. All we must remember is that is has never been more necessary.
APPENDIX
Notes on Contributors

Co-editors

Dali Angel Pérez is Indigenous Zapotec of Oaxaca’s San Juan Jaltepec community. She is part of the Indigenous Youth Commission in the Indigenous Women’s Organization for the Conservation, Research, and Use of Natural Resources (CIARENA), a community grassroots organization in Oaxaca. She was also the co-president of the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus and the founder of numerous Indigenous youth organizational processes, such as the Indigenous Youth Network for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Iberoamerican Platform for Indigenous Youth. She is currently an alternate representative for Latin America and the Caribbean in the Indigenous Peoples’ Major Group for Sustainable Development (IPMG), and coordinator of the Youth Unit and the Objectives of Sustainable Development in the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC). Dali is a graduate of Mexico City’s Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) in Hydrobiology, with a post-graduate degree in Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples’ Rights from Madrid’s Universidad Carlos III (UC3M).

Victor Anthony Lopez-Carmen is a member of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe and is also Yaqui. He has been an active member of his communities since
he received his traditional name and baptism as a new baby on the Pascua Yaqui reservation in Tucson, Arizona. He holds a Bachelor’s of Science in Health Sciences and Chemistry from Ithaca College, and a Master of Public Health from Western Sydney University, where he is an Honorary Fellow. He is a Martin Luther King Jr. Scholar, Udall Scholar, and a Fulbright Scholar, School of Health, Medicine, and Applied Sciences, Central Queensland University. With a strong desire to serve his communities as a health worker, he conducted genetic research at Harvard Medical School and is currently a medical school candidate in the class of 2023. Recently, he was part of the UN human rights hearings delegation at Standing Rock in conjunction with the UNBHRC (UN Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises) and was named a 2018 “Native American 40 under 40” national honoree. He currently serves as North American Focal Point of the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus and as a member of the International Indian Treaty Council.

**Elsa Stamatopoulou** joined Columbia University in 2011 after a 31-year service at the United Nations with some 22 years dedicated to human rights, in addition to 8 years exclusively devoted to Indigenous Peoples’ rights. Having worked in Indigenous affairs since 1982, she became the first Chief of the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Her academic background is in law, international law,

**Authors**

**Juweria Ali**, 24, is from the Ogaden-Somali people. She is a PhD student in Politics and International Relations based in London. Her research interests lie at the intersection of nationalism studies, contested territories and liberation struggles with a focus on everyday forms of resistance emerging from the Ogaden-Somali region. She is also interested in state expressions of gendered violence specifically in occupied territories through the lens of intersectional feminist theory. Juweria also serves as the Advocacy Chair on the Ogaden Youth and Student Union (OYSU) global board, leading
the organization’s advocacy campaigns focusing on the human rights situation in the Ogaden region.

**Maria Antonia Benito Tomas**, Guatemalan, young Indigenous woman of the Mayan community Poqomam, is 28 years old. Communicator and television presenter, she is a thesis candidate in the Teaching Faculty of Language and Literature and student of journalism at the University of San Carlos of Guatemala. She is the focal point for Guatemala at the Indigenous Youth Network for Latin America.

**Q”apaj Conde Choque** is an Aymara attorney from Bolivia. He is a SJD candidate 2019, Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy, University of Arizona; LLM 2016, University of Seville; and Law Degree 2010, Universidad Mayor de San Andres. He served as legal officer in the Centro de Estudios Multidisciplinarios-Aymara, CEM-Aymara (2016 - 2017) and was an Indigenous Fellow in the World Intellectual Property Organization, WIPO (2013 - 2014). He is a member of the Red de Jóvenes Indígenas de Latino América, and Co-Chair of the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus (April 2017 - April 2019).

**Sylvia Elias**, born on the island of Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), was raised by her parents in the village of Elieliwi, Madolenihmw. Sylvia is 27 years or 10,000 days old; she is also the first FSM citizen to receive a Master’s degree in Social Work. She is currently the Executive Director of Youth-4-Change Inc., an all-
volunteer Micronesian youth-centered NGO that focuses on its four pillars of Leadership, Characteristic, Identity and Advocacy. When she is not volunteering with Youth-4-Change, Sylvia works with Upward Bound Program Pohnpei as the Student Activity Coordinator and a Part-Time Instructor at the College of Micronesia’s Social Science Department in the FSM. She is a Micronesia Red Cross Society youth representative in the governing board, one of the Pacific focal points in the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, and FSM Youth Council Secretary, among many other activities. A fighter for equality and equity in society, Sylvia extends her genuine, honest-to-goodness respect and appreciation to each and every one of you reading this.

Rayanne Cristine Maximo Franca, Baré community, Amazon, Brazil, is 26 years old. She is educated in Nursing at the University of Brasilia and is currently completing a Master’s degree in Development, Society, and International Cooperation at the same university. She is collaborator and responsible for international affairs for the Indigenous Youth Network of Brazil (REJUIND). She is also the focal point for Latin America and the Caribbean in the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus.

Amnai Handaine, 27, is a Moroccan young Amazigh from Agadir. Early in his life, he became aware of the importance of biodiversity and the necessity to defend the rights of Indigenous Peoples
to maintain real sustainable development. He participated in several conferences, among them the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNFPII) in 2018 on behalf of IPACC (Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee). He made strong recommendations for Indigenous Languages safeguards. He is currently working as a consultant in Management in France and is still involved in Indigenous Peoples’ issues through the Center for Historical and Environmental Amazigh Studies and within IPACC.

**Abhinav Joshi**, 20 years old, belongs to the Indigenous group of the Newars of the city of Patan in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal. He is a student of social work and also works as a human rights educator for Youth for Human Rights Nepal (YHRN), a chapter of Youth for Human Rights International (YHRI), which aims to educate people regarding human rights. He is also a Scout Master in Nepal Scouts.

**Carson Kiburo Kibett** is among the three co-chairs of the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus (GIYC). He is from the Endorois Indigenous tribe of Kenya in East Africa. A community organizer with keen interest in using media as an advocacy tool to advance social justice, he believes that with a good grasp of the law, this can revolutionize the advancement of social justice. He is currently employing this method as he pursues the implementation of the African Commission ruling on the Endorois Case. Previously, he volunteered as
a Communications Officer at the Endorois Welfare Council (the umbrella organization of the Endorois).

**Varvara Korkina**, 29 years old, is a member of the Indigenous Kumandin People living in Siberia. She is a graduate student and research assistant in the ARCTICenter, University of Northern Iowa. Varvara is an Indigenous youth and human rights activist with interests in cultural economy, dynamics of Indigenous cultures and community well-being. Now she is leading the project Arctic Young Indigenous Leaders. She worked with Indigenous students in Saint Petersburg, Russia, on problems with cultural identity of Indigenous Youth in the big cities, their view on self-development for Indigenous Youth, and cultural rights, among other topics. She was running the Russian ethnic fashion festival “Polar Style” for 5 years, as well as the dancing performance group “Ener.” She has been working with the most active Indigenous Youth organizations in Russia and helping them to amplify the voice of Indigenous Youth at different levels worldwide.

**Ole-Henrik Lifjell**, 24 years old, is a Sámi with diverse Sámi heritage. He was born and raised in the Southern region on the Norwegian side of Sápmi, where he went to a Sámi school in addition to regular Norwegian school. This was his main source of learning the Southern Sámi language, a language that only 500-600 people globally can
speak today. In the beginning of his twenties, he became engaged in issues concerning the Sámi people. Rights to land and language have been continuing issues in which he is involved. Today he is the Chair of the Youth Council of the Sámi Parliament (Norway). In addition to this, he works with various creative projects.

Qivioq Nivi Løvstrøm is Co-Chair of the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus and the chair of the Student Organization of Greenland, ILI ILI. She worked for the Human Rights Council of Greenland from 2013-2015 and freelanced for the National Children's Rights Institution, MIO, from 2014-2015. Beside her work, she volunteers for various children’s and youth organizations, such as Children’s International Summer Villages (CISV), AFS and Camp Rising Sun. Qivioq Nivi is currently studying for her Stud. Cand. Mag. in Cultural and Social History at Ilisimatusarfik, the University of Greenland, while working for the Nordic Institute in Greenland (NAPA).

Aisah Czarriane S. Mariano, 24 years old, belongs to the Indigenous group Kankana-ey of Benguet in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) in the Philippines. She works as the Network Administrator of the Asia Young Indigenous Peoples Network (AYIPN), which aims to defend and promote Indigenous Peoples’ rights, particularly for Indigenous youth.
**Jesse T. Martin**, 31 years old, is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth raised in North Queensland, Australia. His father an Eora and Yuin man from the La Perouse Aboriginal community in Sydney and mother a Wagadagam woman from the St Pauls community on Moa Island in the Torres Strait, Jesse has grown up with a broad cultural and political education around his people and identity. He sees himself as a proponent of social and political change and looks to create a strong narrative from which Indigenous people can forge their own identity and future in an ever more connected and changing world. His background is politics and community development, having founded a community development organisation as a reaction to social circumstances within his community at 19 years of age. He has built youth and community impact initiatives over the last 13 years through the entity called The Streets Movement Organisation (TSM), which today works in local, regional and international development.

**Marcos Antonio Moreno**, 24, is a proud member of the Yaqui Tribe, born and raised on the Pascua Yaqui Reservation just outside of Tucson, Arizona. As a child, Marcos attended *Ili Uusim Mahtawapo*, the Yaqui Reservation Head Start program, where he received his first major introduction to his tribal culture and language. Through his adolescence and teen years, Marcos continued to be culturally involved as a member of the Yaqui Tribe’s *Kohtumbre Ya’ura*, participating in sacred ceremonies. Marcos attended Cornell University in
Ithaca, New York, where he studied Neuroscience and American Indian Studies. As an undergrad, Marcos became extensively involved in multiple research laboratories, studying areas such as cognitive development, neural mechanisms of drug addiction, and the neurochemistry of prosocial behavior. Additionally, he was involved in a public health project tasked with assessing the Yaqui Tribe’s health department and reservation community. In 2017, Marcos graduated with honors from Cornell University, receiving distinctions for his contributions to research, his volunteer work with Native communities, and his medical work overseas with the Global Medical Brigades. He is currently a medical student at the UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

*Seqininnguaq Lynge Poulsen* is a 17-year-old Inuk (Kalaallit) from Greenland. She is a student at the gymnasium of Nuuk; she is also a visual artist and a human rights activist. Her activism focuses on LGBTQ+ and Indigenous Peoples’ rights.

*Elvir Sahirman* is a young Crimean Tatar from Ukraine. Currently he is completing a Master’s degree at the Institute of Journalism, and specializes in photo, video, international journalism, international relations, and global policy. Since 2013, Elvir has been active at the Crimean Tatar Youth Center and the Crimean Tatar Resource Center. As human rights violations in Crimea heightened, Elvir took it upon himself to begin monitoring human rights violations in Crimea and
informing the Ukrainian and international community about these cases.

**Shanese Indoowaaboo Steele** is a 26-year-old Afro-Indigenous Queer Kwe youth of Trinidadian, Nipissing and Métis descent. She was born on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee confederacies, now known as Milton, Ontario, Canada. At the age of nine, she moved to the territory of the Dish with One Spoon, Tkoronto, where at the age of 18 her work around Indigenous education rights began. She belongs to the Red Sky Independent Métis Nation as well as Nipissing First Nation and is Crane Clan. Her Anishinaabe, Indoowaaboo, name means “To Carry the Ceremony.” Shanese is currently the North American focal point for the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus as well as the national Chair for the Canadian Federation of Students Circle of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students. She has spent her last six years focusing on bridging the gaps around solidarity between Canadian Indigenous Peoples and Black people on Turtle Island. Her dream is one day to open up a community centre in a lower income area in Tkoronto for Black and Indigenous youth with cultural and historical content.