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Indigeneity in the CA Bay Area

An Interview with Corrina Gould

Aragorn!, Corrina Gould

Spring 2015

Corrina Gould is a Chochenyo and Karkin Ohlone woman, born and raised in Oakland, CA- or the ancient village of Huichin. She works at a drug and alcohol program for Native women and children, she and her close friend Johnella LaRose started the Shellmound Walk and the yearly Shellmound protest that happens at the Emeryville mall on Black Friday. Here, she talks about the history of indigenous people in the bay area, the shellmounds, and the spiritual occupation at Sogorea Te.

Aragorn! (A!): Can you talk a little about why you thought about doing the shellmound walk, the history of shellmounds in the bay area, and focus more on people finding them and celebrating them (instead of just paving over them).

Corrina: Yeah, there are over 425 of them that ring the entire bay area, wherever fresh water meets salt water; they're these huge mounds, and there are always burials inside of them. Folks have to have fresh water. And our ancestors ate lots of fish, lots of clams... This is why they're called shellmounds, because when archeologists came from other places they called

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these mounds “midden.” In Europe, midden means a dunghill or garbage heap, right? But then they realized that they were all burial sites. So, since they were known as midden already, people were like “So, you just throw your ancestors in the trash?”

It’s asinine... These are all spiritual places. People were buried, and then layers of shell would be put over them, to keep them safe of course, because there were large animals in the bay area, you know, grizzly bears lived here. These were places where people came together to have ceremony, people lived on our shellmounds, they were vantage points because people could see, and send signals to each other across the bay. They were needed for survival.

A!: How tall were they, and was the land around them usually cleared?

C: The one in Emeryville was one of five; they fingered out (like your hand). The one in the middle is central, and then smaller ones radiate out around it. The one at Emeryville was three stories high. You can imagine, that’s pretty tall. And it was three football fields in diameter. So you can get a visual, kind of, right? That was the largest of all of them. The oldest one was the one in Berkeley. That was around 4th Street, by Spenger’s parking lot, under the railroad tracks and under Truitt and White hardware store, that’s the oldest according to their carbon dating. But Strawberry Creek, which we can’t see at all, is under there and went right into the bay.

What we found was the issue of how to talk about these things in the bay area when one, even Ohlone people amongst Indian people, were nonexistent really, which happened because of the relocation laws. The Relocation Act was in the 50s and 60s, I’m not sure of the exact date...Their rationale was to take Native people out of the reservations because there was so much poverty, which of course was true, right? But there also their desire to get the Indians off the reservations so that

the fire, and teaches us, someone who prays with my kids in the sweat lodge. I have lots of friends who are not native, and they do great work, and they support us, but on the weekends I don't see 'em. So, there's different kinds of relationships.

A!: Any last thoughts?

C: I do have something. One of the things I really want to talk to people about is coming back to the land in a way that nourishes them, and feel whole again. I was talking to people over the weekend and they were saying, "oh yeah, there's parks in the bay area and stuff" and I said, yeah, but do you know there's kids living in the flatlands of Oakland that never get to the hills of Oakland and never are able to see that, and wouldn't it be nice to have a plot of land in the middle of east oakland bottoms that kids could go to and feel safe in and have ceremony there. People could come and share food. Because people are so stuck in these boxes that are apartments, that have no land attached to them and don't know where they come from, and don't know where they're going. We need to become interdependent again, and that's part of the dream of the land trust, for people to become human again.

the U.S. government could go into the reservation and use the resources that were there.

The whole assimilation process was really building on the idea of wiping out Native people in America. Which is why the 1978 Longest Walk happened, because there were bills that were going through Congress that were going to allow the US to say that American Indians no longer existed.

A!: It's interesting to think in these terms of... where was the intentional genocide, and where was the unconscious motivation of genocide. I'm comfortable using the word, because I feel like... whatever, I don't think it's too harsh of a word.

C: I don't think so either.

A!: I think a lot of people feel nervous about... 'oh, it just happened'.

C: Well, it's "progress." It's "just how things are." The interesting thing is that California Indians are talking a lot about genocide right now because Junipero Serra is about to be canonized. What does that look like? We talk about the mass genocide of California Indians that happened with their first colonizers. And I think that's one thing, that folks in the bay area don't realize the history of where they're at. That was one of the main reasons that we really needed to do the shellmound walk, because so much is invisible here. So I started talking about even Indian people not even knowing that Ohlone people still existed in the bay area, right? And you can't blame them, nobody knew that, right? And even then it was really scary for Ohlone people to come out.

A!: And we could think of the missions as city states?

C: There were 21 of them, started in 1767 and lasted 98 years, starting from the bottom of California to San Rafael. My ancestors were enslaved in Mission Dolores in San Francisco, and Mission San Jose in Fremont. So Junipero Serra started the first nine missions with one of the first being Mission Dolores in SF. And, of course, his idea was to conquer the Indians, to use them as slave labor, and to kill them if they didn't cooper-

ate and become Catholic... to civilize, but it was really about having free slave labor to create these missions and to look at the land in a different way.

It's still true that Native people look at land in a different way from non-Native people. Folks look at land and say, "look, there's all these thousands of acres and the Indians aren't using it, so they don't need it." While the Indians have been tending to the land for thousands of years, harvesting in ways that they can get their basket shoots straight, burning stuff off so that the vegetation that they ate came back in a good way, ways that they brought animals in to the land so that it's not destroyed, and how they take care of the acorns and the fish in the area, so there was a natural process of care-taking the land, tenuring the land.

When other people got here they said, "There's all this land and there's so much rich soil," ('cause the natives had been tending it) "that we could put all these orchards up." And that 's exactly what happened; they put these orchards up and kept pigs and goats and all these animals that we know as food. And giving those foods to my ancestors made them sick, as anybody eating food that they're not used to will get sick, so they got sick and died. The animals came with diseases that folks here had never seen.

A!: If you were going to talk about the stages of genocide of California natives, how would you do that? Was there a stage prior to the founding of the missions? perhaps with the initial contact with whites?

C: So Native people were free to go after the missions closed, right? And the state of Mexico was here for a while, right. What was supposed to happen was that Native people could apply for land tracts for land that used to be theirs. The problem was that folks were illiterate.

A!: Not to mention the traditional world view about land.

C: Right. so how would they have done it? they didn't think about it like that for one, and two, so they're posting stuff up

Accomplices. I don't know. I think of my friend Johnella, who has been there and created IPOC with me, as my accomplice. She is the one that... we dreamed this stuff together. She's gone off to school, but is still working on this landtrust. We live in different places, she lives out in the country mostly and I live out here in the city still but we're still dreaming those ideas together, we both have that relationship with the land, because we're both Native, we're both mothers and grandmothers, and we've gone through all these years of work, doing this stuff and trust each other. For me that's what an accomplice is, somebody who I would lay my life down for, who I trust.

So Johnella, I trusted her before, she was the one who came up with the idea of these walks. I had no idea what a walk was like. I had no idea. I trusted her. We sat down at that little cafe down the street with the maps and wrote it all out, and then drove the things, and it looked like, hey, we could drive this so easy, 18 miles, it's nothing, right? We could do this, no big deal [laughter], but walking every step of that with all these people behind us, really counting on us to have food at the end of the day, counting on a floor to sleep on. That's an accomplice. I appreciate the people who help me sit at the table and be an equal, that's an ally. That's somebody who says, your work is bomb, and people need to hear this, and I want you to share this with other people... but it's not the same as having someone who does that work with you like that. An accomplice is more rare. I have a cousin, who grew up with me and helped me raise my kids, she's my accomplice in that part of my life. I have a friend who went to all of our events, every single thing, and was kind of like my shadow to make sure nobody messed with me, until her health got bad, she is an accomplice, and we raised our kids together too, so it's like that. So I have those folks. Wounded Knee, who has gone out of his comfort zone on all that kind of stuff and drove all over the world, all over the country, talking to people about Segora Te and why it's important, he's an accomplice. Fred, who lit

and what do you think of the accomplice vs ally, that is sort of the flavor of the month terminology. It's the new decolonize...

C: Yes, the new decolonize... [laughter] I think that... gosh it's hard to say.

A!: To approach it from a different direction: most of this bureaucratic nonsense that you're trying to do, are you mostly doing it with other Natives or are you getting much help from people who are not native? And what have your collaborations looked like. 'Cause it sounds like a lot of what you're doing has Native people as the driving force, but I'm sure that's not entirely true, especially financially.

C: Well, we had a small two-year grant from a foundation to start the land trust. We got one year of funding and don't know if we'll get the second year, which is what I hate about foundation stuff. I've had people who were at Segora Te with us, who provided herbal stuff, supplies, who said that they want to be this next step, this next journey, where we're going with this... Because I think all folks came away wanting that community, loving that community, wanting to be a part of something like that. I haven't utilized folks in a way that probably I should. People have come to me, but I think that...for me, there hasn't been enough conversation to move this forward in a way that I feel comfortable with. Part of me is afraid to do this, what is it gonna look like, how is it gonna change my life...

A!: Are you gonna jeopardize what you have...

C: Yeah...yeah. I guess that's it. Sometimes you get scared when you're trying to do those kinds of things. Folks who are my allies are the ones who have walked with me from the beginning and haven't left, and want to stay and offer help and also know when to back off and let me do what I gotta do. Who bring me information, so I can use that for the work. And are willing to stay on the line with us. And I saw a lot of people who were ready to do that, at Segora Te. I really have a lot of respect for and honor those people.

with words on it, so what do the words mean? It means nothing, and who's gonna tell you that it does mean something? "Well, none of these Indians came forward and got this land that they could've gotten, so..." So, Mexico had it.

Then there was the Treaty of Guadalupe, where Indians were supposed to get land back, but that didn't happen. Then the state of California was created and the state of California created laws specifically for genocide, for example a law stating basically that it was illegal to be Indian: that any white man could take you to a court of law and say that you were vagrant, and say that they would take care of your food and your clothing for the next 40 years, if they could use you for work, and the court would find in favor of that. They could take people's kids away.

This is in to the 20th century. They could take your children and say they were orphans. And they could shoot you, as the parent, to make the children orphans. You didn't have any rights because you couldn't say anything in a court of law if you were not white. So children were taken from their parent(s) and sold into indentured servitude. People were hunted down because the state of California paid over a million dollars for the scalps, heads, and ears of Native American people.

A!: This is after Mexico.

C: Yeah, after Mexico. So this is Gold Rush era. Everybody flooded into the state, and of course there's not enough gold to go around, but on the weekends, there'd be these black Sundays, people would get on their horses, shoot a couple of Indians, have some money to get through so they could continue panning for gold. So it was all of these things that created the genocide of Natives in California.

A!: Sounds like you're now talking about Natives who would've lived closer to the Sierras, while obviously San Francisco and the bay were already a different environment, with cities, etc. But also it is where the missions were.

C: Right. Yeah, there weren't missions up there, they were all on the coast. It was still illegal to be Indian, even though you were in San Francisco or Oakland, so people could still kill you and get a bounty... this was the case anywhere in the state of California. They were trying to exterminate the Indian. There was no reason to have us here; we were an inferior race. They called us diggers, here. We were not even human. Not even just in the state of California, in the US, Indians did not get citizenship until 1924. So my great grandparents were not even born with citizenship. It wasn't until 1978 that we had our own right to religion. So all of this forbidden stuff had to go underground. My particular family survived all of those ways of genocide by pretending to be Mexican. They worked on a ranch in Pleasanton, and survived. But the interesting thing is that they all intermarried with other Ohlones and other mission Indians who were close by.

A!: There was still some language.

C: There was still language. My great grandfather was one of the last speakers of Chochenyo language. This crazy... JP Harrington, and he was absolutely nuts. (I think the ancestors had something to do with it.) But he went... not just California languages but all these languages in Mexico, he'd seen all these languages disappearing and he just went and wrote notes and had people talking to wax cylinders and recorded them and got all of this information and that's how we're bringing our language back. Because he did that with my great grandfather. It's really amazing that those things happened. Nels Nelson, who worked in Berkeley in 1909 knew then, over a hundred years ago, that all these shellmounds were going to be desecrated or removed, and he made a map of them, over a hundred years ago, and that's what we used for the shellmound walks. It's not just Ohlone people who were invisibilized, all Native people were invisibilized in the bay area for a while, even after Alcatraz and stuff. They kind of went away, you know?

crowd, you know? And then when they come to us, and start talking about their traditions, and how their family still goes back for ceremony, there is a different part of them that lights up, and they're able to leave the other folks behind for a while. It's the popular culture that really kills us, you know. I think that's what it is. I think it's hiding to be whole, in some kind of way. My ancestors hid so they wouldn't be killed. Then they hid so they could hold on to our songs 'cause they were against the law until '78. And they hid for their kids to have an easier life—in California it was easier to be Mexican, even, than Indian.

It's my generation that's saying, ok, we don't have to hide anymore. It's ok for us to come out and talk about this stuff, but even with my kids going to elementary school with a bunch of Native kids (it was one of the schools with the largest populations), they still had a hard time in their classroom with their teacher. It's the education system and society as a whole that makes you want to hide, still.

A!: Almost impossible to change it at all unless you change the whole damn thing.

C: Yeah. I often think that. It all needs to change. People need to figure that out sooner than later. So, I'm thankful that my ancestors hid in the way they did. And I'm thankful that whoever the crazy people were in the past, wrote down stuff and left those clues so I could find those things. I think having a voice in today's society allows the next generation to pop up and say, "hey! I've got something to offer too, and we're still here." I think hiding is a good way to survive; like you say, people do it all over the world. They hide in different kinds of ways. I think sometimes we're just tired of hiding.

A!: So the last question I have for you is one I brought up earlier and you may not have any particular thoughts about it, but... it's the idea of what makes a good ally. Who have been people you've worked with who you've enjoyed working with,

this ourselves.” We could’ve created a land trust, and a land trust could’ve done the exact same thing the tribal entity did, so that’s the tool we were missing...

So yeah. I think we had to be there, so we could learn these lessons. So for me, that’s what it is. For Occupy, that’s what it is... People who were involved in Occupy, did the medic stuff and did the kitchen and all of these crazy, fun, wild ideas, and brought life to themselves and other people, th’ats what they walk away with. So, in the material world, whatever, maybe it’s a loss. Just like Segora Te, which was a loss to some people.

This is what I tell people, it gave us how to be a human being again. And I think that’s the same with Occupy. People learned how to be human beings again, and share with each other, oh my gosh, and talk to each other.

A!: There’s a thing you brought up earlier that I would love to hear your deeper thoughts on, which is this idea of disappearing to survive. That is a really interesting idea, and I know that other people have experienced this... I’m just curious about your thoughts about what that looks like in this world, where it’s so hard for people to be visible at all.

C: I still see it in Indian kids, ‘cause I work in the public school district. That it’s easier to kind of mask yourself as something else, so that you don’t get those questions asked of you. I go around to the schools and track all the Indian kids in the Oakland Unified School District, and sometimes I find one kid in an elementary school. He’s the only kid, he’s in fourth grade, and they’re doing stuff on gold rush and the missions, and he definitely does not want to be asked, “what does it feel like to be Indian?” Even as adults we don’t want to be asked those questions by people who...I have no idea why they would ask that. But kids, and teachers, ask that still to this day.

In a city like Oakland, it’s easy to just kind of hide and invisibilize yourself so you don’t have to do that. A lot of the kids who we work with who are in afterschool programs, are mixed with African-American. So it’s much easier to fit in with the

A!: Yeah. And the problem with Alcatraz is that it’s sensationalism: it’s not “Natives exist in daily life” it’s “Natives exist in a circus.”

C: Right. I agree with that. So we decided that was important after Emeryville was such a debacle...

A!: That mall that opened in 2003?

C: 2002, I think. We decided to protest it. So we protest it every year...

So we walked all the shellmounds that we could find, superimposing our bay area map on Nels Nelson’s map and trying to figure out roadways and reading old newspapers that had stories about when ancestors were pulled out. We just figured out where they were, and we stopped and prayed at these places that were under buildings, under railway tracks, under bars, under schools, under all this stuff. And one of our main reasons was that if we didn’t recognize the ancestors from this land, we couldn’t do the work to be recognized. People work for recognition in different ways...

A!: For the audience, you’re talking about federal recognition of your tribe, and the complicated process, and the value of that recognition, pro and con.

C: Right. There are folks that work on federal recognition and I think it’s a farce. It was set up in a way that has never been for Indians or about Indians, it’s about preventing us from being recognized.

A!: It’s about genocide. Why don’t you talk about Sogorea Te. Since you’re talking about the end of the chapter of the walks, and there were a bunch of other things too...

C: In 2011, after twelve and a half years, we’ve been going and helping Wounded Knee, SPIRIT, that’s the group that worked to get the city of Vallejo and the Vallejo Restoration District not to build a park there. It’s 15 acres of open land on the Carquinez Strait. It’s the last 15 acres right there in Vallejo that’s open land, and folks have been going to city council meetings—the city council is actually separate from their park

district; their park district holds a lease on the land and are the caretakers.

So, we had to go through their board, and their board was super racist, and didn't want to hear anything about holding on to that piece of land and leaving it as open space. There was an old abandoned house that was on top of it before, it would be overgrown all the time, there was a little creek that ran through it, and fishermen would fish there regularly, and people walked their dogs there. It was just open space and no one basically went there and there was a big huge housing development that was butted right up against it and actually a lot of the cremations had been removed when the built that development, and put onto Sogorea Te space, right? So, twelve and a half years going to board meetings, impact report meetings, having letter writing campaigns, all of that to have them say "we're gonna do it anyway." At that time the city of Vallejo was going bankrupt, people can look that up. So, they decided in all their wisdom to give the Greater Vallejo Park District \$40,000 in free permitting to go ahead with the park.

We decided there was nothing else we could do. On April 14, 2011, we called folks up to go up there and hold it down. We figured we'd be there for a weekend, we ended up being there 109 days. We set up camp, we set up a sacred fire first of all. That was the first thing we did. And Fred Short was the one who put that together for us, he got the sacred fire going, and it stayed burning for 109 days. That was one of the biggest fights.

A!: So I've heard you speak about this as prefiguring the Occupy moment, especially as figuring out how a big pile of people shares a small space that is not where they normally live, so can you talk about some of the decision making, and some of the ways it mirrored and didn't mirror Occupy, which happened later that same year.

C: Yeah, we actually came and welcomed Occupy that first day [in Oakland]. Sogorea Te, for a lot of the people who were

decided against that because we know that it's my ancestral land, but coming into it, what Yocha Dehe did was to become a partner with them, with the city and the park district. By creating that partnership the city and park district became owners of the land as well. So it created the first... what's called a cultural easement, within a city and park district and tribal entity. The first one ever created.

So, for \$35,000 (I think), they bought into this, to create this cultural easement, and called us, telling us they were going to take care of it, that they were basically going to follow what we wanted. They were going to make sure that the structure was taken down in such a way that it didn't have any heavy machinery on it where the shellmound was, that they weren't going to grade the hill that had the cremations in it, that there would be no overhead lighting or bathrooms, and that the parking would be down to two spaces for handicapped people. There's hundreds of parking spaces there because we had hundreds of people on that land for many different ceremonies, and none of them ever needed to park on the land. They ended up creating six parking spaces, putting in a water fountain, no overhead lighting and no bathroom, they did put these big cement benches and tables on it and they got rid of the housing structure but they did use heavy machinery on top of the mound without protecting it, they did grade down the area that had the cremations... So they got what they wanted by using other Native people.

A!: So they made a verbal agreement with you, everyone left, and then you discovered...

C: Yes. They made a verbal agreement with us, everything was written down, we looked at it, it basically gave us what we wanted. And it said we had to leave the premises by July 31, which is why we left on that day. And we figured, because it was a tribal entity, that they would do the right thing, so we were very naïve about that, figuring that Indians weren't going to... So in retrospect we were like, "we could've done

there has to be a goal that you can grasp onto, to come away with. That you can say “this law exists because we did this,” or “35,000 other people didn’t get arrested because we did this.” We stopped hunger in America, or at least Oakland, for one day.

I think when you do something with a bigger idea behind it, you have to be ok with saying “I got some kind of awareness, there’s some kind of spiritual awareness now, there’s some kind of human contact that I had, that now I’m a different person. Because of Occupy, because of Segora Te, when I walk in this world, that walking still makes change, because it impacts the other people in our lives, and we have to continue having that impact on each other’s lives. Just like this guy who I visited today, he made an impact on my life. And vice versa, and we talked about that, just by being there and talking to each other. Children who experienced Occupy will be able to talk about that, and there are kids who come every year and say, “Mom, you remember when we slept here, in the teepee... how come our tent’s not here anymore, what happened to this place?” and we can continue to tell those stories.

A!: Is there an annual event?

C: There is an annual event, around April 14th, that’s the day we began the occupation, so either the weekend before or after. People come from all over the place back there, and people who weren’t there now want to come and see what it is.

A!: Can you talk a little about how it fell apart? Because it was a little different from Occupy, it wasn’t the cops storming in...

C: Yeah, it wasn’t the cops storming in, although we were ready for the cops storming in at any time... but at the end of the day [the city of Vallejo] worked with the Native American Heritage Commission and got the area designated as a tribe that is not from that area’s land. And Yocha Dehe, Cache Creek Casino, is the tribe that said that this was their land. We were gonna fight that because we know it’s not their land and we

there, was a spiritual awakening, and also caused a lot of post traumatic stress. I think at some point we need to get all together, because there’s pieces of the experience that are missing somewhere. I forget a lot of stuff. But, there was a group of eight of us, four Native and four non-native people, that got together to figure out things like how we were going to deal with the media, how we were going to do messaging, how we were going to deal with the police when they got there, who the security was gonna be, who was gonna be in charge of food, etc.

Each of us took our own place, but as we noticed people coming in to the land, the one thing that was centralized was the sacred fire and people who had never been there were greeted (by security or people there from the beginning) to tell them that when they walked in there they were walking on sacred land, and to come in a respectful way, and that if they wanted to stay there they could. And then they were told that we didn’t care what religion they were, but whatever they believed in, to say a prayer to whatever it was, and to put tobacco on that fire to help to keep this strength. The fire was a central place for having conversations with the entire group that lived there at the time, it helped focus us when the police came, everyone gathered around (children and women inside, men outside, security outside of that)... it was the central place we would meet when anything happened.

It was our place of spirituality, we would stand there in the morning and pray before we ate breakfast to welcome in our ancestors. There were ceremonies there; people from all over California, different tribes, people from the Pacific, came and brought ceremony there. It became an ongoing spiritual ceremony, we knew that there was something else besides us. So it took a lot of ego out of stuff, by doing it that way. Also we kept the space. There was no cussing when you were around the fire. No alcohol or drugs of any kind on the premises at any

time. It was set up that way and everyone was in agreement about it.

People ask us how we kept it together, and it was because everyone had the same mind set; we were there to hold down this land for these ancestors, and that's what our lifework was and we didn't have time for that other stuff. So everyone found a place within there. Some people were good at cooking, some people were good at cleaning up trash, some people were good at watching people's kids, some people were good at going and making copies so that we could flyer. Everyone had something they could do that would help the community.

A!: So that's the strength. What were the weaknesses, compared to, in the context of, Occupy.

C: I think those were the strengths of Sogorea Te and the weaknesses of Occupy. I think that there's some amazing things that happened at Occupy... I think the leadership was lacking in a way.

A!: Helps to have a specific mission.

C: Yeah. that helps. I don't know. I traveled to different occuppies, and some of them were just a group of folks hanging out in front of a post office. Some of them were big like Oakland. It was different. I think because... maybe it was because of how Sogorea Te was positioned.

I think the idea of occupy was great. the idea of people coming together and learning how to live together again is an amazing idea and it has to happen again. I think if I was to build up an Occupy in Oakland, not nationwide but in Oakland, then I would ensure that there was representation of all people, in the leadership, and that was not true of the Occupy in Oakland. There was a lot of education, but people were still stuck in their ideas of how things should be.

Sometimes in leadership folks have to make unpopular decisions, and stick by their guns, and sometimes they need to step back and let someone else shine for a while. And I think that is what happened at Sogorea Te. When you're doing something

to join me to save these places. If we don't then after this generation we will be annihilated. We will only be a street sign. [pause] Save an endangered species...me [laughs]

A!: There's a ton of places I'm tempted to go that are so theoretical and abstract that I don't want to go there. One thing I do want to ask you about (which I think was one of the strengths of Occupy) was the idea of no demands. Have you heard of this?

C: Remind me.

A!: The concept is that as a way to fight the politicians, who of course will try to take over any movement or any sign of life... You know, there are always these people who predate on that sort of energy, and usually how they leverage it, how they succeed in politicizing these moments, is by nailing down the movement to a set of demands and they become the spokesperson for the demands, they become the most fluent in talking about the demands, and when they win, that becomes the tool belt that they use to justify how necessary they are for future activity along this issue.

So one anarchistic way of dealing with that is to no longer be a movement or a moment to nail itself to demands like "better education, we just want x, y, and z". That defeated the politicians, but that tactic also allowed Occupy to come through people's lives, and other than the people who were devastated by it (similar to your experience with Segora Te), for many people Occupy just passed right through their lives. This is sort of the criticism of it, especially when compared to the Civil Rights Movement, we can all point to this wonderful law, that's you know greatly improved our lives... Civil Rights exist! And we can use it in conversation. But for people who are not fluent in these kinds of conversations, they didn't come away with much from Occupy.

C: Right. I think people say the same thing about Segora Te, and we had demands. That's interesting. I think that people look at the world in such a materialistic way, that they think

the whole decolonize thing happened in Occupy and screwed up, it was like “decolonize your food,” “decolonize your water,” you know what I mean?

If you start using a word frivolously like that, then it loses its original meaning, and that’s what happened. And I think that happens in the bay area a lot. That people take on the new fad, “let’s decolonize everything...” Like, if you have white privilege then find out about that, own up to it, and do something about it. But it’s not our job to teach you about that.

My friend Johnella says, we can’t teach all these folks about how they need to be in this world. Sometimes they need to figure it out themselves. It’s kind of like teaching your kids, you know? For a while I babied the heck out of my kids. They never knew we were poor, although we were. But then that stunted their growth, going into young adulthood. When people start to ask those questions, it’s because they already have a mindset that something’s wrong in this world. If they start to think about decolonizing, or going to rallies, or reading things about anarchy and different theories, then their mind is already there and they need to have conversations with people and not expect people to have all the answers for them.

When I think about decolonize now, I think it’s about re-educating ourselves about who we are, as human beings, and what our connection is to specific places, and once you figure that out you have the ability to see other human beings as other human beings, and to work together on bigger issues. I always say yes, I have this little tiny group of Ohlones who are left here, and we have this little tiny thing called shellmounds that are mostly paved over, and why should anybody give a shit about this issue when there’s global warming, all of this stuff, right? I always ask that, why should people be interested in this? Because what it comes down to is when we all have people we bury, those spaces should be sacred. When you can’t respect people’s sacredness around their burial sites, then you can’t respect a lot. That’s why I ask people to do the work, or

that is so big, you’re not on all the time, you just can’t do it, so allowing yourself to back up and let someone else take the face, for a while? is good to do. It allows other people’s ideas and inventions to come in and you can see different things happen.

A!: So you’re using the word “leadership,” which is very loaded word for anarchists. Can you talk about it in a way that we can understand what you mean? A leader is not a boss, or a ruler?

C: No, not at all. Although sometimes people in those positions need to make harsh decisions. Let me back this up a little bit. I don’t know what Occupy had in place to make sure that everyone stayed safe and people were asked to leave. In the time we were at Sogorea Te, we asked four people to leave. It came from the group of people, and then it came to the leadership group, and then we talked to the people, and then they usually just left, in a quiet way. It wasn’t something where people had to be dragged out or anything like that. There were specific reasons for it. I don’t know if that happened at Occupy. I think there were some particular protocols that need to be in place when people are living together like that.

That said, for me leadership is not about people appointing themselves as the group head, but someone who follows what needs to be done. And I think whatever community you live in, mainstream or anarchy, there are certain people who make themselves available to regular folks, who have ideas that get grabbed onto by other people and gone with, and I think that’s happened with Sogorea Te. We had built relationships with folks, “you’ve been walking with us for four years, you know the work that we are doing here, you know what Wounded’s been doing for twelve and a half years, we’re now calling on you to help us.” So, folks showed up, and then folks who hadn’t met us before showed up, and folks who they knew showed up. So it was like that.

The Native people who were in the group that invited people had been doing the work for so long, people respected them

and shared food with them and talked with them and they made themselves available and showed up at each others' funerals and...we shared a life before. The non-native people who came had been involved in some way in grass roots organizing, and also had some kind of skill to share with folks and were willing to take direction from the Native folks and from women. And vice versa. So a leadership role comes from the people within, not from self-appointment or winning a popularity contest.

A!: I just talked to a friend who is in the bay area purely to go to school here. When he's done with school he's going back to the rez. He's Diné. It's a little surprising to me that he is associating with the decolonize crowd in Oakland. Decolonize as far as I can tell is has amorphous definition, it's not a clear, coherent, singular kind of thing, but it's become weaponized before it's become coherent. I talk about this moment from Occupy Oakland as sort of a central moment of this diffusion of the term decolonize. In talking to my friend last week, it was striking to me when he said that for him decolonize is the direct spiritual practice of reclaiming this land. Which is a very powerful thing to say, and what I really appreciate about him is that there was no guile. There were no political machinations in what he said. What he said is exactly what he meant, and I almost can't even imagine someone in the bay area saying this and really meaning it, and backing it up in practical terms. Because decolonize is such a political movement, post Occupy. So maybe we can start this by talking about your sense of decolonize prior to the confrontation in 2011 and then since.

C: So, he can say that the way he said it because he comes from a place that is more traditional. So it's not decolonize the way that the bay area looks at things. Where he comes from, it makes total sense to me that he would say that, think that, believe that. For me, I don't think I really thought about decolonize before the whole movement or whatever it is. At that point, I was trying to re-acclimate myself into this world,

because when we were at Sogorea Te, when we were left there, it left this huge void in a lot of us...

A!: Did you call it an occupation?

C: It was a spiritual occupation, yeah. We used that terminology. And it being a spiritual occupation made it different from a political one. But I think that—well, ok this is what I know—when people left Sogorea Te they were devastated because they were leaving a community they had built, a family that they created, and they were going back to this world that doesn't care about anything that we care about.

I went back to my kids and I didn't know how to be a mom to them the same way I was a mom before. I couldn't watch tv for six months, or read a book. I couldn't even concentrate... so going back to work full time was just getting through the day. I asked other people if they felt the same thing and they said yes; it was just so difficult to get back in our own bodies and to be in this kind of...I don't know what it is. What society is today. It took a long time to get back.

Then we were asked to be at the Occupy thing, and did the welcoming folks to Occupy. Then pretty soon I started getting emails from folks about hey, we should change the name to decolonize, and I thought "Ok, I can jump on board with that." So what does that mean? I started asking people, well, what does that mean to you? Cause there were a lot of groups, people were having teach-ins about various things including indigenous stuff. I was asked to do one but I was not there in my mind yet, I just couldn't do it, but I started thinking about what does decolonize mean, and I decided that it does mean that people need to be educated about where they are, whose land they're own, and to be adjusted to that place and space in their life. To me that's the first part of decolonizing, is to realize you're not from here. I don't even care if you're another Indian, you're not from here. Folks really need to know that, that America was a creation. It's not real. So what is reality, and how do you go back to these things... and then it just started to be a joke. After