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ECO-TERROR? EXPLORING CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF VIOLENCE IN  
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

by

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to explore concepts of violence as they relate to environmental activism. It employs a comparative case study analysis to illustrate that environmental groups are often labelled “violent” regardless of whether or not they engage in any sort of physical violence. First, it works to define “violence” and explores the concept of structural violence as it relates to gender, ethnicity, race, and the environment. It argues that considering the concept of violence under structural terms is useful in understanding the populations affected differently by environmental violence and who has the power to name what constitutes “legitimate” violence.

Second, it argues that environmental activists are labelled “violent” or “terrorists” not necessarily because they are precipitating some form of violence, but because they threaten the status quo and structural foundation of the state. The people and groups who receive these labels are impacted differently by structural violence and thus are less able to legitimate whatever perceived acts of violence they are committing. It concludes with a call for further research into the relationship between violence and environmental activism.

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## **Chapter 1: Structures of Environmental Violence**

### Introduction

On October 11, 2016, a group of five individuals coordinated the closing of pipeline valves across four states as an act of environmental protest. Since the incident, the group has been dubbed the “Valve Turners” and has been listed as a “domestic terrorism threat” by the Department of Homeland Security. No individuals were harmed in the closing of the pipeline valve; moreover, Ken Ward, who was arrested following the event, states, “we put a premium on minimizing damage to pipeline property, and carefully considered ways to minimize any violations of the law. We called the pipeline companies beforehand and waited around afterwards for the police to arrest us (nearly an hour in two cases)” (Ward 2020).

The situation that Ward describes here is a common theme surrounding environmental protests across the world, as acts of nonviolent environmental protest are increasingly labelled “terrorism” or “violent.” The terms “eco-terrorism” and “terrorism” more broadly have been used by various political actors, scholars, and news media to describe acts of economic sabotage for environmental purposes. More recently, the labels have been applied to other types of environmental resistance (such as pipeline and extraction protests) as violence and punitive measures against environmental activists continue to rise across the world. This project uses news and mixed-media discourse to analyze the externally given construction of “violent” identities of environmental activists across cases in the U.S. and abroad, as well as various forms of violence and surveillance experienced by environmental resisters.

U.S. domestic pipeline protests have gained global attention in recent years following violent interactions between protestors and security forces. For example, news sources and documentary footage revealed violent interactions with protestors that included the use of mace,

pepper spray, water cannons, etc., as Dakota Access Pipeline police and private security company TigerSwan raided the Oceti Sakowin protest camp. Pipeline protests also generated discussion on the supposed links between nonviolent protest and “violence,” as terms like “ecoterrorists” and “criminals” appeared across news outlets and political discourse. Interestingly, other groups historically labelled “ecoterrorists” usually emphasize commitments to nonviolence (Earth Liberation Front 2020; Animal Liberation Front 2020).

Some news sources note sharp increases in violence against land defenders and extraction and infrastructure opposition globally, with a large concentration clustered in Brazil, Colombia, and the Philippines (United Nations Development Programme 2018; National Public Radio 2019; Ulmanu et al. 2017). As rates of violence against environmental activists appear to be on the rise, the relationship between that violence and the framing used by various state and private actors merits exploration. My research is beneficial to international security studies and international relations more broadly, as it provides insight into the role of power exercised by individual political actors and institutions in favor of protecting corporations, land rights, and colonial and patriarchal norms. It is especially useful for research in terrorism and political violence, as it attests to ambiguous and strategic usages of the “terrorist” label and the framing of violence in a less conventional way.

Some research has been done on “ecoterrorism,” much of which follows the declaration of the War on Terror at the turn of the twenty-first century (Vanderheiden 2005; Trujillo 2005; Loadenthal 2013; Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde 2014). It does not, however, encompass broader and more recent dialogue about environmental activists and defenders’ susceptibility to receiving violent labels or the implications of the employment of those violent labels. Research in international security studies regarding the relationship between environmental activism and

violence is limited but would provide important considerations for understanding the concepts of terrorism, political violence, and violence overall within the field.

This project seeks to explore the following research question: “in what ways is environmental activism connected to violence?” I argue that violence has a structural component; our global structure (and many state structures) are contingent on environmental subjugation and environmental violence, and that structural environmental violence often manifests differently across genders, races, geographical locations, ethnicities, and income levels. Violence is not simply direct and physical; it is broad and complicated. Conceptualizing violence as structural allows for the questioning of who names legitimate or acceptable forms of “violence.” As individuals and groups react to manifestations of structural violence with environmental activism, they are labelled “violent” and “terrorists” because they threaten the fabric of the structure that is founded on exploitation.

### Defining violence

This chapter analyzes definitions of violence as they pertain to disempowerment under structures such as colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy, as well as the ways that these structures interact with the creation and reinforcement of structural environmental violence. In some ways, all are threatened by environmental violence under increasing threats such as climate change and natural disasters; however, a substantial amount of literature points to the fact that marginalized communities around the globe are even more vulnerable to environmental violence (Bullard 1990; Bullard 2005).

I argue that violence is bound into these structures and is necessary for their continuation with specific attention to the relationship of those structures to environmental violence. Structural violence is a very broad concept, so I also use human security frames to identify some

of the ways that individuals are impacted by those manifestations of structural violence. I ultimately argue that understanding “violence” as a structure broadens the lens for viewing “violent” instances and situations perpetrated by those repressed under that structure; additionally, “structural violence” helps to provide a framework for who has the power to name “violence” in a structure.

In this section, I work to define “violence” as it pertains to environmental activism by drawing from Johan Galtung’s distinctions of “direct,” “indirect,” and “structural” violence. I am primarily concerned with the latter and suggest that human security frames are helpful in parsing out the specific ways that structural violence manifests, as I aim to consider “violence” in very broad terms. I ultimately argue that environmental violence, gender-based violence, and racial/ethnic violence are crucial for the makeup of our current global structure, which consistently reinforces these various forms of violence to maintain itself. Defining violence in these terms helps to provide some backdrop into the ways that activism challenges these structural dynamics and the ways that state, media, and private actors respond to that activism (by labelling it “violent” or “terror” or inflicting violence onto them).

In many cases, direct violence against environmental activists has ties to resource extraction, particularly across Latin America (Shriver et al. 2013; Narchi 2015; Fletcher 2018; Deonondan and Bell 2019). Although 60% of murders of environmental activists occurred in Latin America, the trend is a worldwide phenomenon. Murders of environmental activists were reported across the world, with high numbers also present in the Philippines and Africa, specifically the Democratic Republic of Congo (Global Witness). Direct violence against environmental activists can take many forms and can be initiated by a variety of actors and often includes military and security forces. Less attention has been paid to the negative conceptions of

environmentalists formulated by various actors; some argue that the framing of environmental activism as “violent” is itself a foundation for violence against environmental activists (Shriver et al. 2013).

Some research has separated forms of environmental violence into two categories: direct and indirect violence (White 2009; Shriver et al. 2013; Fletcher 2018; Deonandan and Bell 2019). Although the lines between these two distinctions can often become blurred, direct violence is most frequently conceptualized as death, sexual assault, and other instances of physical harm to activists, while indirect violence is broader and more abstract.

Indirect violence can specify a variety of things, but some research includes negative framing and labelling of environmental activists as “violent” as a form of indirect violence (Shriver et al 2013). For example, Shriver et al. (2013) provide evidence of state involvement in a campaign designed to denigrate environmental activists through a study in the Czech Republic. They contend that the state employed the aid of state officials and some private actors in a countermovement strategy that ended in increased direct violence and harassment toward environmentalists. Shriver et al.’s work illuminates the increased vulnerability to violence that can result from the negative framing of environmental activism and activists. This illustrates the multifaceted nature of violence that I emphasize throughout this chapter.

In some instances, physical contact with environmental activists may even become more prevalent as negative discourse surrounding activists escalates (Fletcher 2018; Deonandan and Bell 2019). However, if one understands harassment, threats, poverty, and other facets of human insecurity alone as forms of violence, an end- game of direct bodily harm is unnecessary for a definition of indirect violence. Indirect violence shares some similarities to the concept of “structural violence” that I discuss at length in the following section. Like indirect violence,

structural violence does not share the same immediacy often associated with more direct and visible forms of violence. Considering these more abstract, intangible forms of violence helps to better understand an incident of protest not as isolated but as part of a broader picture of retaliation under an oppressive structure.

### Violence as structure

Structural violence stems from the understanding that human insecurity itself is a form of indirect violence; structural conditions, both economic and social, can end with suffering and death as a result of economic and social inequalities (Galtung 1969; Tickner 1995; Narchi 2015). Galtung emphasizes that distinctions between direct and indirect violence are based on whether or not there is a clear *actor* perpetrating the violence; both might end in physical harm, but direct violence can be traced back to a concrete actor. Indirect violence is “built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and unequal life chances” (Galtung 1969, 171). This is important to my analysis because violence inflicted onto environmentalists should not only be understood as direct and physical, but indirect and structural as well. Whether industrial expansion invaded territories or contributed to environmental degradation more broadly, it often privileges wealthy individuals and corporations. In contrast, vulnerable groups and individuals often bear the brunt of environmental degradation in many ways (Bullard 1990; Bullard 2005). While state or private actors manifest that structural violence with acts of direct violence, the flaw lies within the structure itself both within the state and in transnational industrial interests. These structures are often based in industrial and colonial expansion and patriarchal norms, which rely on violence and inequality as a basis for their existence, as well as tools to maintain it.

Human security frames separate these into broad threats to human security: environmental security, gender security, food security, health security, community security,

personal security, economic security, and political security (United Nations Development Programme 1994). Security frames are clearly helpful for identifying a direct, physical violence caused by a lack of security or simply feeling insecure. If one has limited access to food and health security, this will likely cause negative concerns for their health or physical well-being. If someone is experiencing or fears sexual assault as it corresponds to their gender, this can negatively impact both body and mind.

Security frames are helpful in specifying more in-depth dimensions of broader concepts of structural violence – for example, there are state and global structural inequalities that dictate who has greater access to food, to political representation, to body autonomy, etc. Structural violence surely impacts human security; Schnabel (2007) offers human security frames as a helpful component in identifying the types of abstract threats that Galtung references with structural violence (which, admittedly, can be somewhat challenging to narrow in scope). Providing human security certainly entails mitigating violence and acknowledges the state’s responsibility in preventing future violence, offering a vessel for establishing a practical response.

Using “structural violence” alongside human security frames is not only helpful in identifying more specific elements of violence but allows for a closer emphasis on what I understand to be a major indicator of structural inequality – the power to name and to frame. I am referencing a quote from Schnabel (2007)’s call to wed structural violence and human security frames to illustrate my point: “economically or politically marginalized populations that suffer from structural violence may breed extremist violence (insurgency or terrorism)” (92). Not only are economically and politically marginalized populations suffering from direct violence differently than others, they are now labelled extremist “insurgents” and “terrorists” (which often

contributes to even more violence used against them by “counterinsurgency” and “counterterrorist” forces). Naming and framing as “insurgency” and “terrorism” is a move allotted to those in power within a structure.

Take, for example, the case of Ken Ward and the “Valve Turners.” Labelling what Ken Ward and the other “Valve Turners” did “domestic terrorism” was an act perpetrated by the officials of the Department of Homeland Security. Their position within the framework of the U.S. legal system allows them to label someone a “terrorist,” and their position within that system thus allows them to take whatever measures are deemed necessary in order to quell the “threat.” Ken Ward and the other “valve turners” are not in a position to label what constitutes “terrorism” or “violence” under the law, although they seemingly viewed the environmental impacts of those pipelines dangerous enough to humanity that they were willing to risk a prison sentence to take action.

The Valve Turners’ positions within the structures I have described are complicated: “all are white, all are college- educated and none are truly poor. While all are deeply concerned about climate change, none are immediately threatened by its worst effects. . . .all say that it is this relative safety – and the relative advantages of age, race, education and wealth – that makes them feel they have a particular responsibility, as climate activists, to push the boundaries of civil disobedience” (Nijhuis 2018). In many ways, the United States is structured to favor people like them from a demographic standpoint. However, as they threaten industry, they are still threatening the makeup of that structure, rendering them powerless in being described as “terrorists.”

## Structures of environmental violence

The sentiments of the Valve Turners illustrate interactions between environmental violence and other oppressive structures that might be experienced based on one's wealth, location, or race – the Valve Turners are aware that the entire world is increasingly being threatened by climate change, although they themselves will not yet bear the immediate brunt of it. Structural violence can be linked to environmental subjugation and degradation in several ways. First, violence should be viewed as a broad and multifaceted concept that includes not only physical violence but psychological violence, community violence, gender-based violence, etc. Structural environmental violence thus positions perpetrators of environmental harms favorably to groups more vulnerable to environmental degradation or natural disasters because of where they live or their access to basic needs. Although the effects are pronounced among vulnerable populations, peoples of all walks of life are increasingly exposed to environmental violence or living in environmental insecurity due to natural disasters, pollution, and climate change.

In 2011, Rob Nixon coined the phrase “slow violence” to describe a peripheral environmental violence that lacks the immediacy and visibility of other, quicker, types of violence. Similar to Galtung's “structural violence,” Nixon urges readers to broaden their understandings of what does and does not constitute “violence” and if violence can or should include instances such as toxic waste-dumping into poorer countries. Environmental violence, then, is still capable of causing the types of physical or psychiatric damage that a burning building might cause, but it is instead susceptible to diminished visibility and questions of agency (who initiated or contributed to the slow violence or if it is indeed just a “natural” phenomenon).

I emphasize that not only is environmental violence often initiated by powerful, wealthy groups, it is necessary for their creation and maintenance altogether. Oil expansion and other industrial enterprises have often historically relied on encroachment into indigenous territories, which threatens indigenous environmental security on its own; as oil expansion continues, contamination into natural resources continues, threatening indigenous health but also often the health of other populations, such as the residents of the city of Flint, Michigan (Culqui 2010; Huaynate 2012; Bellinger 2016). Violence against people and the environment was present from the inception of these types of practices, and oil pipeline expansion cannot continue without continuing to threaten indigenous populations.

If a corporation or wealthy state's foundation of environmental subjugation is necessary to maintain that structure, the structure cannot exist without that subjugation. This can be applied to many other levels of analysis, whether globally or internally across genders, races, religions, etc. The "visibility" of slow violence is also crucial; just as slow violence is essentially out-of-sight and perpetrated by the powerful, the "wealthy" are able to construct narratives of what actually constitutes "violence" (which usually does not include themselves).

Second, groups and individuals have suffered from direct violence by state and private actors for resource extraction or territorial conquest (both contemporarily and historically through imperial conquest and slavery). Downey et al. (2010) highlight the structural dynamics of armed conflict as it corresponds to environmental violence, as military or police forces often respond with violence to environmental protest, employ forced labor for extractive purposes, forcibly remove local populations for conquest and extraction, etc. These individuals are acting as direct agents of the state to maintain a violent structure that privileges industrialization and wealth over human security and wellbeing and environmental security and sustainability.

Ultimately, I argue that environmental degradation is crucial to the structural foundation of our current global order, as well as a necessary element in creating and maintaining many state structures; under global capitalism, the earth and the environment are often viewed as a resource exploitable for profit (for states with histories of settler-colonialism, environmental subjugation often corresponds with the exploitation of peoples). Moreover, state sovereignty and state self-interest are enmeshed in the foundation of the state and the global system altogether.

It is unsurprising that various forms of violence are used to maintain these structures, but I emphasize that they are crucial to the base of the structure itself. “Activism” or resistance threatens these structures because of these groups’ sheer existence, not because they are necessarily “violent” (although some are, in various ways). Many groups offer only property damage or nonviolent protest and are still categorized as “terrorists” or “violent” because they threaten the foundation of a global system; environmental exploitation is intrinsic to the fabric of the state, and it is necessary for its maintenance.

### Methods and design

This project will use a mixed-media discourse analysis to compare the indigenous-led 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline protests in the United States and the 2009 Peruvian political crisis that arose in opposition to the further development of oil pipelines across the Dakotas and in the Peruvian Amazon. Although these states differ in many ways, they were selected for case comparisons because of reported violence following anti-extraction and land invasion protests between environmental defenders and police. Both were indigenous-led, and both resulted in the employment of “terrorism” accusations and some level of conflict with private and state security forces. I am using an illustrative comparative case study and discourse analysis, because it allows for an in-depth glimpse of the cases for critical analysis. This allows for analysis of discourse

among news media, government officials, security forces, and the protestors affected by the development of these pipelines. In the future, I would like to expand to include other case studies to include an even broader portrait of the positions that I argue.

I am using mixed-media sources for a couple of reasons: academic work on these subjects are limited, and this allows me to incorporate the viewpoints of those peoples actually involved in these events. I acknowledge that the documentary and news sources used throughout the paper could potentially be problematic, as they are not held to the same peer review process undergone by academic research and are thus susceptible to bias in achieving the goals of the work. I have worked to correlate most facts presented in the documentaries and news sources with other academic sources; although filmmakers and journalists likely have certain goals in mind during the creation process of these films and articles, I attempt to take at face value the dialogue of the protestors and other actors involved as they convey their own experiences.

This paper also acknowledges the problematic nature of labelling persons or groups as “activists” when such activism has not necessarily been self-proclaimed. It also acknowledges major distinctions between indigenous resistance and environmental activism more broadly, including (but not limited to) cultural complexities and histories of marginalization and genocide. It is my aim to establish some of the ways in which state and political actors align with and protect industry and corporations over people affected by whatever environmental harms may arise from industrial environmental degradation; I do not, however, intend to suggest that all people or peoples are affected equally by environmental harms.

Language barriers may also exist with some primary news sources, documentary sources, and literature. The documentary sources that I am analyzing have been translated to English, and

I translate online written material via internet translation services. There may exist some flaws or misinterpretations in translation that I do my best to avoid.

### Gender and structural environmental violence

Just as structural violence should be understood as it relates to the environment, colonialism, and race, some feminists have also labelled patriarchy an inherently violent structure (Tickner 1995). I am using the term “patriarchy” to loosely describe structures of gender-based oppression, which can include a multitude of things (such as sexual violence, a lack of political representation for women, gender norms, etc.). Defining “patriarchy” as a unified system of male domination can be problematic, because it can obscure the ways that things like race and geographical location can interact with gender in systems of oppression and difference. I will further address the intersectional nature of these systems throughout the paper.

“Patriarchy” is not intended here to define the attitudes or behaviors of individual men, but a *structure* that has historically placed women in positions of subordination that have contributed to different experiences of violence and insecurity for both women and men. It is important to emphasize that gender roles and experiences look different across cultures and attempts to essentialize them can prove to be very problematic, but some have highlighted similarities across them. As this relates to environmental violence, women are often caregivers for households and responsible for household tasks and food security. When food is scarce or when natural disasters strike, women are often placed in situations of increased insecurity as they attempt to continue to provide care, food, etc. (Detraz 2012).

As gender roles relate to patriarchal structures, I emphasize here that I am not suggesting that women in caregiving roles are always “oppressed” or even necessarily doing something that makes them unhappy. Many women actively choose these roles for a multitude of reasons;

however, it is evident that women's roles as caregivers can sometimes place them in situations of increased vulnerability, ranging from the instances just mentioned to other types of economic vulnerability (as they are most often not financially compensated for these responsibilities). Just as women are affected differently by more indirect forms of violence just mentioned, they are also often placed in different positions to respond. Detraz (2012) suggests that women are often viewed either as responsible for perpetrating certain environmental harms, victims of environmental harms, or viewed as responsible for "saving" the environment from its current state. These roles often correspond with perceptions about the nature of women (the idea that women are inherently "loving" or capable of a different kind of care – or less violence - than men). These ideas certainly can essentialize women's roles in environmental change but ultimately stress ideas about what women are or should be that are bound in a patriarchal structure that prescribes capacities for action based on gender expression.

#### Race, ethnicity, and structural environmental violence

Structural violence affects individuals and groups relative to their positions within a structure. Thus, women, persons or groups in lower economic positions, and marginalized communities are often affected differently by environmental violence than individuals or groups within other parts of the structure based on geography, access to resources, or daily responsibilities. It is widely accepted that lower-income communities and people of color are often affected uniquely by environmental pollution and climate change disasters both in the U.S. and globally (Bullard 1994; Couch et al. 2003). This has been labelled both "environmental racism" and "environmental injustice." I am interested in identifying some of the ways that racial injustices are connected to concepts of environmental violence and insecurity. First, I have touched on Nixon (2011)'s claim that instances such as toxic waste disposal into poorer countries

should be categorized as “slow violence.” While the racial makeup of the world’s wealthiest countries varies (Qatar; Macao SAR; Luxembourg, etc.), countries falling in the lower half of income disparities are predominately nonwhite and largely concentrated in parts of Africa and Latin America (World Atlas 2019). As 90% of waste is openly dumped or burned in the world’s lowest income countries, it is often the poor who are the recipients of undue environmental violence; “waste landslides” have buried homes and people under piles of waste, drains have clogged, and respiratory problems have increased (World Bank 2018).

Within the U.S. specifically, lower-income communities are often deprived of clean drinking water, exposed to pollution, and are less able than higher-income communities to cope with increasing temperatures. These lower-income communities are disproportionately nonwhite. Pulido (2017) suggests that environmental racism can be understood as the continuity of *state-sanctioned violence* that is racial capitalism. Through this reading, racial violence, injustice, and oppression were imperative for the establishment of the United States’ dependence on capital and industry through slavery and colonial expansion (Robinson 1983). Just as the state was dependent on the violent exploitation of nonwhite individuals at its inception, it continues to be dependent on them for the “sinks” (places where pollution is stored) necessary to maintain industry. People of color are often in closest proximity to these “sinks,” but Pulido takes this a step further, arguing that nonwhite bodies are viewed as dispensable to the state and therefore can be understood as “sinks” themselves. Nixon’s “slow violence” also highlights the disposability of peoples in poorer countries for industry and global capital.

I have just identified some of the ways in which global structures contribute to the direct, physical violence of nonwhite individuals. Following authors like Nixon (2011) and Pulido (2017), I argue that the foundational structure of the United States is contingent on direct

violence against nonwhite bodies and communities. direct, physical violence via climate catastrophes, waste disposal, pollution, and more. In addition to the types of direct violence resulting from structural inequalities that I have just identified, it is apparent that structural violence can include broader, more indirect violence as well. The capacity for this list is seemingly endless, so I will attempt to highlight a few that are important to this analysis. As structural violence is indeed a very broad category, human security frames are helpful to indicate structural threats in greater detail.

Violence, and the fear that accompanies violence, is certainly comprised of a psychological component. The “freedom from fear and freedom from want” that human security studies validates is not only an immediate, physical insecurity but a psychological insecurity found within all of its security categories. For example, the 1994 Human Development Report cites a lack of access to water stemming from climate change as a major factor for “environmental insecurity.” Besides the obvious health risks related to a lack of access to clean drinking water, individuals might also suffer from psychological pains as a result of that lack of access to water (for themselves or for those close to them).

I later provide a more in-depth analysis of the types of structural security threats realized by indigenous populations in the United States and Latin America for the specific cases selected. A closer inspection of possible sources of insecurity for specific populations is warranted, as customs, traditions, and locations vary among them like any other populations. It can be problematic to use security frames to describe cases in which individuals themselves do not necessarily use those frames themselves. However, the inclusion of the various types of insecurity inflicted onto indigenous populations is beneficial for understanding the structural violence underlying the various types of insecurity inflicted onto environmental activists. These

security threats might include state encroachment into land historically inhabited by indigenous populations; in addition to threats to physical wellbeing, community security frames are helpful for analyzing some of the ways in which groups themselves can be made insecure by the state (or who are arguably made insecure by the sheer existence of the state).

### Environmental activism and the “violent” identity

The previous discussion identified some of the ways that environmental violence is embedded in state and global structures and realized differently by groups and individuals relative to their positions within the structure. I ultimately argue that environmental subjugation is itself woven into the fabric of the state, but it is often experienced differently by different individuals or groups based on their positions within that structure. In a patriarchal structure, women are often affected differently based on their position within the structure relative to men. In a racial hierarchical structure, nonwhite individuals are often affected differently than white individuals. In a neocolonial world, indigenous peoples are often affected by environmental violence differently than non-indigenous peoples.

I define “violence” not just as direct, physical threats but as a broader system of violence than can be slower rather than immediate. It can encompass psychological harms or work to make individuals feel insecure in many ways. Understanding violence and insecurity as structural contributes to the claim that I will make in my next chapter: that environmental activism is often labelled “violent” or “terrorism” not necessarily because of any type of physical violence that is exhibited by activists, but because it threatens the structural norms I have just described. The tendency to label environmental activists “violent” or “terrorists” further attests to the idea that violence is structural; individuals involved in environmental activism or resistance

receive these derogatory labels because of their position within the structure. They do not have the “power to name” (Bhatia 2007).

## **Chapter Two: Identities of Violence and Terror**

In January 2020, *The Guardian* reported that the London Terrorism Policing Unit had distributed a twenty-four page document to medical professionals and teachers as a measure of caution and “prevention strategy” for the “terrorist” threat allegedly presented by environmentally-oriented groups, which included Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion. Although the groups have only been involved in nonviolent protests or occasional bouts of property damage, the document placed environmental activist campaigns on par with neo-Nazi and “jihadist” groups that have long threatened or enacted physical violence onto civilians (Dodd and Grierson 2020).

The article described here is one of many instances of state and local police forces labelling nonviolent environmental activism as “violent” or “a terrorism threat” throughout the last several decades. Following the United States’ declaration of the War on Terror after the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, FBI Counter-terrorism Chief James Jarboe defined “eco-terrorism” before the House Resources Committee as “the use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally-oriented, subnational group for environmental-political reasons, or aimed at an audience beyond the target, often of a symbolic nature” (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2019). At this time, the Environmental Liberation Front (“ELF”) had claimed multiple incidents of property damage across the United States, such as damage to ski resorts and the destruction of private property. The Animal Liberation Front (“ALF”) claimed incidents of animal liberation from slaughterhouses and animal testing centers, often without even damaging property. Jarboe is here

using a term that equates environmental activism to a large-scale attack that cost hundreds of lives and of which paved the way for extralegal imprisonment and torture tactics to be inflicted onto alleged non-American “jihadist terrorists” (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2019).

“Terrorism” has recently been used to describe acts of environmental (often indigenous-led) protests across the globe. The 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline protests, of which I elaborate further in chapter three, In chapter three, I go into further analysis on the 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline protests in the United States. In this case, the indigenous-led protest was described as “terrorism” by private security forces and news media despite the presence of neither acts of violence nor intent to initiate violence by the protestors. In this case, protestors did not even inflict any sort of property damage; they simply interfered with the further construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (Brown et al. 2017).

In other cases, land defense protests do end in bloodshed and death. For example, in 2009 Peru, a coalition of indigenous peoples formed in order to protest oil development in the Peruvian Amazon. After a series of unsuccessful negotiation talks between tribal leaders and leaders of the Peruvian state government, protests eventually turned violent, and President Alan Garcia declared a state of emergency. Ten natives and civilians and twenty-three police officers were killed, and around one hundred and fifty were injured (Bradenburg and Orzel 2016).

I argue that the precipitation of direct, physical violence is nonessential for groups to receive derogatory, “violent” labels. Rather, they often receive such labels simply because of their identities, which are positioned antithetically to the foundation and continuation of the state. “Violence” initiated or allegedly initiated by oppressed peoples certainly adds ammunition to dialogue and accusations about their perceived goals, but the dialogue is often already present to

begin with. Lastly, their place within a structure founded in and dependent on violence can make such violence retaliatory, as the state itself is structured against them.

#### An introduction to “eco-terrorism”

Throughout this paper, I primarily focus on two indigenous-led protests that garnered support from the broader environmental movement. I reflect on earlier scholarship and political discourse on “eco-terrorism” throughout the 1990’s and early 2000’s, because the rhetoric surrounding the acts put forth by these groups share stark similarities to the descriptions of the oil pipeline and extraction protests of recent years – these acts were nonviolent, but they were still labelled “terrorism.”

I argue that identity, rather than acts perpetrated by the supposed “terrorist,” is enough to inspire the external label of “terrorism.” Earlier environmental groups that prompted the “terrorist” label, however, were largely comprised of white individuals; this presents the most major difference between these earlier “eco-terrorist” groups and the indigenous-led protests I describe throughout the rest of the paper. White eco-terrorists receive the label after engaging in voluntary acts of environmental protests or economic sabotage. Nonwhite, indigenous “terrorists” and colonized peoples have long suffered from such associations and earn them before engaging in any sort of “act” (Fanon 1963; Schotten 2018). I further elaborate on the following claims throughout chapters two and three: colonized and indigenous identities threaten the status quo and framework of a neoliberal, (neo)colonial state. They are born into these identities and thus are the “terrorists” regardless of engagement in any sort of violence or threatening act; their very identity is a threatening act (Schotten 2018).

I argue that white “eco-terrorists” do something similar when they threaten industrial enterprise and capitalist development (which are both inseparable from the status quo and

framework of the neoliberal, neocolonial state). While they usually receive this label following an action, a “radical” identity is imposed onto them that indicates their deviation from the status quo and perceived “threat” to the future of the norms of the state. An association with the “radical” aspects of the environmental movement are enough to warrant this “radical” identity; if these environmental aims were established, they would alter the framework of the neoliberal, capitalist state. I emphasize here that whiteness is certainly allotted many privileges, and white environmentalists might be able to shed the “terrorist” identity by disassociating from the movement in a way that nonwhite, indigenous activists cannot. This receives further elaboration in chapter three.

Groups like Earth First! and the Environmental Liberation Front (ELF), which followed the development of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) at the close of the 1970’s, are primarily associated with eco-terrorism. Since the 1980’s, the ELF has claimed ownership of property damage across the country on various occasions, including acts like setting fire to ski resorts, car lots, etc. According to the FBI report, ELF advocates “monkeywrenching” (the property damage of perceived perpetrators of environmental harms and abuses) through a variety of tactics: arson, damage to logging or construction equipment, etc. “Monkeywrenching” represents the act of throwing a wrench into the system (Love 2006).

ALF’s website features persons clad in camouflage and black ski masks posing with animals; their guidelines call for “economic damage to those who profit from the misery and exploitation of animals” and “[the taking] of all necessary precautions against harming any animal, human or nonhuman.” Guidelines also include a “Isn’t This Terrorism?” feature in which the term is rejected outright: “not one human or animal has *ever* been harmed by the ALF. . . activists as terrorists trivializes real terrorism and clouds the true nature of the ALF.” The FBI

website emphasizes ALF's destruction of various farms, restaurants, laboratories, and companies. Despite acknowledging the nonviolent philosophy of the movement, the website also states, "the ALF is considered a terrorist group whose purpose is to bring about social and political change through the use of force and violence."

Both groups seem to view "terrorism" or "*real* terrorism" as something concrete, definable, and involving some form of violence. ALF's adamant rejection of the "terrorist" label seems to indicate that ALF believes that there are undesirable implications of receiving such a label, as well indicating that there is something called "terrorism" that is clearly definable and should not include them. Within a few paragraphs, the FBI website inconsistently labels ALF as both violent and nonviolent; continued emphasis on property damage also makes evident that the two groups are defining violence differently. Mathias Thaler refers to these discrepancies in the definitions of what terms signify as differences in concept-formation (Thaler 2018). More explicitly, the FBI appears to view physical bodily harm as something similar to, equitable to, or even inseparable from damage to property or simply interference with property (which, for the FBI, seems to include both animals and inanimate objects). ALF, in contrast, does not seem to define violence in a way that encompasses property damage or the liberation of animals (even when that liberation inhibits monetary gain).

Groups like ELF, ALF, Earth First!, and others are impatient or hopeless with the state of incremental political changes toward (or against) environmental and animal protections (ELF 2019). In a call to action on Earth First!'s "About" page, the group asks: "are you tired of namby-pamby environmental groups? Are you tired of overpaid corporate environmentalists who suck up to bureaucrats and industry? Have you become disempowered by the reductionist approach of environmental professionals and scientists?" It is clear that these groups are

disenchanted with the state of environmental and animal relations and believe a “radical” response is warranted and necessary.

Scholarship on “eco-terrorism” abounded throughout the 1990s but diminished in recent years, along with general discussion on “eco-terror” altogether. Similar to more general dissension over what constitutes “terrorism,” the concept of eco-terrorism is contested within academic discourse across cases of both concept-formation and concept-application: what exactly comprises violence, intent of the perpetrator(s), and the role of fear involved in acts of “terror” (Loadenthal 2013).

Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde (2014) maintain that defining intentional property damage or sabotage by environmental activists as “eco-terrorism” is inconsistent with the characteristics of other acts defined as “terrorism,” as eco-terror only precipitates property damage rather than physical violence against human beings. Others take issue with the fact that labeling acts of environmental activism or ecological sabotage (property sabotaged with ecological motivation) as terrorism places those acts on par with the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 (Loadenthal 2013, ALF 2019). For them, using “terrorism” to describe acts of property damage or sabotage is not an appropriate application of the term (Thaler refers to this as “concept-application”). Similarly, Vanderheiden concludes that acts of ecotage (sabotage of property for ecological purposes) are only justified or warranted under extraordinary circumstances and when they target very specific actors (presumably large corporations inflicting perceived environmental abuses), emphasizing that moral limits are a necessary component in creating and maintaining alliances for the overall environmental movement (2005).

Scholars also dispute the role of the intention to instill fear (or to terrorize) among the targeted populace. Objectors contend that this criterion lacks the random victimization of other

types of terrorism. Targets are selected due to their perceived damage to the environment; often, these are large-scale construction ventures by corporations or simply the freeing of animals from perceived situations of harm. Thus, the general population is not at risk of personal property damage by environmental groups because they do not control the means of production. It is only those with the strongest vested interest in the system who will be affected by such property damage. Regardless of their positions on the matter, most work on eco-terrorism is focused on finding a cohesive definition or determining when acts of ecotage or eco-terror fit the definition or are justified or warranted.

#### “Terrorism” as structural threat

In keeping with foundational theorists Johan Galtung (1963), Frantz Fanon (1969), and contemporary theorist C. Heike Schotten (2018), this section proposes that the label “eco-terrorism” does not necessarily describe any type of physical violence. Rather, the label is strategically employed in order to protect industrial interests. These three thinkers are helpful for a few reasons. First, Galtung’s concept of “structural violence” is helpful for considering a multifaceted concept of “violence.” Additionally, Galtung’s work makes evident that those in power are often those who are able to dictate what constitutes “legitimate” violence from the state’s perspective; likewise, they are also able to label and punish what constitutes “illegitimate” violence (and that can be applied to the concept of “terrorism”). Violences implicit in the creation and maintenance of the structure are often excused or outright legitimized, because they are perpetrated in cohesion with the state rather than a subnational group or person.

Although he does not specifically refer to it as “structural violence,” Fanon (1963) takes great care to emphasize both the physical and psychological effects of the structure that is colonialism; these effects were necessary for its creation and continue to manifest throughout its

continuation. Fanon allows for some insight into the broader effects of structural violence under colonialism specifically. Schotten (2018) provides a link between colonial power and the concept of “terrorism,” arguing that the “terrorist” is just an extension of the dehumanizing terms typically used to describe the Other who impedes on the development and perpetuation of the settler-state and its goals.

In chapter one, I suggested that environmental violence is inherently linked to violence under other forms of domination more broadly. It inflicts a spectrum of violence onto those who lack power in the structure, and it allows those individuals at the top of the structure to label what is “legitimate” violence and what is “illegitimate” violence; denying victims of structural violence the *power to name* is itself necessary for the sustenance of the structure. Galtung (1969)’s “structural violence” is thus a useful tool in deciphering why exactly nonviolent protest is often framed in derogatory terms (as I argue that these labels are only employed because of the various ways that activists threaten various structural norms). Although Frantz Fanon (1963) does not necessarily use this exact term to describe states under colonial rule, he does notably address the question of normative violence and is therefore very useful in supporting my claim that resistance through physical violence is irrelevant for ensuing consequences of those labelled “violent.” Lastly, C. Heike Schotten (2018) directly posits that the “terrorist” identity is created antithetically to the state, and I argue that this can be broadened to encompass other types of resistance as structural threat.

### Colonialism as violence

As much of my analysis centers around indigenous-led resistance in defense of the land, I will first analyze the violent structure that is colonialism and its inextricable reliance on environmental subjugation and industrial allegiances. “Structural violence” suggests that

violence is built into a system; there is no clear actor perpetrating the violence. The system itself is violence. As the very foundation of colonialism rests on various forms of violence against indigenous peoples, is an inherently violent structure. It uses broad forms of violence and exploitation to sustain itself and ultimately cannot exist without it. For example, Native American groups within the United States have faced horrific abuses since the inception of the settler-state; they suffered physical injury and have ultimately suffered near genocide (Renique 2009; Stetson 2012). These physical brutalities are an example of direct violence; certain actors themselves inflicted those brutalities. Throughout the last century, Native American communities have been removed from sacred sites and territories and have suffered from immense levels of poverty and lack of access to resources such as food and water, safe living environments, and access to healthcare and emergency care. One in three Native American women are twice as likely to be victims of sexual assaulted in their lifetimes than other women (Wilcox 2019). Poverty and lack of access to necessities are examples of indirect violence caused by structural inequalities. There is no clear actor perpetrating such violence; it is slower and more abstract. Nonetheless, it may cause both physical or mental pains.

These are just a few manifestations of direct and indirect violence often realized by Native American populations, touching on nearly every facet of human security (community security, gender security, environmental security, health security, food security, and income security) (United Nations Development Programme 1994). Clear actors are often involved in these cases; historically, the U.S. government and military forcibly pushed Native groups westward from the territories in which they were residing, killing and torturing them in cases like “The Trail of Tears” (History 2019). However, if the structure that is colonialism is understood

as violence itself, the sheer existence of the state itself means violence and threat for indigenous populations.

Although colonial violence should be analyzed in greater depth on a case-by-case basis across states, some similarities do exist between the types of effects realized by indigenous populations under environmentally degrading state-sanctioned industrial practices. Oil expenditures within the region have had damaging effects on the environment, but they are also deeply impacting the day-to-day lives of inhabitants of the region (Fox et al. 2017). This is an example of a threat to community security, environmental security, health security, and food security. More broadly, it is an example of a manifestation of structural violence and native oppression.

These interrelated structures have oppressed vulnerable groups within their very natures. As groups have scrambled for survival and some resistance on behalf of their communities, the environment, and humanity itself, they have been met with not only direct physical violence but have been labeled “violent,” “terrorists,” “primitive,” etc., which serves to reinforce the structural dynamics of colonialism that have historically thrived on the demonization and dehumanization of indigenous communities. While this resistance has triggered violent responses from state officials, private actors, and news media, it is symptomatic of the very foundation of the structure.

Frantz Fanon, in his revolutionary work *The Wretched of the Earth*, describes the system of violence that is inherently colonialism: “If events go one step further, the leader of the nationalist party distances himself from the violence. He loudly claims he has nothing to do with these Mau-Mau, with these terrorists, these butchers” Fanon (1963). Fanon explicitly employs the terms “terror” and “terrorism” in two ways: he describes a “system of terror” that is

inherently colonialism, and he acknowledges that colonized resisters have been portrayed as “terrorists” and “butchers” because of the threat of their existence. Fanon also acknowledges that indigenous resisters have indeed responded with physical violence to colonial oppression, but the derogatory labeling of the colonized exists prior to violent resistance. Certainly, there exist different connotations between twenty-first century conceptions of “terror” and “terror” in the case of mid-century French Algeria that Fanon describes. Twenty-first century “terrorism” has been globalized; its employment has been used in various parts of the world (especially the Western world), and it is often used to describe “jihadist” terrorist attacks.

However, I argue that some similarities do exist. Similarly to colonized groups, the contemporary “jihadist” is often described as “irrational,” “evil,” and “animalistic” both in scholarly literature and in news media (Schotten 2018). C. Heike Schotten suggests that the demonization of Islamic individuals as “terrorists” is in many ways an extension of a sort of global colonialism- parts of the world with large Islamic populations receive these negative and problematic labels. The Western world then charges itself with ending the “terrorist” threat with either direct, physical violence (such as wars, bombings, torture, etc.) or slower violence (such as economic sanctions, which often contribute to very high death tolls) onto entire populations (Peksen 2011; Allen and Lektzian 2013). The West often publicly diminishes or ignores Western involvement that might precipitate “terrorist” responses, minimizing its role in provoking such retaliatory measures. Schotten parallels this to historical depictions of Native Americans as “uncouth savages” who threaten Western “civility” and are in need of Western saviorism by any means necessary. This dynamic can be applied to many other violent structures derived from colonialism and imperialism, such as the justification for African- American slavery based on depictions of African- Americans as “inhuman” and “animalistic.”

Within these cases, the real or alleged violence precipitated by the colonized is irrelevant. Through the eyes of the actors in power within a structure, the colonized are “terrorists” before they even initiate any sort of physical violence, because they are perceived as the only ones capable of such horrible evils. They are labelled uncouth, the animals, the barbarians, irrational, evil, jihadists. State-sanctioned violence that likely led to such resistance is notably often falsely legitimized, ignored, or left out of the picture entirely, painting resisters as the perpetrators of violence.

Structural oppression of indigenous groups is all encompassing and should not be minimized simply to the types of environmental degradation that contribute to that oppression. As I further explore in the following sections, I argue common threads do exist between the demonization of the broader environmental movement (which itself is often enmeshed in indigenous- led resistance). Like indigenous resisters, non-indigenous environmental activists are often labelled “terrorists” whether they inflict physical violence or not. Perhaps they are not born “eco-terrorists” in the same way that colonized peoples, women, or nonwhite people are born into their identities, but I argue that their associations with a movement that threatens all of the aforementioned structures places them at risk of being depicted as “terrorists” or “violent.”

#### Identity and environmental activism

White men labelled “eco-terrorists” in the United States are arguably experiencing something different than many indigenous women land defenders in Latin America. Their identities are bound to the structures of colonialism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and environmental degradation ways. Conversely, the structures themselves are foundationally hierarchical in a way that protects and privileges the white male identity. However, white men

have also been charged as “terrorists” within the United States for acts of property damage for environmentalist causes.

In addition to violence against indigenous peoples, colonial expansion is additionally reliant on environmental violence. It rests on the conception that the environment is an expendable resource existing solely for its exploitation, of which the benefactors have historically been white men (and in some ways, white women, because of their marriages to those white men). Moreover, the right to exploit the environment has at times even been justified as divinely ordained by God (Warren 2000). The environment itself resides beneath them on the structural hierarchy, and violence against it maintains that structure. In a more abstract sense, the environment is verbally degraded, complex ecosystems are minimized and devalued, and those associated with the environment are “savage” because of their proximity to it.

Although the identity of the white man is historically separated from the environment and placed hierarchically above it, acting in its defense threatens the structure that relies on environmental subjugation and is intrinsically interwoven with patriarchal rule and white supremacy. To threaten this in some ways threatens all of these structures- the structure itself is built on the premise that white men own the tip of the umbrella that encapsulates the land and everyone associated with it (women, children, and nonwhite peoples). Certainly women are not blameless in the perpetuation of that structure, as the entire population is likely to have contributed to environmental degradation in some ways, but it is possible that “radical” white male environmental activists are also greatly removed from the position of power held by other white men explicitly perpetuating severe environmental harms. These men are not marginalized by their race, their gender, or their ethnicity; they have likely been allotted many privileges based on their identity that other identities have not. However, they are still threatening structural

norms by their perceived “radical” nature. They become a threat to the structure and all that the structure entails when they are lumped into “terrorism” discourse.

Take, for example, cases of demonization of white male “eco-terrorists” who have acted in defense of environmental protections. The documentary film *If A Tree Falls* (which was produced by Marshall Currey and Sam Cullman and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature) depicts the story of ELF activist Daniel G. McGowan, who was arrested and charged as a “terrorist” for his 1996 arson attacks. McGowan was sentenced to seven years in prison. No one was killed or injured in McGowan’s arson offenses; he simply burned down private property. While arson is, indeed, a crime, charging McGowan as a “terrorist” allows state officials to steepen punishments against environmental activists. Big Oil is often defended by state actors.

Following the coordinated pipeline shutdown in 2017, eighty-four members of Congress penned a bipartisan letter to then Attorney General Jeff Sessions urging him to consider the incident an act of “domestic terrorism,” on the basis that it could potentially cause “physical injury” or “damage to the environment that they claim to care about” (Carpenter and Williams 2019). Of those eighty-four senators, the only Democrats to sign the letter were from Texas. Texas comprises 38% of the nation’s oil production and is home to two of the four partners executing the development of the Keystone XL pipeline’s route through the western United States, Energy Transfer Partners (headquartered in Dallas) and Phillips 66 (headquartered in Houston). No sources are cited that state unauthorized valve tampering could cause physical injury; pipelines themselves are not often positioned near human beings (The Nation 2019). This letter is one example among many of state officials’ defense of Big Oil and capitalist enterprise at the expense of indigenous and environmental interests. Signees of the letter are also

overwhelmingly white men, which is unsurprising given the historical and current makeup of Congress.

This case of environmental activism threatens industry, and by extension, the structures in which that industry is based (colonialism and patriarchy). Environmental defenders, regardless of their race or gender, thus threaten those structures. I argue that this is why they are labelled “terrorists.” The “eco-terrorist” is here paralleled with the “radical hippie” and the “tree-hugger” who impedes on the progress and development that is at its core the American way of life and the foundation of it.

Similarities are present between cases of white U.S. environmental activism and global land defense. In 2016, activist Berta Caceres was murdered in her home in La Esperanza, Honduras after a lengthy fight against hydroelectric dam construction within the region. Caceres had previously had altercations with local and state police forces and private security company Desarrollos Energeticos (DESA) before being killed by DESA forces. Police officers claimed that Caceres was killed in a “crime of passion” (Blitzer 2019). No arrests were made of the alleged perpetrators, just Caceres’ fellow activists. Here exists another case of state actors acting in allegiance to industry. Berta Caceres threatened the patriarchal structure that is industry and capitalism, just as white male environmental activists have in the United States. Astoundingly, of the 908 environmental activists murdered in the last decade, only ten perpetrators have been convicted (Bittner 2014).

#### Gender and environmental activism

Eco-feminists have long highlighted links between the subjugation of women and the environment. Both have historically been “backgrounded” in Western states such as the United States as passive counterparts for white male actors at the forefront of society; this is notably

represented in the tendency to use feminine pronouns to describe the earth, states, vessels, etc. Just as the environment has been exploited for the resources it is able to produce, women have also been exploited in many ways. For example, women's "worth" has in many cases historically centered around their capacity to conceive and bear healthy children (and often, preferably, male children).

Because of bodily functions and the perceived inherent "nature" of women, they have often been associated with earthliness, irrationality, and animalistic qualities (as have nonwhite and colonized individuals). As women are often charged with caring for children and household duties, they are in a sense "rooted" into certain domestic spaces. Men, on the other hand, are often involved in the political sphere and associated with "rational" thought that transcends the earthly qualities of woman; they are charged with dominion over the earth, women, children, and whatever or whomever falls within the bounds of their "property" (Lloyd 1984; Shiva 1989; Plumwood 1993; Warren 2000).

The dual subjugation of women and the environment have culminated in the present state of structural environmental violence. On the one hand, most people are in a sense impacted by or will likely eventually be impacted by environmental violence under the threat of climate change. As I have already briefly mentioned, however, women are often affected differently by this structural environmental violence due to the common roles and responsibilities they often hold within a society (Detraz 2012; Detraz 2017).

Women's roles in activism and resistance altogether are constrained by the structural violence of the patriarchy, as women's voices are often minimized or silenced (and backgrounded, as I have just mentioned) (Enloe 2004). Women's positions within a society not only often place them in different positions in structural violence but also contribute to their

relationship with environmental activism. Women are heavily represented in environmental activism, ranging from climate change to animal rights to pollution protests and more (Detraz 2017; Buckingham and Kulchur 2009; Di Chiro 2015).

Early eco-feminism often sought to develop positive associations between women and nature; others have later criticized the idea that women are somehow intrinsically more inclined to care for others, and by extension, the environment itself. Furthermore, some have criticized the problematic tendency within the field to essentialize indigenous women especially as inherently more capable of caring for or “saving” the environment due to their proximity to nature, often problematically labelling them “feminists” although many of those women may not necessarily identify as such (Shiva 1992; Sturgeon 1997; Sturgeon 1999). Although I often use the term “activist” to describe those who are engaged in work that further threatens the status quo, I am primarily describing these individuals because they are being labelled as “terrorists.” I have not selected them because they are “activists,” but because they are labelled in similar ways.

In the same vein, I emphasize here that indigenous struggles for recognition and basic human rights are broad and should not be limited to simply environmental activism, although this is often described as intrinsically related to the overall human security of many indigenous peoples who choose to engage in activism. Certainly, defense of land and natural resources has been emphasized by many indigenous resisters but often encompasses a much broader struggle for the health and recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples. Activist Faith Gemmill (1996) states, “from a traditional perspective, the health of our Peoples cannot be separated from the health of the environment, the practice of our spirituality and the expression of our inherent right

to self-determination, upon with the mental, physical, and social health of our communities is based.”

Faith Gemmill emphasizes the inextricable relationship between environmental health and the health of many indigenous Peoples. As I have previously mentioned, environmental and colonial violence have had detrimental effects on indigenous populations. Here, the manifestation of these broader structural threats can be seen manifesting as multiple facets of human insecurity. Threats to environmental security contribute to health insecurity for many peoples, as oil contamination and pollution affect natural resources (Adger et al. 2014; Szpak 2017). Whole communities have historically been impacted by these security threats, ending with the death of large numbers of indigenous peoples. In addition to immediate physical threats to the future of community security, indigenous communities have suffered longstanding abuses as a result of the overall structural violence inflicted onto them, such as the enforcement of practices that abducted indigenous children and forced them into Western schools in order to “civilize” them and remove them from traditional environments (Castle et al. 2018).

The list is endless, but most threats to the environmental security and structural environmental violence are intertwined in some ways with many other threats to the human security of indigenous peoples. Although environmental threats often encompass broader and deeper impacts on the human security of indigenous peoples as opposed to other environmental activist groups, is my understanding that indigenous-led resistance certainly often encompasses environmental activist practices and thus has some similarities with the broader environmental activist movement. At certain points throughout this paper, I will refer to the environmental activist movement and include indigenous resistance for simplification purposes. When my focus is primarily on indigenous resistance, I will often employ the terms “defenders” and “resisters.”

The murder of Berta Caceres is just one example of an upward slope of murders of environmental activists globally, many of which have been women. Female environmental activists have also described sexual harassment and assault after engaging in protest. In the documentary film *Laguna Negra*, anti-extraction protesters gathered in nonviolent protest of UK-based company Monterrigo Metals in Huacabanca, Peru (Watts 2009). Many were rural farmers whose families had relied on the land to survive for many years. After being described as “terrorists” both by news media and local workers, protesters were captured and detained for several days, beaten, and starved. Cleofe Neyra describes in graphic detail the sexual assault experienced by she and other women during their detainment.

The documentary film *Warrior Women* (2018) was directed and produced by Christina King, Elizabeth Castle, and Anne Marie Pitman, and won a slew of awards. It depicts a group of Lakota women who led successful activist movements throughout the latter half of the twentieth century (King et al. 2018). The film opens with Madonna Thunder Hawk, a leader of the movement, describing the graphic sexual assault of her friend by white men within the region and states that notifying local police about the event would not likely have yielded results, as had happened before. In turn, she and several other Native women tricked him into following him behind a building and badly beat him, causing serious injury and halting sexual assault against the local indigenous population in the following years. Throughout the following decades, Madonna Thunder Hawk and others engaged in sit-ins, protests, and marches to protest industrial development on the land in which their people had historically resided. Activist mothers also describe the difficulties they faced in leaving their children to engage in this work.

Cases such as these exhibit multiple threats to the structures that have historically inflicted violence onto marginalized communities: colonialism, patriarchal rule, and white

supremacy. Through their engagement with environmental activism, they have also threatened the environmental degradation that is entangled with all of these structures. In keeping with theorists like C. Heike Schotten and Frantz Fanon, I argue that this is why they are labelled “terrorists” and “violent.” They are positioned antithetically to structures that are founded on and continue to inflict violence onto these communities.

I have argued violence is connected to environmental activism in two ways. First, “violence” can be understood structurally as a multifaceted system that founds the basis for multiple state and global structures, such as patriarchy, colonialism, white supremacy, etc. I have previously described how these foundation of these structures are foundationally entangled in and reliant on environmental degradation. These forms of structural violence can manifest in different forms of direct violence, such as physical or sexual assault. Direct violence that manifests from these structures can also be understood as a threat to human security, creating community insecurity, gender insecurity, environmental insecurity, etc.

As people affected by these various forms of violence retaliate, they are labelled “terrorists” or “violent” before they even commit any form of physical violence because they are positioned antithetically the groups that have historically exercised power and violence over them (colonizers, who have historically been white men). In some ways, they are born into these identities (the colonized, the nonwhite individual, the woman). All are susceptible to some sort of violence or punishment regardless of their identity through ties to environmental activism, but the intersections of these facets of identities may present different manifestations of structural violence and threats to human security. For example, indigenous women may be more likely to experience sexual assault than white male environmental activists (Watts 2009).

The “terrorist” or “violent” identity is an extension of those associated with nature and the environment – the primitive “savage” or the inhuman African slave, the rooted woman, the “tree-hugging” environmentalist. Because of this, they are threats to structures that rely on the oppression of these people regardless of whether or not they commit acts of physical violence at all. I further elaborate on specific cases that illuminate this argument in the following chapter.

### **Chapter Three: A Comparison**

In this chapter, I compare two cases which highlight the use of “terrorist” framing of indigenous-led protests surrounding oil development: the Peruvian political crisis of 2009 and the 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline protests in the United States. Whilst the United States and Peru (and the indigenous protestors per each case) certainly have many historical and cultural differences, I have selected these two cases for a couple of reasons. First, both indigenous groups in the United States and Peru cases were protesting oil development before state and security forces responded with some form of physical violence. Second, although there are many historical differences in state development between the two, both indigenous groups expressed marginalization and dehumanization under their respective state structures (Latin American Digital Beat Staff 2011; Fox et al. 2017). I understand this marginalization and dehumanization to be a major component of structural violence.

A major difference between the Peruvian political crisis of 2009 and the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protests of 2016 are the commitments (or lack of commitments) to nonviolence by the groups involved. Members of the Great Sioux tribe in the DAPL case recurrently emphasize a strong commitment to nonviolence; the indigenous-led coalition in Peru does not. I argue that the precipitation of violence by the protestors are irrelevant for their earning “terrorist” or “violent” labels or for receiving increased violent or punitive measures. They are already

“terrorists” regardless of whether or not they engage in any sort of violent protest because their identities have already been positioned as a threat to the status quo and the future of “development.”

### Peruvian political crisis of 2009

Between April and June 2009, political protests heightened between Peruvian state military and police forces and a coalition of indigenous and *mestizo* peoples and allies within the Amazonian and Andean regions over industrial expansion in the Peruvian Amazon after a series of unsuccessful negotiations between the coalition and the Peruvian state government. President Alan Garcia declared a national emergency, and media footage captured violent interactions between state forces and the indigenous-led coalition (Bradenburg and Orzel 2016). Buildings were destroyed, and the protests ended with the deaths of at least twenty-four police officers and eleven indigenous protestors (Renique 2009; Stetson 2012); others report up to fifty deaths of indigenous people and the burning of bodies following those deaths (Hughes 2010).

I am interested in the rhetoric employed by government officials that highlights the increase of neoliberal extraction policies and longstanding colonial violence inflicted onto indigenous peoples within the region. Several sources reveal President Garcia describing the situation as the indigenous coalition simply “not understanding” the positive outcome of increased development within the Amazonian region for “all” peoples within the area; this means either that they “do not understand” the gravity of impeding on oil drilling or have somehow been manipulated by outside agents with vested interests (Boelens et al. 2009; Stetson 2012). These quotes illustrate what I have just demonstrated in my previous chapters – a dehumanization of indigenous peoples that has long been employed under many colonial and (neo)liberal regimes. Indigenous peoples are here described as impeding on “development”;

moreover, they are framed as incapable of understanding the ways that this would benefit “all” peoples within the region by stimulating economic development. Their identities are created as antithetical threats to the progress of the state; their identities are dehumanized under a structural violence that was necessary for the creation and perpetuation of the colonial state (e.g. the “primitive savage”) (Schotten 2018; Altamirano-Jimenez 2013). This structural violence continues to manifest with violence inflicted on the natural environment inhabited by these peoples, as well as the direct violence that ensues – violent protests and threats to health, community, and environmental security.

Renique (2009) notes that a large number of Achuar children located near the Rio Corrientes downriver from Occidental Petroleum oil wells “suffer chronic malnutrition and contamination from ingesting fish tainted with cadmium and mercury” (Renique 2009, 9). The documentary *Two Worlds Collide* also features children swimming in streams caked with murky oil as parents struggle to find live fish to serve their children. These are just two of many threats to health security suffered by indigenous peoples of the Peruvian Amazonian region. This can, and should, be understood as violence. It is a violence overwhelmingly ignored in depictions of indigenous “precipitated” violence – a violence that should be understood as retaliatory under a system of colonial and neoliberal structural violence, and a violence that can be understood as imperative for the health and wellbeing of the peoples most directly affected by it (and arguably, the world, as damage to the Amazon continues to impact us all through global climate change and diminishment of natural resources).

Renique here quotes President Garcia, noting that the president also referred to protestors as “pseudo-indigenous”: “These people don’t have crowns. They aren’t first-class citizens who can say...’You [the government]’ don’t have the right to be here’. No way.” (Renique 2009, 5).

President Garcia is demonizing protestors in several ways here; first, he notes that indigenous peoples are not citizens; they are not Peruvians, and they do not have claims to Amazonian territory. In this quote, indigenous peoples should not be treated as “first-class citizens.” In contrast, Garcia presumably believes that he and other Peruvian citizens should be considered first-class citizens and treated as such, with their own interests prioritized. Once again, Garcia positions protestors as outsider threats to the state in an attempt to delegitimize them.

In a broader sense, Garcia’s referring to protestors as “pseudo-indigenous” is reminiscent of some of the types of psychological abuse that Frantz Fanon often describes under colonial regimes – the intent to delegitimize colonized identities and existence (Fanon 1963). Not only does Garcia position indigeneity as an impediment to “development,” he publicly suggests that these protestors do not have legitimate claims to an indigenous identity. Structural violence through colonialism intends to colonize both bodies and minds through a variety of means: physical harm, the internalization of negative images of oneself among the colonized, and more directly (in the United States), the forced assimilation of indigenous children into white boarding schools that often forced them to cut their hair and adopt Western “Christian” names and identities.

The Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSESEP) notes the *robbing of identity* present in demolition of and encroachment onto indigenous territories by Peruvians or other state officials. AIDSESEP wrote a letter to Garcia criticizing his plans to move forward with further oil development and extraction within the rainforest and on traditionally indigenous territories, claiming the scheme was “devised for the exclusive benefit of transnational capitalists whose investments would further deplete Amazonian territories, leaving them ‘without resources, without air, without water *and without identity*’” (Renique 2009).

Indigenous resistance should certainly not be limited to conceptions about environmental activism; however, environmental health certainly seems often to be intrinsic to the health of many indigenous peoples on a multitude of levels. Structural violence encompasses all of these interrelated threats to human security.

In addition to describing the protestors as “pseudo-indigenous,” Garcia also associates the broader indigenous-led protests with communism. Stetson (2012) writes, “President Garcia’s *perro del hortelano* discourse misrepresents indigenous perspectives on development. Garcia implies that environmental activists allied with indigenous causes are heavily influenced by socialist perspectives. He writes that the present-day environmentalists are in fact ‘yesterday’s communists,’ who have changed their red shirts for green ones” (14). Here, Garcia employs a similar type of rhetoric to what C. Heike Schotten describes as the “othering” of the modern “terrorist” - the “terrorist” that was once the “savage” or the “communist” (Schotten 2018, 129). Garcia also directly refers to the protestors as “terrorists” on occasion, suggesting that they are taking lead from an “international ‘anti-system’ force” (Renique 2009). Most interestingly, President Garcia smears the protestors with all three of these labels on various occasions, although the group does not indicate any sort of allegiance to communist or socialist principles (Stetson 2012). Thus, Garcia not only works to cultivate a derogatory image of the protestors but a threatening one. As he labels the protestors “savages,” “communists,” and “terrorists,” he labels their existences and interests a threat to “progress” and a threat to greater Peruvian interest.

#### Indigeneity as a threat to modernity

President Garcia uses the *perro del hortelano* metaphor to describe the situation between government officials, Petroperu (the oil company over which the protests developed), and the

indigenous-led coalition. *Perro del hortelano* is the story of “the gardener’s dog.” In the story, a watchdog guards over a farm, preventing any other animals from eating from the farm. However, the dog is unaware that allowing the other animals to eat from the farm is actually best for everyone (Stetson 2012). Garcia expresses that such “uncultivated” land is for the use and benefit of all Peruvians. Perhaps oil expansion within the region might, in fact, benefit the region financially; however, this oil expansion would pose many direct human security threats to the indigenous inhabitants of the area (health security; environmental security; food security, etc.). Garcia describes the protestors as simply “not understand[ing]” the benefit that such oil development would have for all of Peru, suggesting that the protestors are unaware of the possibilities for “development” here. What Garcia does not acknowledge is that “development” for some of Peru might not necessarily mean “development” for all of Peru.

Indigenous peoples are oftentimes externally associated with “traditional” and “natural” solutions to environmental issues that can be problematic and biased in what one considers modernity and development. The logic of “development” is that one (or one state) should always be on a forward trajectory; thus, by associating indigenous peoples with only “traditional” issue solutions, the identity of indigeneity is solidified in the past. Stetson (2012) highlights that there are many organizations created by indigenous groups that are working to implement climate change solutions within the area. For many of these individuals, the type of “development” associated with oil drilling is not really development at all under the threat of climate change.

The denigration of indigenous knowledge and perspectives as something purely traditional or even “backwards” or “savage” is just another representation of a violence inflicted onto indigenous populations in a structure that is based on their oppression and repression. Someone in a position such as the presidency likely has much more power to name what

constitutes things – violence, terrorism, development, etc. By reinforcing what “development” means in this context (oil drilling), President Garcia has positioned the indigenous protestors as outside of that development and as *threats* to development.

I have argued that the identity of the “terrorist” is created in opposition to a status quo that is often the manifestation of a neocolonial, patriarchal ideology. Not only were the protestors described directly as “terrorists,” they were associated with other dehumanizing claims and are described as allegedly “violent communists” and “savages.” In this case, the indigenous-led coalition is not only described as targeting a corporation – in positioning the indigenous identity opposite “development” and “modernity,” President Garcia thus makes them a threat to that modernity and to the future of greater Peru altogether. As I have argued, threatening “development” or industry can alone be enough to warrant a “violent” label. They are “terrorists” because they are threatening the future of industrial development within the region. They are “terrorists” not only because of what they are actively doing within this one particular context in the 2009 political crisis, but they are “terrorists” based on their perceived identities – identities that are associated with backwardness, with traditionalism, and with threats to state “development.”

#### 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline protests

In 2016, construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline was feared by many as an environmental threat and threat to native sovereignty, thus prompting an indigenous-led protest that attracted activists and allies. Local police officers and private security company TigerSwan became involved in patrolling the area in an effort to move forward with the pipeline. After enduring a bitter winter of physically blocking areas required for pipeline development, security

forces infiltrated the Oceti Sakowin protest camp, attacking Sioux people and allies with dogs, rubber bullets, pepper spray, mace, and water cannons.

According to the Stand with Standing Rock website, Oceti Sakowin was “a first of its kind historic gathering of Indigenous Nations” (Oceti Sakowin 2019). The most recent such assembly of Tribes occurred when the Great Sioux Nation gathered before the Battle at the Little Big Horn. The group had previously been ordered to leave or face arrest. Before she was arrested and charged with the misdemeanor “physical obstruction of government function,” photojournalist Tracie Williams captured the tactics of the squad infiltrating the camp. Photographs reveal officers in military-style uniforms pointing assault rifles at men in prayer and slicing open teepees with large knives. Numerous other protestors were also arrested when the camp was infiltrated.

Reference to the Battle of Little Big Horn further elucidates perceived indigenous “threats” to the structural makeup of the United States (neocolonialism, neoliberalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, etc.) and their bases in structural violence. U.S. troops, who had continually driven native groups west and away from traditional and sacred land, were ambushed by a large group of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors. United States soldiers killed in the battle were exalted following the event, as it became synonymously known as “General Custer’s Last Stand.” The veneration of Custer’s “last stand” does not simply describe the literal death of the general: it also seems to praise his metaphorical “last stand” in defending U.S. citizens or their way of life.

Both the Oceti Sakowin website and native voices throughout the documentary film “Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock” directly reference The Battle of Little Big Horn and Custer’s literal and metaphorical roles: his brigade’s direct attack on indigenous people and their

roles (as well as the roles of their “descendants”) as representatives and protectors of the Colony (Fox et al. 2017). In the eyes of many Americans, however, Custer’s death was viewed as heroic and patriotic; following the success of the indigenous coalition at Little Big Horn, attacks on indigenous populations only heightened as they were forcibly relegated to smaller areas of land for the interests of U.S. citizens (History 2019).

As a result of the necessity of this subjugation for U.S. property rights, the desire and calculated move to demonize and criminalize native peoples was present in narratives preceding and following the Battle of Little Big Horn. These narratives can be linked (and are linked by voices throughout the film) to present in narratives that paint nonviolent indigenous groups as violent criminals in order to justify violent action against them. The film’s narrator, Floris White Bull, emphasizes that her people “are not criminals” and that protestors were completely unarmed, as do many other voices throughout the film (Fox et al. 2017).

Furthermore, one person stresses that the movement is so foundationally opposed to violence that they would rather allies “stay home” if they do not come in peace. Throughout the film, voices reinforce a narrative of humanity present in county police and DAPL private security that does not seem to be granted in response: “they are still our brothers,” “still human under the armor,” and are guests on Mother Earth just as the Sioux are. Myron Dewey, one of the film’s directors, states that county police were not originally hostile toward protestors, but that “DAPL police ate at them.” Dewey claims that county police served as a distraction, or puppets, as the pipeline itself was laid; this further supports the argument that private corporations are not only allied protectors of the colonizer but are something intrinsic to the perpetuity of the colonial state.

“Terrorism” itself is directly referenced both at the beginning and toward the close of the film. Initially, a Native veteran describes the pain and guilt he has suffered since his tours in Iraq in 2003 and 2004, “when we got there, we realized [that] this war is not about terrorists; this war is about oil. This war is about money.” This person seems to be reflecting on the idea that there is actually no such thing as the “terrorist” at all; rather, it is an identity created in opposition to the aims of the United States government (a government that is bound in the interest of industry).

Later in the film, another person expresses his fear of the term being used to describe the protests, conveying that the U.S. government strategically uses the terms “terrorist” and “terrorism” to achieve its desires and allot itself special powers in the ways that it attempts to silence or punish certain actors or groups, “I think the real danger is that the powers that be will try to elevate the status of what we’re trying to do here as ‘domestic terrorism,’ and that becomes a justification for more vicious and massive repression. The human rights have already been violated on a number of different levels.” The voices of other nonwhite, non-indigenous allies stand in solidarity and echo that these themes are common among other marginalized groups in the United States.

Linked documents later revealed counterterrorist tactics used against protestors by TigerSwan, who often referred to the protestors as “jihadists” despite the fact that they seemingly have no dedication to an ideological aim linked to some “terrorist” groups (Deem 2019; Brown et al. 2017). Christianity is the predominant religion in the United States (Pew Research Center 2020). It has served as a means to justify the subjugation of indigenous peoples since the foundation of the settler-state and remains a component of what many might believe to be a “true” American. “Jihadist” rhetoric evokes an emphasis on the “radical” nature of the environmental movement, as the jihad often denotes a movement that will turn the current social

order on its head. It is a term often used by government officials to legitimize the War on Terror and the degradation of Islam as something inherently violent. To equate a nonviolent movement that does not seem to be associated with the Islamic faith is unsupported, misguided, and deliberate.

This type of behavior shares similarities with other instances on environmental protest, such as President Garcia's aforementioned allegations that indigenous protestors in Peru were "communists" and "terrorists" in disguise, although the movement had no ties to communism or socialism. *The Guardian* has also reported counterterrorism tactics used against nonviolent environmental protestors across the world (Dodd and Grierson 2020). This type of discourse was strategically employed to play on tropes typically used to demonize and dehumanize other groups both historically and in the present United States in order to further the aims of industrial expansion.

#### Violence and nonviolence: the irrelevant distinction

I have just described two cases in which indigenous-led coalitions acted on behalf of environmental protections by impeding on the development of a state-supported industrial venture. In both cases, security forces responded with direct violence to protestors who were blocking access to the areas in which oil development was set to move forward. I have argued that in both places, indigenous groups are currently and have historically been the victims of structural violence under (neo)colonialism that has encompassed entire ways of living within the bounds of the state structure.

In the DAPL case, a private security company worked alongside local police forces in order to bring protests to a halt. In the Peruvian case, security forces seem to be largely state police actors. A crucial difference here is each group's philosophical position to nonviolence.

Members of the Dakota Access Pipeline protest coalition repeatedly emphasized strong commitments to nonviolence, whereas the indigenous coalition in Peru did not vocalize commitments to nonviolence (Fox et al. 2017; Bradenburg and Orzel 2016). In the photographs and documentary footage for each corresponding case, images capture DAPL protestors fleeing the scene or sitting and praying; the Peruvian case escalated to that of a large-scale political crisis with a death count as the indigenous-led coalition responded to police forces with physical violence. This paper does not take a normative position on the most effective or appropriate way to respond to violence (either structural or direct), but I argue that the precipitation of physical violence by protestors is irrelevant for earning the “violent” or “terrorist” label. The “violent” or “terrorist” label is created as a group or person threatens the fabric and future of the state and all that that entails – colonial foundations, white supremacy, patriarchy, and allegiance to land, territorial, and industrial rights. A discussion on the role of identity in earning the “terrorist” label is at the crux of this argument.

#### DAPL, Peru, and broader “eco-terrorism”

I argue that commonalities exist surrounding the language employed by state officials and state and private security forces between these two cases, as well as cases of “eco-terrorism” in which many of the perceived “terrorists” are often white and often men. These commonalities include a perceived “violent” identity of the protestors and/or movement, the elevation of that “violent” identity to one of the “terrorist,” and intent or actions taken by those in power to inflict some type of punishment onto those deemed “terrorists” (direct violence and/or punitive legal measures). These cases share in common a vested interest in environmental protections; in states and situations where industrial development is often privileged over environmental sustainability

and the territorial rights of indigenous peoples, these protestors are thus deemed a “threat” to the status quo, a threat to industrial development, and a threat to the fabric of the state.

The major difference that exists across these movements is that of the *identity* of the protestors. White “eco-terrorists” are not necessarily born into that role in the same way that nonwhite, indigenous peoples are born into their own identities. I have described the dehumanization of the indigenous “savage” which existed long before a popular environmental movement developed in the United States; as the “savage” and in this case as the “terrorist,” these indigenous peoples were born into an identity that threatens the colonial state.

Indigenous peoples were perceived as “savages” based on differences to their settler counterparts: race, religion, dress, and entire way of life. However, one crucial difference here is that of relationship to the environment and to land. The conquering and exploitation of indigenous peoples was often heavily intertwined with the conquering and exploitation of land and the environment for white settler gain. Likewise, indigenous peoples’ proximity to nature and relationship with land and the environment was also intrinsically associated with the creation of the “savage” identity. Now, in both the Peruvian and Dakota Access pipeline cases, these “savage” identities become the “terrorist” identities as these groups and individuals continue to act in favor of the environment over industry. The environmental element is not the only component that makes of the creation of the “savage” or “terrorist” identity, but it also cannot be separated from it. While these activists engaged in an action (protest) that brought them visibility and might have contributed to prominent discussion on their role as “terrorists” and “savages,” these types of labels and frames used to describe indigenous peoples are at least centuries old and exist across borders.

White environmental activists, in contrast, probably do have to engage in some sort of *action* to be labelled an “eco-terrorist.” In the cases I have described, these actions are not physically violent; they might entail some sort of property damage, but in the case of white allies’ actions during the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, those actions might not include property damage at all but strictly an impediment to industrial enterprise. Thus, these white activists then adopt an identity, and likely one that they have not prescribed for themselves (similar to the identity thrust onto the “savage” native). This identity is also radicalized, it is intrinsic to their relationship to nature and environmental protections, and it is deemed “violent” because it poses a direct and physical threat industry- and thus threatens state allegiance to industry, and it threatens those who benefit from their position to power in that structure. In some ways, white environmental activists adopt an identity adjacent to that of the indigenous protestor as they, too, begin to threaten the state’s framework and the interests of industry.

Labelling these groups “terrorists” does a couple of things for those who are initiating these labels. First, it associates protestors with all that the “terrorist” frame has come to represent – an “evil,” “irrational,” “extremist” person who presumably will not work to achieve their desired goals in a “civil” way. Second, it allows for extralegal measures be taken in order to quell the perceived “terrorist” threat. In the United States, charging activists who engaged in property damage with “terrorism” rather than whatever other crime they might have committed (such as arson, destruction to private property, or theft) has elevated prison sentences and allowed for counterterrorist and extralegal measures to be taken.

Prior to the 2009 Peruvian political crisis, “terrorist” threats allowed for President Garcia to lessen constraints on police forces to act with direct violence to those deemed a threat. This extended to the indigenous protests that happened in 2009 (Boelens et al. 2009). Some have

suggested that the deaths of indigenous protestors are much higher than acknowledged by the government, and that indigenous bodies were burned in order to conceal the evidence of those deaths; additionally, protests leader have sought refuge in Nicaragua after being charged with “terrorism” (Boelens et al. 2009). “Terrorism” is inherently a strategic term used to achieve desired ends, and in the cases, those desired ends are enmeshed in environmental subjugation and industrial allegiances.

### **Conclusion**

This project explores the concept of “violence” as it relates to environmental activism. In keeping with Galtung (1969), I argue that violence is structural. Structural violence has no clear actor; it is systemic and encompasses much more than just physical violence. This violence is multifaceted and hinges one one’s position within a system. For the purposes of this paper, I have discussed some of the ways in which indigenous peoples are the victims of structural violence, as the state structure itself is founded on their oppression. They have not only suffered direct, physical violence as a result of this but also often do not even have the power to name what constitutes legitimate violence. What structural violence tells us is that some violences (state-based violence and violence perpetrated by those in power) are legitimized or minimized, while violences precipitated by those victimized within the structure are not often legitimized but are instead described as “extremist” or “terroristic.”

Under structural violence, those in power are able to name what violence is at all, regardless of whether or not someone or some group precipitates an act of physical violence. Under structural violence, those in power are able to legitimate not only direct violence but are able to minimize or ignore slower types of violence that result from state regulations and norms, such as anthropogenic climate change and a lack of access to basic needs that threaten human

security. In my reading, Frantz Fanon describes this dichotomy as the “system of terror” that is colonialism versus the “terrorist” identity that is created by the colonizer (Fanon 1963). In this dichotomy, the concept of “terror” is systemic and entirely dependent on who has the power to name what constitutes “terror” and what constitutes legitimate “violence” under colonialism.

I have used these two thinkers to extrapolate to the use of “terrorist” and “violent” labels as they correspond to environmental activism using examples from the broader environmental movement and two cases in which indigenous-led environmental protests were described as “terrorism” in the United States and Peru. Similar to C. Heike Schotten (2018), I argue that “terrorism” is an identity thrust onto individuals who threaten the status quo and future of the state structure, as well as the structures intrinsic to that state structure. Environmental activists might choose to engage in a physically violent protest, but I argue that this is irrelevant; they are violent not because of something that they have done, but because their identity is positioned antithetically to the state by those who have the power to name them and whatever actions are precipitated by them.

This project raises questions about agency in environmental violence: who exactly is associated with violence and terrorism and who has the power to label and legitimate violence? I have argued that activists receive “violent” labels because their identities threaten the structure of the state. Further research should examine more closely those who precipitate violence as agents of the state, whether they be local police or state military forces. Questions arise on just how much agency they themselves have to act under the current state and global structures I have mentioned, as they also are subject to them and act accordingly based on their roles within the system. A broader selection of case study analyses will also will also provide more insight into

when exactly the “terrorist” label is prompted as it relates to environmental activism and environmental resistance.

It also raises questions about gender, race, and ethnicity in environmental activism. Future projects should center questions of gender, race, and ethnicity in questions about the prescription of “violent” labels as they correspond to environmental activism. For example, how are female environmental activists described by state actors and news media with respect to their male counterparts? A gendered discourse analysis of cases of perceived “eco-terrorism” will provide useful research for feminist international security studies and women’s roles as agents in environmental activism.

This project contributes to research on structural violence and is it corresponds to who has the capacity to label legitimate violence (or illegitimate violence) in a state structure that relies on violence against the environment and violence against various groups of people. It attests to broader themes of dehumanization provoked by the popular use of labels like “terrorist” and “terrorism” and urges the reader to question what defines “violence” and how it relates to questions of power and structural inequalities.

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