White Noise Dialogue  
November 19, 2013  

Mythologies  

What drew us here tonight?  
**Having conversations with families**, processing the discomfort, not just one day - a whole season, **choosing not to celebrate**, idea of having one day to have gratitude, why does it need to be the one day that is marking genocide, identifying **ways to have indigenous solidarity**, what do I celebrate?, **confronting indifference**/how to talk to people who don’t care about why they have a stake, questioning what my goals are, growing up with these stories and now looking at the revisions/stereotypes/lies, **cultural appropriation** in terms of performance, remembering the “Thanksgiving” school crafts/costumes/plays, making visible the invisible, my school is hosting AIM conference, want to ground myself in what I think/feel/need, sitting with painful things.  

Thinking about comedy in response to today - 1491s & Hari Kondabolu  

**Captivity Narratives** – brave white males defending weak white women from savage Native American men – a fiction needed for American psyche to justify violence and continue settlement  

**Three Pillars** (Andrea Smith) – Offered as a framework for this conversation. Three inter-related systems of white supremacy: Slavery/Capitalism (free labor), Genocide/Colonialism (clearing land/disappearing), Orientalism/War (seeing other as Threatening Other to be dominated).  

**Cultural Appropriation**  

Not just native appropriation, appropriation of many cultures, dreadlocks, spiritual practices, sweat lodges,  

What does it mean to participate when there is no historical context? “Honoring the past” without  

“White Shamans and Plastic Medicine Men” Youtube video – gets at the phenomenon of commercialization and histories of cultural loss – “taking” dynamic. First they took our land, our resources, now they’re taking our culture, our spirituality.  

Colonial spread of “cultural theft” – wiping out culture to squelch rebellion in indigenous communities
Have been doing solidarity work with Ohlone tribe, and doing research realizing the Shellmounds are burial grounds of the richest people, which conflicts with class analysis.


Narratives “these are pictures of the last native people from this area.” Erasure of native people who are still living. Dichotomy – either demonized or valorizing or exotifying or romanticizing native cultures. Never just telling a real story. Makes it easier to co-opt when they are one-dimensional? Current native politics are not romantic, singular, or perfect. But we long for and project onto them what we want them to be. One-dimensionalizing all histories and narratives.

Friends raised Fundamental Christian and Jehovah’s Witness then moved toward native spiritual practices – moving from one fundamental truth to another.

Related to psychedelic tourism in South America. Related to issues of land and taking. And erasure of culture. The terrible bargain of becoming white was giving up what you were. Racial formation – racism and colonization and ways it works the soul of the colonizer. Come to a place of compassion toward white people, what was lost. White culture is now based on appropriation and consuming. Cycles of violence related – cycles of colonization/theft of culture. Use of healing practices to heal the cycle and continuing the cycle.

Issues around the picking and choosing – decontextualizing. Making a quilt of appropriated cultures. Can only happen with distance. “This is my African mud cloth, my Tibetan payer flag, my…” Ridiculous. I don’t know what these objects mean, I’m just going to use them. Can only happen without knowledge of history.

Indigenous People were punished for practicing their own religion- connected to why we are sold “exotic” healing practices and not European ones.

Discussion of bindis – for white people it is a fashion statement without any consequence and for Indian people in a culture where people are being targeted for being South Asian, there are consequences – a mark of othering.

**To Celebrate or Not to Celebrate**

What to put in that empty space where I don’t have a culture. One thing that is missing is respect for/time with families and elders.

I am Jewish – maybe I could celebrate Jewish Harvest festival. But this would distance me from mother who rejects Judaism. Consumerism is my mother’s religion. It is bonding. Shopping together, buying things for people. Not just about
me – what do I offer my mother if she were to accept my rejection of these colonial/consumer holidays?

So precious to have that time together. Rare. How could we redirect energy or replace traditions. Supplemental.. Making instead of buying. Thinking about gratitude – offering thoughts about ecology, food justice, remembering Indigenous people/histories,

Not just wanting “days” to remember Indigenous peoples, gratitude, etc. This is our “time” to celebrate, which is actually a mask to cover horrible atrocities – keep replaying our origin story.

How is this story stiiiill playing out?

Comparing to Israel/Palestine conflict – parallels. Storybook has come out comparing cultures. Interesting to compare different settlement narratives. How powerful they are in terms of shaping national stories. Global dimensions.

Something to subvert gift giving --> experience making.

Having summer family gatherings instead of Christmas.

Ducking away when the Bible comes out.

Questioning Thanksgiving is perceived as an attack on family. Such an intertwined meme. But it’s a day of food, football and shopping. How do we change the meme?

Create other opportunities to be with family and loved ones.

Enraged that we only get these “National Pride” holidays.

Go to Sunrise Ceremony on Alcatraz Island. Ceremony dedicated to remembering indigenous struggle.

Not wanting to use Santa – colonial implications of gifts just showing up because you’re good. Sharing alternative narratives of Santa – santa as shaman. Scandanavian and Siberian figures of Santa-like figure – shaman who went of a night journey led by reindeer drums, led by bells, came through chimney to deliver mushrooms.. Representations of St Nick as nature based. Mischevious elves around Christmas (Tumptuns). Also, racist incarnations - Black Santas. Connections to Coca-cola.

Taking all these mythologies and stripping them in order to fill them with consumerism.
Creating traditions I can feel good about – is it not cultural appropriation to go learn Irish culture? Cultural exchange is not just about exchange, it’s about an unequal power dynamic. What are histories of loss in our ethnic traditions? It was for our survival that our family rejected our culture – there is a fear and a resistance to reclaiming these traditions. Giving up power through this process.

What are effective ways to engage with the Thanksgiving day? What feels right when I’m eating all these foods with my friends on this day that is a marker of cultural genocide? -- Sending articles ahead of time, asking questions, sharing personal thoughts.. Learning about present struggles. Find media.

Ras K’Dee – has a lot of videos out there.  
Black Fire – Diné rock band – Klee Benally: respect existence or expect resistance

**Commitments**

Learn more about the history/indigenous here and where I grew up x2
Keep having this conversation with my family and keep expanding it to more family x1
Bring space for discussion to Thanksgiving with friends
Learn more about captivity stories and real truths about them