**Land, Race, and (Slow) Violence:**

**Indigenous Resistance to Racial Capitalism**

**and the Coloniality of Development in the Caribbean**

**Abstract**

This article offers a critical structural analysis of the Maya land struggle in Toledo District, Belize, which has been informed by sustained engagement with an autonomous social movement and long-term participatory action research. We contend that state-sanctioned violations of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) reveal both the coloniality and misanthropic skepticism inherent in conventional ‘development’ agendas and the Westminster-modelled liberal state. More specifically, by drawing from revolutionary theories of race and decolonisation and placing the concepts of racial capitalism and slow violence into an integrated anticolonial frame, we explain how economic development projects and government sponsored FPIC violations are aiding and abetting land dispossession, ecosystem damage, heritage destruction, the criminalisation of environmental defenders, and disavowals of Indigenous governance. Ultimately, the piece illustrates how extractivist-driven refusals of good faith consultation with Indigenous communities in the Caribbean exacerbate environmental degradation, undermine Indigenous self-determination, and constitute contemporary manifestations of colonial power, racial-capitalist exploitation, and structural (slow) violence.

**Keywords**

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC); dispossession; misanthropic skepticism; racial capitalism; slow violence; Latin American and the Caribbean

*Each generation must, out of relative obscurity,*

*discover its mission and fulfil it­––or betray it.*

Fanon (1963, 45)

# Introduction

Across myriad geographies, colonial violence against Indigenous peoples persists. Regrettably, this is a statement that rings true for countless negatively racialised ‘Others.’ In some instances, ongoing colonial violence arrives in a form that is brutal, shocking, and spectacular. At other times, however, it unfolds in a fashion that is far more subtle, furtive, and slow. Nevertheless, whether ‘spectacular’ or ‘slow,’ colonial violence endures. Notably, land is at the heart of such violence, particularly when it comes to violence experienced by Indigenous communities at the hands of both the state and capital. Present-day Belize, which is rather uniquely situated in both Central America and the Caribbean and was formerly ‘British Honduras’ and a crown colony until 1981, is case-in-point.

In 2015, the Maya people of Toledo District, Belize obtained a historical ruling in the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) affirming rights to lands they occupy, use, and enjoy. The CCJ’s recognition of the Maya system of communal land tenure as commensurate with the private property rights outlined in the constitution of Belize was unprecedented. The Maya’s victory in the CCJ followed a series of contentious legal clashes that spanned nearly two decades. The protracted litigation process was triggered by habitual refusals by the Government of Belize (GoB) and multiple failures of multinational extractivist corporations to obtain the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Maya communities regarding concessions for logging and mining on their ancestral lands (source-removed-for-anonymity). While business interests were and remain culpable for the detrimental social and environmental consequences that successively ensued, it is crucial to recognise that the state’s economic development and planning processes facilitate both corporate extractors and conservationists who benefit from the privatisation and expropriation of Indigenous lands. Although the Maya won the 2015 court case, the FPIC violations and subsequent prolonged legal battle came at tremendous cost to local ecosystems and communities––a cost that often goes unnoticed, omitted, or denied––much like the coloniality of nation-state, orthodox notions of ‘economic development,’ and even conventional approaches to planning (Esteva, Babones, and Babcicky, 2013; Porter, 2010; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020).

Accordingly, in this article we make use of the concepts misanthropic skepticism, racial capitalism, and slow violence to expose and explain the racial logics that underpin development-driven FPIC violations and the manifold adverse effects experienced by the Maya resulting from state and corporate refusals of the duty to consult. Our main thesis is twofold. Firstly, we contend that contemporary economic development planning agendas and FPIC violations are at once an initiator and form of violence resulting from the misanthropic skepticism embedded in racial capitalism. Secondly, we maintain that the chronic (structural-slow) violence of development and FPIC violations is a recurring manifestation of extractivist exploitation that reveals the coloniality of the Westminster-modelled state and global capitalist economy. To animate our contentions, we draw from empirical data gathered via first-hand autonomous movement work in southern Belize, grounded experiences and collective mobilisations related to the Maya land struggle, and the in situ political assessment of frontline environmental defenders. The evidenced-based anticolonial analysis we offer throughout the piece has thus been informed by a combined 25 years of grassroots organising, community outreach, and participatory action research composed of Indigenous methods and decolonial praxis with-and-alongside a diverse array of Maya villages, families, farmers, activists, and land defenders in Toledo District.

To provide readers a clear understanding of the terms we find most generative with respect to understanding the historical context and current geopolitical complexities of southern Belize, the ensuing sections provide detailed summaries of misanthropic skepticism, racial capitalism, slow violence, and the Maya land rights struggle. We then offer an explicatory analysis and discussion section that casts light upon the coloniality of the liberal-capitalist state and slow violence of development, which we argue are perpetuated and evidenced in part via disregarding good faith consultation, ongoing land grabs, and the criminalisation of Indigenous environmental activists. Ultimately, then, this article demonstrates how the concept of slow violence is useful towards naming state-sanctioned capitalist development and FPIC violations for what they are––contemporary expressions of colonial violence. We do so in hopes of sharing with readers movement-based insights and grounded Indigenous knowledge that can inspire emancipatory praxis and be put in the service of other communities in struggle. To fully comprehend the situation of the Maya in Toledo District and better recognise the intricacies and enduring colonial legacies at hand, an understanding of the conjuncture of race, capitalism, and violence is necessary, which is where we now turn.

# Conceptual Framework: Misanthropic Skepticism, Racial Capitalism, Slow Violence

## Misanthropic Skepticism and Racial Capitalism

Numerous revolutionary thinkers over the past century have reasoned that colonial power is undergirded by a dehumanising logic that imagines and constructs ‘Others’ via processes of negative racialisation, which renders them enslavable, killable, and disposable (Fanon, 1963; Gilmore, 2002; Lorde, 2018; Quijano 2000; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020). Decolonial theorist Maldonado-Torres (2007) posits this form of racial dehumanisation is driven by ‘misanthropic skepticism.’ Misanthropic skepticism entails both doubting and condemning the humanity of Others due to, inter alia, phenotype, melanin levels, ethnicity, spiritual practice, and namely––difference (Saldanha, 2006). For Maldonado-Torres (2007, 246), misanthropic skepticism ‘provides the basis for the preferential option for the *ego conquiro* (I conquer [therefore I am])*,* which explains why security for some can conceivably be obtained at the expense of the lives of others.’ Notably, race, both historically and socially, is mutable, its construction non-linear, and it has not been solely based on phenotype and melanin levels alone. Even so, colonisers and capitalists have used each, amongst other arbitrary criteria, to construct different races to justify enslavement, indentureship, and exploitation, hence Robinson’s (2000) explicit use of the term ‘racial capitalism.’

Maldonado-Torres (2007, 246) notes that misanthropic skepticism forges and emboldens an imperial-Manicheistic view of the world ‘that promotes a fundamentally genocidal attitude in respect to colonised and racialized people.’ This skepticism and scrutiny of the humanity of Others operates in relation to socially fabricated notions of what a ‘respectable’ liberal subject is (e.g. white, male, propertied, Christian, bourgeois). On this point, Caribbean cultural theorist Wynter (2003) and Aymara anarchist Rivera Cusicanqui (2020) each argue hegemonic ideas surrounding what ‘Man’ is––and who ‘respectable’ subjects are––remain Eurocentric and heteropatriarchal, as well as are the products of Western worldviews, liberal ideology, and contrived yet chauvinistic nationalisms. Similarly, Fanon (1963) asserts (post)colonial respectability politics and liberal-statist nationalisms––in conjunction with the driving forces of capital accumulation––are traps that have devastating (i.e. ‘damning’) consequences for negatively racialised Others.

Historically, misanthropic skepticism has enabled supremacist racial animus, colonial worldviews, class stratification, and capitalist modes of production and exploitative relations to go global. Put differently, misanthropic skepticism is the contingent rationale through which select groups in given times and geographies are negatively racialised and have their humanity *doubted* and denied to justify deracination, decimation, subjugation, enslavement, or even elimination (e.g. Indigenous communities, peasant societies, African/Caribbean people, South Asian landworkers, Irish farmers under the British Empire [Gonzalez, 2021]). According to Maldonado-Torres (2007), misanthropic skepticism is a product of the racist colonial imagination and causes the liberal state’s proclamations of: ‘You are human’; ‘You have rights’; and ‘You are free;’ to take the form of cynical rhetorical interrogations like: ‘Are you completely human?’; ‘Why do you deserve rights?’; and ‘Why do you not understand that the state actually has sovereignty?’. Similarly, under racial capitalism, state power, and via misanthropic skepticism, the individuated recognition that: ‘You are a rational being living off the land’ takes the form of a suspicious query: ‘Are you *actually* rational and where is the deed to your private property?’ This relegates the claims of certain negatively racialised groups to humanity, sovereignty, the commons, and (communal) lands disputable, inferior, and dispensable. In short, misanthropic skepticism is the logic that lies at the heart of colonial power, liberal ideology, capitalist economics, and their attendant acts of abjection, violence, and dispossession. In his influential treatise on racial capitalism, *Black Marxism*, Robinson (2000, 9), reminds us of this precise point when he states

The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did *social ideology*. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism [emphasis added].

The nexus of land, race, space, and the state thereby remain a key battleground on all matters related to capital accumulation, economic development, political sovereignty, resistance to exploitation, and struggles for decolonisation (Tuck and Yang, 2012). In illustrating the situated yet variegating socio-spatial dimensions and (dis)ordering principles of racial capitalism, Hjalmarson (2021, 3) explains, ‘As a modern determinant in the social organisation of space and people, racism is implicated in the segregation and exclusion as well as in the differential treatment and liminal inclusion of those identified as racial others.’ On the matter of land and the exclusion of the state’s racial others and ‘undesirables’ (e.g., Indigenous people), King (2013) avows that the oft-posed query of: ‘What do Indigenous people *want*?’ is the wrong question­­––for it is not what Indigenous people want that should be subjected to scrutiny, but what others want from them that is the real issue. That *want*, King emphasises, is land. King (2013) drives home this point via the assertion that ‘as long as you (Indigenous communities) have an inch of it (land), they (colonisers, states, corporations) will come for you.’ It is in this ‘coming for you’ that misanthropic skepticism and the violence it rationalises on the part of both the state and private capital are revealed. Meaning, the development interests and planning agendas that governments and corporations have regarding Indigenous lands cannot be decoupled from colonial histories, racial logics, and ongoing acts of expropriation, settlement, occupation, and assertions of statist nationalism (Jackson, 2012).

Put simply, misanthropic skepticism is at the centre of racism, empire, genocide, enslavement, and war. Here, Maldonado-Torres (2007) explains that the basis of misanthropic skepticism is the question of whether Othered peoples have souls (or souls that can be saved), which is an inquisition framed around the idea of damnation (Fanon, 1963) and declarations of just war. In the Americas, the humanity of Indigenous people was debated, probed, and deemed inferior on ontological levels not only because of their *cosmovisións* and cultures––but because of their very being and alleged ‘nature,’ i.e., socially-constructed race. The Spanish and British Empires, for example, justified condemning, waging war against, and enslaving Indigenous people, Afrodescendant groups, and Others ‘by virtue of *“race”…* ’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 247). This violence was a direct result of Others refusing to accept via their own volition the purported superiority of European cultures and Christian doctrines. In turn, misanthropic skepticism rationalised a form of just war violence and dispossession that could be meted out against negatively racialised groups who lived outside the Crown, kingdom, metropole, Christianity, or nation-state (Pulido, 2017) during non-war moments. Maldonado-Torres (2007, 247) subsequently argues that coloniality ‘can be understood as a radicalization and naturalization of the *non-ethics of war*.’ Hence, Indigenous people and non-White, non-Christian Others become inherently suspect, deserving of condemnation, and permanently damnable (Fanon, 1963).

Maldonado-Torres (2007, 247) notion of ‘non-ethics of war’ suggests that violence, which includes ‘the practices of eliminating and enslaving certain subjects (e.g. Indigenous, Black, Brown) as part of the enterprise of colonization’ is extended *beyond* war. For example, violence outside of war that takes the form of explicit physical-psychological harm (e.g. assassination, rape, torture, extrajudicial killing, police brutality, slander); what Gilmore (2008) cogently argues is ‘organized abandonment’ (e.g. state negligence, ancestral erasure, austerity measures, violating consent); what queer theorist Ahmed (2007) refers to as ‘straightening devices’, bourgeois respectability politics, and social norms that are heteropatriarchal, ableist, and racialised; or the operation and codification of disciplinary technologies of enclosure, erasure, and domination that include things like law and legal statutes (Hunt, 2014), citizenship requirements, private property, school curricula, language policies, economic development programmes, and even planning agendas and regulations (Porter, 2010). Maldonado-Torres’ ‘non-ethics of war’ shifts the focus away from the jarring types of gratuitous violence and abhorrent maiming ordinarily associated with conventional warfare toward forms of manipulation, abuse, neglect, ‘straightening,’ coercion, and domestication that are institutionalised yet frequently neither recognised as systemic nor wartime violence because they have become *naturalised* and banal. Notwithstanding this process of naturalising violence, it remains violence put at the service of dispossessing, excluding, and dominating Others. The fact that it is violence not classified as the violence of war evidences the ‘non-ethics of war’ Maldonado-Torres describes. With respect to grounded realities and struggles for land and justice in the present moment, placing the notions of misanthropic skepticism, the non-ethics of war, and anticolonial critiques of economic development and conventional planning into the same frame is generative because it allows us to further see the elucidatory merit of Robinson’s (2000) overt use of ‘racial capitalism,’ who states of capitalism, ‘Race was its epistemology, its ordering principle, its moral authority, its economy of justice, commerce, and power.’

In this vein, parsing the connections that race has with taken-for-granted approaches to development, planning, and capital accumulation is especially important because exploitation and extraction are justified under the reputed beneficent and ‘humanitarian’ banner of development and its associated ‘straightening devices,’ which mask state violence. On this point, the coloniality of state planning has been well documented and illuminated upon by Sandercock (2004), Porter (2006), Dorries and Harjo (2020), and Jolly and Thompson-Fawcett (2021). Here, Porter (2010, 34) observes

One of the significant bases of relations between Indigenous and non–Indigenous peoples and states is both the fact and discursive operation of territorial dispossession. Dispossession is a fact that state-based planning is not only confronted by, but complicit with.

Similarly, (de)territorialisation and the (re)creation of colonial spaces, borders, and states made possible via dispossession are achieved in great measure though via what Sandercock (2004, 118) identifies as a range of ‘spatial technologies of power such as the laws of private property, the practices of surveying, naming, mapping and the procedures of urban and regional planning.’ To this list we would add state adjudicated FPIC protocols and certain forms of purported participatory planning and supposed community consultation, for reasons we specify in the sections to come. In many respects, state-based planning activities, development consultations, and FPIC protocols, even if ‘participatory’ on paper, can be more accurately thought of as racial ‘straightening devices’ that facilitate structural and slow violence, as well as reproduce and legitimate a colonial (re)ordering and (mal)development of ecosystems, environs, and what would otherwise be viewed Indigenous territories and spaces.

## Slow Violence, Environmental Ruin, and Climate Risk

As a matter of scholarship and activist intervention, violence continues to be a political-intellectual topic of choice for a multitude of academic disciplines and revolutionary thinkers (Arendt, 1970; Chattopadhyay, 2019; Cover, 1986; de Leeuw, 2016; Fanon, 1963; Jiwani, 2006; Pulido 2017; Springer and Le Billon, 2016). Whilst impossible to fully scope the concept of violence in its entirety given the fulsome attention it has received over the past half century, our focus is on two distinct typologies of violence: structural (Galtung, 1969) and slow (Nixon, 2011), which we suggest are useful in revealing ongoing and concealed forms of colonial violence.

Structural violence can readily be thought of as exposure to premature death or avoidable suffering (Galtung, 1969). A more detailed overview is offered by Farmer et al. (2006, 1686), who, drawing from Galtung (1969), state that structural violence

describes social structures—economic, political, legal, religious, and cultural—that stop individuals, groups, and societies from reaching their full potential. …it is the avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible.

Structural violence, as Gilligan (1996, 3) goes on to explain, is deeply entrenched in long-established societal systems and cultural conventions that are ‘normalized by stable institutions and regular experience.’ Meaning, the structural violence inherent in racial capitalism has become quite ordinary and common sense (Robinson, 2000). Indeed, it is so routine and run-of-the-mill under the current neoliberal order that it has become a taken-for-granted and seemingly innate and inescapable part of modernity. Concretely, experiences of structural violence include, inter alia, the differential or discriminatory provision or lack of access to economic resources, political participation, schooling and education, medical care and treatment, citizenship, legal status, or impartial treatment before the law (Montoya, 2016). As Farmer et al. (2006, 1686) add, the operation of structural violence is linked ‘very closely to social injustice and the social machinery of oppression.’ Recent scholarship has additionally pointed out that structural violence includes epistemic, discursive, cultural, and indirect forms of suffering, trauma, and burial (e.g. negligence, exnomination, forgetting, inaction) (de Sousa Santos, 2015; Irwin and Pasko, 2018; Shannon et al., 2017).

Slow violence (Nixon, 2011), whilst recognised as an intrinsically structural process, pays specific attention to violence that is often cloaked, occurs slowly, and the effects of which are cumulative and coalesce over time. In offering a synopsis of slow violence as a reconfiguration and particular mode of operation of Galtung’s notion of structural violence, Nixon (2011, 2) explains that it

…occurs gradually and *out of sight*, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is *typically not viewed as violence at all*. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. We need, I believe, to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is *neither spectacular nor instantaneous*, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales (emphasis added).

Authors wrestling with slow violence have thus posed such queries as: What impact do extractivist economic development agendas have on ecosystems, communities, human and more-than-human life, environmental settings, and biological assemblages? (Collard, 2018); How have respective community and ecosystem susceptibilities to risk, intensified degradation, and escalations in vulnerability been arranged and organised? (Turner, 2016); and who and/or what forces, logics, and actors are behind––as well as included or excluded in––how humans are engaging and interacting with (as well as using and altering) differing ecosystems, environments, and ‘nature’ (O’Lear, 2018)? And finally, Who and/or what communities and ecosystems must disproportionately deal with the aftermaths of extraction, encroachment, contamination, and development? These are only a few of the pressing questions that emerge vis-à-vis slow violence, not to mention its links to land grabbing, violations of FPIC, and climate change (source-removed-for-anonymity).

In other words, slow violence is germane to the persistent, protracted, and outwardly imperceptible; it is chronic––long and drawn out. It includes but is not entirely limited to the debilitation of communities and ecologies because of things like mining, deforestation, toxic dumping, wildlife loss, contaminant leaching, pollutant bioaccumulation, the rollback of environmental regulations, and the generative triggers and indelible upshots of catastrophic climate change and so-called *‘*natural’ disasters, which many scholars assert are not ‘natural’ at all (Sandlos and Keeling, 2016). In this way, slow violence aims to cast light upon the hidden, lingering, long-term, opaque, and aggregative. It can be applied to state planning, economic policy decisions, and development contracts signed in offices and boardrooms far away from the places and communities where the environmental and climatic consequences of said planning decisions and development contracts are felt. For example, signatures on policies and state-sponsored mining/logging concessions might seem mundane in the moment, however, they can give rise to a string of impacts that when tallied in total are tantamount to disaster.

In the Caribbean, a region which experiences a disparate amount of risk regarding environmental change and climate disaster, slow violence poses a grave threat to entire populations. A recently released International Monetary Fund ([IMF] 2018, 7) report on climate change in Belize details this impending fallout by noting that the country ‘already faces hurricanes, flooding, sea level rise, coastal erosion, coral bleaching, and droughts, with impacts likely to intensify given expected increases in weather volatility and sea temperature.’ In addition, Belize’s sovereign debt burden is currently designated as ‘unsustainable’ and has swelled to over 125% of its GDP (IMF, 2021), meaning it lacks the necessary capital for robust disaster mitigation, adaption, and resilience packages. The precarious economic situation Belize finds itself in is partially due to both the shock the tourism sector experienced because of the recent pandemic and given that, historically, Belize was seen as a rich extraction site for ‘natural’ resources and source of cheap/free (read: enslaved/indentured) plantation labour for imperial authorities and colonial administrators (Shoman, 1994). Generations of industrial extractivism and economic dependency have subsequently meant that the environmental fallout and climatic risk Belize now faces include: an expected temperature increase of 20C by 2030 with an equal warming of the sea surface; degradation of marine ecosystems via coral bleaching and invasive seaweed and fish species; a decrease in annual rainfall and increase in risk of drought and water shortages; rising sea levels; an increase in extreme weather events like tropical storms and hurricanes; and accelerated soil erosion, groundwater contamination, salinisation of water sources, and sedimentation of dams and reservoirs (IMF, 2018).

In a context like Belize, the notion of slow violence aids us in connecting the dots between colonial power, resource extraction, environmental ruin, dangerous climate change, and community debilitation *over time*. It also assists in identifying the domino effects and dendritic chains of negative impacts that harm communities and ecosystems that are on the receiving end of state-based planning, economic development policies, and corporate contracts. Slow violence as a concept, then, has the capacity to illustrate, name, make visible, and call attention to the exploitative and extractivist character of conventional ‘development’ programmes endorsed by the liberal state and racial capitalist economy. With these understandings of misanthropic skepticism, racial capitalism, and slow violence now at hand, it is to the land struggle of the Maya of Toledo District, Belize that we now turn our attention to.

# Empirical Framework: The Maya Land Struggle and Realities of Southern Belize

Belize is part of Maya ancestral territory and emerged as a modern nation-state in the colonial crucible where British and Spanish imperial forces and functionaries dispossessed, displaced, and deterritorialised Maya communities, as well as violently deracinated and imported enslaved African people and indentured South Asian groups, amongst others (Shoman, 1994). Via colonial penetration and planning, geographies and populations across the circum-Caribbean were reconfigured through the redrawing and imposition of imposed borders and notions of race, which often fractured Indigenous and arrivant communities (Bolland, 2003). Today, Belize is a multi-ethnic society and home to a diversity of people, including three Maya linguistic groups: the Qʼeqchiʼ, Mopan, and Yucatec. The former two, the Qʼeqchi’ and Mopan, live primarily in Toledo District, which is the southernmost district of Belize and where a total of 39 Maya communities reside.

Since contact, the Q’eqchi and Mopan Maya have been engaged in a prolonged fight to defend their lands, lives, and self-determined futures. Traditionally, the Maya have held lands in common and derive individual rights of use from the community through collective process. Central to this communal and complex land tenure system are the alcaldes, an expression of Maya governance that existed prior to contact and has since been reconfigured several times over centuries via a dialectic between colonial power and Indigenous resistance (Mesh, 2017). The alcaldes of Toledo District, which are internal to rural Maya villages across southern Belize, facilitate and manage land use and boundary harmonisation processes, as well as facilitate the practice of direct democracy, conflict resolution, and community cohesion (source-removed-for-review). Notably, an economy of reciprocity lies at the heart of the Maya’s social relations, practice of participatory governance, and relationships with ecosystems. For generations and despite being targets of empire and state authority, the Maya have been able to maintain a certain degree of relative autonomy and retain their communal approaches to holding and using land, which is a departure from claiming ownership over private property, even though each have been under constant threat.

The latest iteration of this struggle started in the mid-1990s as a response to concessions that were granted without Maya consent by the Belizean state to third-party corporations to ‘develop’ Maya lands. Specifically, the GoB permitted logging concessions to Malaysian companies for timber extraction on nearly half a million acres of land that had been traditionally used and occupied by Maya villages (Anaya 2007). Maya farmers only became aware of the concessions because they were confronted by loggers and heavy equipment in their backyards, a not altogether infrequent occurrence. With respect to the struggle for land, it is vital to note that both the Belizean Government and third-party extractive corporations (e.g. mining, logging, oil) have been responsible for a litany of documented FPIC violations (Campbell and Anaya, 2008; Purvis, 2013). Essentially, that Maya people own, use, occupy, and depend upon traditional lands––and at the very least have a right to FPIC for anything that happens in their ancestral territories––has been ignored for decades. It is state-sponsored FPIC violations of this nature that led to the Maya’s most recent struggle for land, which included a protracted legal battle that lasted almost 20 years. During this time, Maya villagers and movement leaders have been forced into the courts at every level. Meaning, despite the 2015 CCJ ruling that recognised their communal land rights, Maya communities continue to have to fight for their relationships with territory and right to self-determination. Amidst the protracted conflict, government administrators have routinely portrayed the Maya as dismembering and ‘Balkanising’ Belize, i.e., creating a state within a state, which is far from what the Maya have proposed (source-removed-for-anonymity). Contrariwise, at the centre of the Maya struggle is the aspiration to transform Belize into a country that would be more inclusive of and respectful towards Indigenous ways of being and relationships with the environment.

On this point, their struggle is not unlike that of the Zapatistas of southern Mexico, predominantly Maya themselves, who amidst their uprising in 1994 and ensuing construction of autonomy asserted ‘never again a Mexico without us’ and have expressed a desire to build ‘a world in which many worlds fit.’ Similarly, for the Maya of Toledo District, as one contributor to the movement succinctly summarised, they are not seeking to secede from the nation, but rather, hope to eventually reside in ‘a Belize in which may Belizes fit.’ Notably, throughout the duration of their land struggle, numerous Maya environmental defenders have emphasised that whilst entering both domestic and international courts is often necessary for tactical reasons related to the acquisition of Western notions of land ‘rights,’ neither have any real bearing on or legitimacy when it comes to defining the *relationships* the Maya have with their ancestral territories, which they refer to as *ral ch’och* (being ‘people of the Earth’). Ontologically and existentially speaking, being *ral ch’och* is rooted in relationship with land and collectivity. It encompasses human-ecological interdependence, a socio-territorial identity, cultural heritage that is inextricably linked to local environments, maintaining community-ecosystem health, sharing and stewarding the commons, and even the practice of regenerative swidden agroforestry (citation-removed-for-review). As we will see in the forthcoming sections, state-based planning and development agendas continue to threaten Maya lands, governance, and their collective embodiment of *ral ch’och.*

## Protracted Court Battles and the 2015 CCJ Victory

The Maya filed their first lawsuit in the Supreme Court of Belize in 1996. This proved to be futile as the hearing was delayed for almost two years. Frustrated with the lack of response, in 1998, Maya communities petitioned their case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), arguing that

…the State has granted logging and oil concessions on the Maya lands *without meaningful consultations* with the Maya people and in a manner that has caused *substantial environmental harm and threatens long term and irreversible damage* to the natural environment upon which the Maya depend. [emphasis added]

After six years, the IACHR produced a report siding with the Maya people. It agreed that the Maya have collective rights to the lands they had been traditionally ‘using, occupying, and enjoying’ and that the government had violated Maya property rights by failing to recognise, delimit, demarcate, title, and protect the territory where those rights existed (IACHR, 2004). Additionally, the IACHR found the GoB was responsible for ‘granting logging and oil concessions to third-parties to utilize the property and resources… …in the absence of effective consultations with and the informed consent of the Maya people.’ The IACHR recommended the GoB define, distinguish, and title Maya ancestral lands. This report was largely ignored by the state (source-removed-for-anonymity). While some of the permits were cancelled, the GoB continued to act in ways that neither accepted the Maya as rightful owners to ancestral lands, nor recognised that they have a right to FPIC, i.e. there was no delimitation, demarcation, or titling.

In between the filing of the claim and the IACHR ruling of 2004, there had been several attempts at negotiation prompted by the commission. One of the outcomes of these negotiations was the ‘Ten Points of Agreement’ in 2000, in which the GoB acknowledged Maya rights to land. While this seemed like a major advance, it did not result in any meaningful action by the state. Responding to a lack of political will and progress by the GoB, the Maya made their way back into court in 2007. This time, however, instead of focusing on Maya territory in its entirety (the 39 Maya communities across Toledo District), the Maya legal team concentrated on two individual communities: Santa Cruz and Conejo. The GoB argued that Maya people, while Indigenous, were not Indigenous to Belize, and consequently, have no rights to land. The Supreme Court of Belize, conversely, ruled in favour of the Maya people recognising them as Indigenous to Belize––and as having rights to land. The verdict issued by Judge Abdulai Conteh, Chief Justice of Belize, noted that the expropriation of Indigenous territories, initially by the British and later by successive postcolonial administrations, did not negate Maya land claims (Grandia, 2009). The court further ordered the GoB to ‘respect and protect’ Maya land rights and refrain from granting concessions without the informed consent of their communities (SCB, 2007).

After the ruling, the GoB adopted the position that the case only pertained to the two specified communities, Santa Cruz and Conejo. This meant that, in the eyes of the state, the other 37 Maya communities of Toledo District had rights to neither land nor FPIC protocols. The remaining 37 Maya communities, which were not included in the 2007 case, subsequently had to file for collective land rights in 2008. After two years, in 2010, the Supreme Court of Belize once again issued a decision in favour of the Maya villages. This ruling clarified that the judgement passed in 2007 was applicable to the whole of Toledo District––i.e. all 39 Maya communities (Cultural Survival, 2018). The Supreme Court also issued an injunction prohibiting any further state concessions based on the Maya’s longstanding use and occupancy of lands in southern Belize (ELAW, 2015).

The Maya then faced two appeals, each initiated by the GoB. The first took place in the Court of Appeal, with the second going to the CCJ––the highest court with jurisdiction in Belize. In 2013, the Court of Appeal upheld the lower court’s 2010 ruling, and in 2015, the CCJ did the same through a consent order (Caserta, 2018). The decision rendered by the CCJ in 2015 asserted that the Maya villages hold title to their ancestral lands, which was a legal recognition of Maya governance and customary law. The CCJ ruling––a first in the Caribbean regarding Indigenous land rights being acknowledged by an international court––decrees that traditional Maya notions of land ownership are equivalent to the Western conceptions of private property and land ownership found in the Belizean constitution.

Four points are worth highlighting here. The first is that the GoB failed to obtain free, prior, and informed consent from Maya people in granting concessions on Maya lands. Secondly, to correct this, the Maya were forced into a time-, energy-, and resource-consuming court battle for nearly twenty years. Thirdly, this protracted battle emerged because the Maya’s presence on and use of their ancestral lands was either invisible or irrelevant to the state. Lastly, the GoB called into question the Maya peoples’ indigeneity by severing it from land, i.e. arguing that while the Maya are Indigenous, they are *not* Indigenous to Belize and local territories. Notably, in issuing the 2015 verdict on behalf of the Maya, the CCJ ordered the GoB to implement a meaningful consultation process related to delimiting, demarcating, and titling Maya lands based upon their customary notions of complex tenure. This led to the establishment of the Toledo Maya Land Rights Commission (TMLRC) by the GoB, which was legally bound to see the CCJ order through to its fruition yet resulted in a new set of contentious politics, which we detail below.

## The Toledo Maya Land Rights Commission (TMLRC)

The role of the TMLRC was to engage in the implementation of the CCJ court order (i.e. delimitation, demarcation, titling of Maya lands). If there were any expectations that the GoB would exhibit more principled behaviour as result of the CCJ order, they were swiftly dashed. What was immediately noticeable was the state’s inability and refusal to see the Maya people as legitimate subjects, which was evidenced by the GoB’s poor understanding of the FPIC protocol and recurrent lack of will to engage in good faith consultation with Maya leaders (source-removed-for-anonymity). Moreover, the TMLRC was conspicuously comprised of non-Indigenous appointees when formed and even when an Indigenous representative was appointed to the TMLRC there was no consultation with Maya people to arrive at whom it would be. Furthermore, the commission, which is a state entity tasked with consulting Maya villages on how the demarcation of Indigenous lands would unfold, promptly failed to develop a draft implementation plan and appropriately consult with the Maya communities (Ramos, 2016).

The fundamental issue at hand is revealed by a glimpse of the TMLRC’s mode of engagement and derisive view of Indigenous governance systems, in particular its view of the Toledo Alcaldes Association (TAA). The TAA is a group of 78 democratically selected leaders (alcaldes) from the 39 Maya communities of Toledo District (each community elects two alcaldes). The TAA is the main representative body and highest central authority of the Maya people in the region, as well as a key pillar of the Maya social order, land rights movement, and practice of self-determination, not to mention culture, heritage, and traditions (Mesh, 2017). The alcaldes were functioning prior to the arrival of colonisers from Spain and Britain, with the TAA now being the cornerstone of the latest expression of the Maya’s customary (non-state) system of participatory decision-making, peace and diplomacy, conflict-resolution, and restorative justice.

In May 2016, as Yucatec Maya scholar (source-removed-for-anonymity) explains, representatives of the TAA visited the TMLRC to ‘communicate Maya disagreement with the way consultations were being carried out by the Commission (TMLRC) because such consultations failed to follow Maya consultation protocol; violated international standards such as the International Labor Organization Convention 169 and the United Nation’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and divided Maya communities.’ In detailing this incident, which is telling apropos the adversarial relations that exist between the TMLRC and the Maya leaders, source-removed-for-anonymity further writes:

On May 16, 2016, the police, at the instructions of the chairperson of the Toledo Maya Land Rights Commission, evicted Maya alcaldes from the Commission’s premises… Shortly after the eviction, the [TMLRC] chairperson issued a press release explaining their refusal to meet with them by stating that ‘the role of the Commission was to ensure that the Maya did not become voiceless’ and that ‘the CCJ order did not grant a monopoly on the autonomy of Maya communities to *anyone*’ (Ramos, 2016)...

...The ‘*anyone*’ to whom the Commissioner was referring to was no other than the institution of Maya governance, the alcaldes, the very actors that brought forward the court case that resulted in the consent order which the commission is established to implement. It was therefore perplexing, to say the least, that the Commission on the one hand proposed to guarantee the voice of the Maya people but on the other was refusing to meet with them and sought to delegitimize the Alcalde system.

In brief, the TMLRC rejected outright––via prevarication and the ‘persistent desire of the state to be in control …’ (source-removed-for-anonymity)––to recognise the alcaldes as a legitimate representation of Maya leadership. Instead, the GoB implicitly decided to take it upon itself to determine how the Maya people should designate their representatives. In so doing, the GoB not only violated the Maya’s right to self-determination, but even its own mandate to start the process of delimiting and documenting Maya lands in ‘good faith.’ Moreover, instead of cooperating with the Maya communities on their terms and preferences, the state refused to acknowledge the TAA as the rightful representative of the Maya people, thereby prolonging the commencement of the demarcation process whilst subverting the customary laws and governance system of the Maya.

Two key points are worth highlighting here. First, neither consultation nor consent describe what has been afforded to the Maya communities by the GoB either before or after the 2015 CCJ victory. Noteworthy, too, is that fact that the cynicism and contempt which has been demonstrated by the state and private capital towards the Maya communities is nothing new (source-removed-for-anonymity). In fact, in 2012, while the aforementioned court cases were being litigated, the GoB announced plans for the appointment of a ‘Minister of Indigenous People,’ yet no Indigenous communities were included. When Indigenous activists raised their voices to point out that while this might be a step in the right direction but needed to be re-examined via consultation with Indigenous peoples (e.g. Maya and Garifuna communities)––the GoB immediately pulled the entire prospect of having a ‘Minster of Indigenous People’ off the table. Numerous observers saw this decision as reprisal. Secondly, the GoB’s refusal to recognise alcaldes as representatives of the Maya people and a legitimate expression of Indigenous governance is race-based misanthropic skepticism and indicative of how the state views the rights and capacities of the Maya people. For clarity, misanthropic skepticism emerges when the state questions and disavows Indigenous peoples’ governance systems, doubts they have aptitude to select their own leaders, and refutes their definitions of what constitutes culturally safe and responsible consultation protocols.

## Backlash: The Santa Cruz 13

The opaque and temporally dispersed forms of violence noted above, which were initiated by state-sponsored FPIC violations against the Maya, have coincided with direct violence. That is, the Maya movement’s legal and extrajudicial advances in self-determination under the shadow of the postcolonial state and its capitalist patrons have not been without repercussion (Wainwright, 2011). Organisers in the Maya movement, from its beginnings to the present moment, have been accosted, harassed, threatened, and arbitrarily arrested, which highlights the Westminster-modelled GoB’s monopoly on violence (source-removed-for-anonymity).

In June 2015, Cristina Coc, a Qʼeqchiʼ Maya organiser, mother, and co-spokesperson of the Maya Leaders Alliance, a rural autonomous social movement comprised of Maya political activists, was arrested along with 12 Indigenous land defenders and dubbed ‘The Santa Cruz 13.’ The environmental defenders were protecting a Maya heritage site, preventing unsanctioned settlement upon sacred grounds, and adjudicating the situation using traditional governance––the alcaldes (source-removed-for-anonymity). The situation was complicated given the perpetrator, who at one point brandished a firearm and threatened village leaders multiple times, was an Afro-Creole Belizean man. Even though the situation was being handled by alcaldes, who are officially recognised as lower court magistrates and intervened only after requesting and being denied support by the state, the GoB used the incident as a pretext to paint the Maya as a ‘violent mob,’ stoke divisive Black-Indigenous relations, and arrest members of the village in the quiet of night.

The significance of the GoB’s ill-advised actions was highlighted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, who, in an international statement, noted that the state’s arrest displayed blatant and ‘troubling disregard’ for Maya property rights. Tauli-Corpuz (OHCHR, 2015) went on to stress that––in the face of the GoB’s benighted justification for jailing Coc and the Maya land defenders––the ‘current situation of conflict and mistrust cannot be allowed to persist.’ Unsurprisingly, and not without taking an emotional and physical toll on Maya activists, after approximately a year of court appearances, prevarication, and vilification on the part of the GoB, the entire slate of charges against the Maya leaders, including Coc, were dropped. This story is neither anecdotal nor happenstance (Cultural Survival, 2018). Incidentally, criminalisation, denigration, and attempts to publicly defame or even disappear Indigenous rights activists and environmental defenders continues to be a favoured method of numerous postcolonial governments across Latin American and the Caribbean (Guzmán Hormazábal, 2019).

Within the Caribbean, matters and tensions related to race, indigeneity, and state power are complex and must be approached both critically and carefully given the region’s experiences of Euro-American colonial domination, anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, plural creolisations, and differential degrees of independence. Jackson (2014), in writing about the intricacies and internal conflicts that sometimes emerge at the nexus of the historical trajectories of enslavement, indentureship, and standing statist claims to political legitimacy in the Caribbean, argues that appeals to ‘rightful ownership’ of the postcolonial nation-state as a result of having ‘built the colony’ through (coercive and captive) labour are fraught and ultimately reproduce colonial institutions and Eurocentric worldviews, not to mention consolidated power and hierarchical authority. In analysing indigeneity, anti-Blackness, and postcolonial social relations in Guyana, which we feel is applicable to other geographies across the circum-Caribbean, Jackson (2014) offers prescient insight into the inseparability of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racisms and how possibilities for reconciling incommensurate struggles for self-determination remain when she writes

...anti-Blackness cannot be understood apart from the subordination of Indigenous peoples in early Empire, under colonialism, and ultimately in postcolonial nationalism throughout the Caribbean. Most writers and theorists tell us that Blacks had to be brought into the Caribbean because its Indigenous peoples disappeared or were too weak to work on plantations. This uncritical argument, that the disappearance of Indigenous peoples was the reason for the introduction of Black, and later indentured labor, hinders us from seeing how these two causalities are in fact irrevocably yoked.

...We must reject the mystification of Indigenous relationships to land and recognize the complex and evolving, pre-colonial social and political systems that Indigenous peoples developed and which they seek to restore through claims for sovereignty and land rights.

The empirical data and theoretical analyses above prompts necessary questions in the Belizean Maya case, namely: 1) what precisely has prevented the state from acting in good faith apropos FPIC and recognising Maya land rights? And 2) what rationale is driving the GoB’s decision to routinely discount the humanity, rights, and governance system of Maya communities and environmental defenders? From the beginning of the most recent land rights struggle in 1996, the Maya’s historical continuity with and presence on land has been either unheeded or refuted by government leaders. For decades, numerous community members also attest to being treated as ‘non-beings’ by the state. Further, when the Maya have appeared in court to say: ‘We are here. And have relationships with these lands.’ the response of the state has been to call into question their indigeneity and rely upon earlier colonial violence and dispossession to contend Maya land rights have been extinguished.

Moreover, when a collective Maya standpoint has been expressed through their traditional leaders, the alcaldes, the GoB has rebuked their legitimacy, not only calling into question customary Maya governance systems but deputising itself as the arbiter of who should be recognised as a Maya leader, what constitutes Maya representation, and how consultation with Maya communities must be structured. This is not dissimilar from the ways in which state power has been imposed upon Indigenous communities in settler societies (Zaragocin, 2019) and extractive development agendas have been used to grab land across the Global South/Majority World (Mollett, 2016). From the evidence at hand, these dynamics are instructive of how the GoB views the Maya people and arguably directly linked to Maldonado-Torres’ (2007) conception of misanthropic skepticism, i.e., questioning Maya governance/worldviews and denying their historical continuity with territory to obstruct self-determination. These accounts also echo the subjectivity of *ego conquiro* (‘I conquer, therefore I am’) that fuelled dispossession and conquest across the region over 500 years ago (Dussel, 1995) and constitute a contemporary manifestation of colonial violence, which we critically analyse further in the discussion below.

# Discussion: Coloniality, Slow Violence, Political Agency

## The Persistent Coloniality and Slow Violence of FPIC

Colonial worldviews remain a durable and pervasive component of present-day ‘development’ agendas, land conflicts, and state-based claims to territorial sovereignty. The protocol of FPIC responds to the undeniable yet often obscured reality that the development and planning actions of the state readily have damaging and violent effects. Otherwise, why have it? Put differently, FPIC, under the ‘modern’ liberal tradition, is necessary because Westphalian-inspired governments and resource-extractive corporate entities, alongside their respective claims to sovereignty and preoccupations with capital accumulation, routinely fail to take Indigenous peoples’ ways of being and worldviews seriously. FPIC protocols are aimed at signalling a supposedly enlightened position by the state and allowing businesses to gesture towards behaving responsibly. In the circum-Caribbean, FPIC is framed as a promissory note to Indigenous, Afrodescendant, and peasant groups that both the state and private capital have overcome their coloniality and local communities shall no longer be deceived, disrespected, and dispossessed by either. The irony which remains, is that FPIC’s very existence is an incriminating confession by the state and private capital that each, inherently, exist to dispossess. In reality, FPIC is a fraught gatekeeping measure meant to hold development aggression and the driving forces of capital accumulation at bay. Yet, it is not a particularly effective one, which is convenient for both the state and extractivist corporations. FPIC disguises their coloniality and enables each to violate the duty to consult whilst claiming plausible deniability and ‘good faith.’ Violations of FPIC, from grounded Indigenous experiences, represent dispossession and unremitting colonial violence, which the concept of slow violence helps us name.

When critiquing FPIC, the historical trajectories of colonialism and racial capitalism matter greatly. The reason for FPIC and the significance of its violation can be elucidated by reference to the colonial encounter and the racialism, dehumanising logics, and profit motives that defined encounter (Robinson, 2000). Upon reaching the Americas, European colonisers dispossessed, enslaved, exploited, and deployed sundry violence against Indigenous peoples as a means to amass land, resources, and wealth––not to mention dominate. This is the colonial encounter, which continues to be reinforced by the state and put in the service of capital accumulation. Indeed, revolutionary peasant movements have contended that the Western liberal state and global capitalism have always, since their inception, been threat vectors to Indigenous life (EZLN, 2015). That is, the colonial encounter and ongoing colonial *present* is characterised by hostile misanthropic skepticism and indiscriminate racial animus towards the humanity of Indigenous people and Others (e.g. Black and Brown people).

For context, whether Indigenous people had souls (e.g. The Valladolid Debate), as well as whether their souls were ‘empty’ or could be ‘filled’ (e.g. *Anima Nullius*), was the subject of much imperial scrutiny throughout the 1500s (de Sousa Santos, 2015, 122). Consequently, the doctrine of *Anima Nullius* (‘empty souls’) in conjunction with *Terra Nullius* (‘empty land’/‘land belonging to no one’) paved the way for expropriation, enslavement, and elimination. To put it candidly, it was neither evil nor sin to dispossess, bind in chains, or put to end a ‘barbaric Other’ with an ‘empty soul.’ And even when some form of recognition or attempt at communication was offered by colonisers, it took the form of an imperial language that Indigenous people did not understand. As case in point, when Columbus, Cortés, and other invaders claimed the lands of Indigenous people across the circum-Caribbean and beyond, they did so via an *ego conquiro* subjectivity (I conquer, therefore I am [Dussel, 1995, 38]) and in languages that were neither accessible nor comprehensible to Indigenous people at the time of invasion. These kinds of obfuscations have typified the countless encounters and numerous treaty ‘consultations and agreements’ that have taken place between colonial agents and Indigenous communities for centuries on end––across untold geographies. Undeniably, deception and coercion, if not blunt force trauma and naked violence, have always constituted the coloniser’s playbook vis-à-vis contact, encounter, development, and consultation.

Ultimately, on the one hand, it could be said that FPIC violations are an ongoing expression of doubt if not wholesale disavowal of the rationalities, worldviews, and even humanity and worth of Indigenous people. Meaning, negligence or outright refusals of the duty to consult with subsistence-based Indigenous, Afrodescendant, and peasant communities committed by the state and corporate extractors perpetuate the same colonial relationships and misanthropic skepticism that Maldonado-Torres (2007) theorises. Moreover, violations of FPIC are a persistent form of colonial violence––albeit *slow––*given such violations result in deleterious effects that accrue after a long gestation period and are decided upon behind closed doors, oft-concealed, and come with repercussions that are delayed. This is not to mention how FPIC violations open the floodgates for other types of more direct ‘fast’ forms of violence (e.g. the criminalisation, harassment, slander, or assassination of land defenders; increased incidents of smear campaigns and sexual assault that coincide with corporate extractivism [Giardino, 2015; IACHR, 2017]). Failure to consult and carry out the FPIC protocol thereby calls into question the state’s commitment to recognising the rights and capacities of Indigenous communities. More readily, it all too eerily resembles the *ego conquiro* ethos of 1492 (Dussel, 1995) and doctrines of *Anima* and *Terra Nullius* that marked Indigenous subjectivities, peoples, and spaces as, empty, ‘Other’ (de Sousa Santos, 2015), ‘wretched’ (Fanon, 1963), and ‘profane’ (Losurdo, 2014).

## The Realities and Political Agency of the Maya People

In Belize and for the Maya of Toledo District, the immediate and long-term detrimental impacts of the government’s refusal to obtain FPIC in granting extractivist concessions remain widespread, as are the consequences of the backlash the state metes out against Indigenous resistance. Industrial extraction on the part of logging companies has resulted in the blockage and contamination of waterways, disruptions in Maya hunting patterns, and the destruction of Indigenous agroecological milpas as a result of forests that were cleared to open new roads for ‘development.’ Natural ecosystems that sustain Maya life and are a part of their cultural heritage have been disordered, polluted, and marred in ways that are not altogether dramatic, and therefore, often go unnoticed by the wider world. Yet, for land-based peoples and agrarian societies in negatively affected areas like the Maya of Toledo District, FPIC violations are as harmful to bioregional ecosystems as they are social relations. Indeed, for the Maya villages, extractivism and ways in which they are negatively racialised continues to be injurious to individual and collective wellbeing, undermine livelihood strategies, and hamper their communities’ ability to build self-determined and sustainable futures. In this way, FPIC violations are a form of slow violence under racial capitalism that––whilst neither ‘spectacular’ nor readily frontpage news––remain violence nonetheless.

The cumulative negative impacts of ‘development’ in southern Belize go far beyond the immediate moment and are often overlooked. What started with a seemingly simple violation of FPIC protocols, and with what might appear as mild impact on the Maya people themselves, led to a protracted legal struggle that lasted over two decades. During that time, FPIC violations continued, as did the attendant slow violence, e.g. land/resource grabs, encroachments onto Maya territories, contaminations of heritage sites. Furthermore, dragging hinterland peasant farmers and rural movement organisers into-and-through urban-centred state court systems is time-consuming and requires an immeasurable amount of emotional and intellectual energy, not to mention demands a massive amount of labour, attention, and money. This is all time, energy, resources, and capacity lost by Indigenous organisers, activists, leaders, community members, and elders who could otherwise be caring for land and community, co-crafting a life-giving future, passing on traditional knowledge/stories, or even just resting/playing with friends, family members, or children. Here, it is arguable that the chronic exhaustion and administrative fatigue induced by state planning procedures and bad faith consultation processes are forms of slow violence in and of themselves. Considering this reality and when viewed through the framework of racial capitalism (Robinson, 2004), government-centred FPIC protocols become contemporary colonial technologies of the liberal-capitalist state and generators of slow violence that continually reopen the intergenerational wounds and traumas inflicted by empire and capital.

Amidst the state-sponsored violence and continued criminalisation of land defenders outlined earlier, the Maya movement has not ignored other aspects of securing the wellbeing and future of their lands and villages. This is evidenced by education programmes of the *Tumul K’in* Centre of Learning (source-removed-for-anonymity), health initiatives like the formation of the Association of Maya Healers (Waldram, Cal, and Maquin, 2009), and efforts to strengthen their traditional governance system, the alcaldes (Mesh 2017). The 2015 CCJ victory has afforded Maya communities more time and energy to focus on Maya future-building. Over the past half-decade, for example, Maya leaders started an initiative to articulate and document a collective vision for their lands and communities, as well as construct an alternative Maya economy. The visioning exercise was a collective grassroots effort that involved a cross-section of Maya demographics in a process of defining what types of futures they wanted for their lands and villages.

One of the key results was a published document on their shared vision entitled: ‘*The Future We Dream*.’ *The Future We Dream* demonstrated how Maya see themselves as *ral ch’och*—the Q’eqch’i term noted earlier that loosely translates to ‘People of the Land/Children of the Earth,’ and more broadly means ‘people who belong to, depend upon, and care for the land.’ The key thesis from the process and project, which took the form of a vision statement, articulates that Maya people see themselves as and are aiming to craft a future in which they are

Peaceful, hardworking, self-determining people, rooted in our culture, open to the world and new technologies, living in community and collectively stewarding the wellbeing of our people and lands.

It is this dreamed-of future that violations of FPIC, protracted legal battles, and state equivocation regarding Indigenous rights has interrupted and delayed. In sum, these oft-obscured foreclosures of life chances and possible futures for the Maya people––alongside the degradations of land/heritage and depletion of energy/resources they experience––all starkly represent the slow violence of FPIC and coloniality of the Westminster-modelled liberal state.

# Conclusion: The Main Challenge and a Mission Betrayed

To reiterate the opening sentence of this piece, violence has always been the *modus operandi* of colonial power and racial capitalism and continues to this day, masked and mystified, via the liberal-capitalist state. Accordingly, there is a need for more sophisticated methods of both scrutinising and naming violence and dispossession if this is to be overcome. In this vein, FPIC is often framed as a kind of pledge to Indigenous people that they will no longer be targeted or taken advantage of––that they will be recognised, respected, and afforded the opportunity to determine the nature of their relationship with governments via transparent consultation and consent. The extent to which this is the case, however, is called into question by the realisation that the state is the guarantor of FPIC, meaning that Indigenous communities are forced to engage on the terms and conditions of the state. The simple fact that remains all too clear for a host of negatively racialised and cash-poor demographics across the Global South/Majority World is that what a respective government professes and signs onto at the international level is often much different than what it does and how it behaves on national and local levels. It is not uncommon for states to agree to human rights accords and FPIC procedures on the global stage but violate each behind the scenes locally. In other words, the violent exercise of power to dispossess Indigenous people and prolong their colonial encounter is sanitised, made more subtle, and invisiblised by FPIC. Hence, FPIC conflicts, although a necessary protocol for Indigenous communities to appeal to given the liberal-capitalist order of modernity and ways in which racial capitalism dispossesses, become a form of slow violence.

Our main reason for using the concept of slow violence in relation to FPIC violations is to highlight its utility as an available heuristic that allows researchers to more readily expose, name, and understand the surreptitious repression and coloniality of both state power and capitalist development. That is, a government or corporation wilfully abandoning FPIC and their duty to consult about any given development activity they conduct which will negatively affect an Indigenous community is not something most readily see, per se. Indeed, deliberate non-consultation and premeditated disregard for FPIC often occur ‘out of sight’ (Nixon, 2011, 2)––as do their ensuing aftermaths. This is unless, of course, one is from a community who must live with the consequences of said FPIC violations. Then, the violence occurs in plain sight and is lived-with, albeit oft-disavowed due to the skepticism that is levied against Indigenous people who report it. Put candidly, irrespective of who sees and reports or does not see dismissals of FPIC, it is violence nevertheless and constitutes a particular form of slow (chronic and colonial) violence. This is because such violations disrupt and damage the relationships Indigenous communities have with each other and their lands, which forecloses possibilities for self-determined futures.

In sum, what Indigenous people across the world, circum-Caribbean, and Belize continue to contend with is the misanthropic skepticism and exploitative logics of the Westminster-modelled state, not to mention its perpetuation of Maldonado-Torres’ (2007, 246) ‘non-ethics of war,’ which renders negatively racialised ‘Others’ suspect, dismissible, expendable, and ‘damned’, to return to the prose of Fanon (1963). Countering the ‘non-ethics of war’ of racial capitalism thereby requires movement activists, accomplices, and scholars alike to become more dynamic and direct in detecting, designating, and calling state-sponsored colonial-capitalist violence out for what it is. Hence, our main contention that violations of FPIC are at once ongoing acts of dispossession *and*––due to their imperceptibility until ex post facto and exhausting effects––slow violence, which lay bare the coloniality of the liberal-capitalist state.

To end, it is patently obvious from an anticolonial movement standpoint that the GoB’s track record of negligence and backlash pertaining to FPIC and Indigenous resistance ought neither be minimised as isolated incidents nor framed merely as violations––it is violence. And it is violence, although slow and oft-concealed, emanating from the ‘Master’s House’ (Lorde, 2018) that is being perpetrated by a Westminster-modelled state performing the most paradoxical type of post-independence belligerence. More imperilling, though, and to call back to the words of Fanon (1963, 145) that opened this piece, is that the bad faith and misanthropic skepticism of the GoB is a betrayal of the emancipatory ‘mission’––decolonisation––that so many resistance movements and revolutionary thinkers from across the Caribbean have always felt is a necessary endeavour––and responsibility––that must be fulfilled.

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