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INDIGENOUS (RE)MAPPING OF LOS ANGELES: ON DINÉ MEDIAMAKER PAMELA J. PETERS

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Abstract: There is a long-overlooked history of Indigenous resistance through mediamaking in Los Angeles. Diné multimedia documentarian Pamela J. Peters is one such artist whose works foreground stories and portraits of urban Natives living in LA. In this essay, I examine her two major photography/film projects *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* (2014/2016) and *Real NDNz Re-Take Hollywood* (2016) with a spatiohistorical approach to argue that Peters remaps key locations for Indigenous history in LA, such as Union Station and Indian Alley. I discuss the mediated relations between her works and earlier films, especially Kent MacKenzie's *The Exiles* (1961), and the Hollywood film industry in different time period. This essay also emphasizes Peters' triangulating role as a media maker-curator-activist in destabilizing the temporal-spatial logic embedded in quotidian violence against Native Americans in the settler colonial LA. Via shedding lights on Peters' practices, this essay calls for more scholarly and public engagement with contemporary Native artists and their active reworkings of Indigenous histories, criticisms of settler time-space, and maintenance of Native hubs.

Pamela J. Peters is a Los Angeles-based Diné multimedia documentarian whose photography, filmmaking, and event curation works foreground stories and portraits of urban Natives living in LA. This article examines her photographic and filmic works *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* (2014/2016) and *Real NDNz Re-Take Hollywood* (2016) with a spatiohistorical approach. I argue that Peters' works remap key locations for Indigenous history in Los Angeles, such as Union Station and Indian Alley, as well as their mediated relations with earlier films, especially Kent MacKenzie's *The Exiles* (1961), and the Hollywood film industry in different time periods. In addition, this essay emphasizes Peters' triangulating role as a media maker-curator-activist in

destabilizing the temporal-spatial logic embedded in quotidian violence against Native Americans in the settler colonial Los Angeles.

Hollywood as a major physical and imaginary site of Peters' works is at once placeless as a global media industry and deeply embedded in the local economies and infrastructures of Los Angeles and the broader Southern California. Union Station is a location of importance to Indigenous diasporas in Los Angeles as a portal through which many relocated Natives came through when first arrived in LA and a frequented transit hub between the city and reservations. It also plays a crucial role in film production, featured in Hollywood films such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) while hosting a variety of industry events from after parties (Los Angeles Conservancy; Kushigemachi) to the 2021 Academy Awards ceremony. Indian Alley in Los Angeles' Skid Row has been a key location for the urban Native community in LA since the late 1950s and 1960s, during which many Native Americans were relocated to major urban areas away from their reservations for forced assimilation.

The formation and development of Hollywood as the center of American film industry interconnects with the rapid expansion of American railroad networks of which the Pacific Electric Railway was a part, more than three decades before the opening of the Union Station in 1939. When writing about the Transcontinental Railroad, American Studies scholar Manu Karuka defines railroad colonialism as "territorial expansion through financial logics and corporate organization, using unfree imported laborers, blending the economic and military functions of the state, materializing in construction projects across in the colonized world" (xiv). If the railway networks served as infrastructures of colonial expansion, Hollywood studio networks benefited from infrastructural colonialism enabled by railway and, in turn, performed a kind of cultural colonialism that furthered the colonial modes of relationship via its transmissions of settler and imperialist logics.

The railway network and the motion picture industry have continued reproducing and replicating colonizing acts and violence. Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, in the essay "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," proposes the coloniality of power as the interlocking of numerous multivalent colonial mechanisms: reclassification of population, articulation of institutional structures, spatial redistribution, and epistemological redistribution. This concept is helpful for assessing the roles of specific locations and institutions such as Hollywood/the film industry and Union Station/the railway system in generating mechanisms that sustain settler

colonialism and reinforce a hegemony. These are two interconnected networks in the realm of cultural representations and that of the physical infrastructures that continue mobilized to adapt varying mechanisms of the very settler colonial structure across history into the present-day. Yet it is crucial to note that these locations are not static nor homogenous; they have also been sites of perseverance and joy despite the continuation of settler colonial practices. *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* very much emphasizes on the latter, claiming the survivance and vibrancy of the relocated Native community from the first generation to the present day.

As I will discuss in this article, spatiohistorical approach—a method anchored in the geographies and histories of a community—is core to Peters’ media practices vis-à-vis Hollywood, Union Station, and Indian Alley. Peters utilizes the process of mediamaking and its ability in community-formation and place-making to strengthen them as hubs for an intertribal, intergenerational urban Native community. Hollywood tends to be perceived as the center around which everything in Los Angeles revolves. Geographers Michael Storper and Susan Christopherson claims that although Hollywood’s production system went through a period of disintegration in the age of flexible post-Fordist age, the spatial concentration of labor persisted in the cluster around Hollywood. Geographer Allen J. Scott also observes the centripetal conjunction of economics and culture at the greater place of Hollywood including diverse industries like jewelry, fashion, furniture, and networks such as trade associations, craft schools, and award ceremonies. The concept of urban Native hub, on the contrary, challenges the assumed idea of Hollywood as the cultural-industrial center whereat agglomeration of labor, capital, and goods cluster. The settler colonial, capitalistic logic behind such conception of center/periphery forecloses other place-based communities and networks.

In the 2007 book *Native Hubs*, Ho-Chunk anthropologist Renya Ramirez builds on Paiute activist Laverne Roberts’s notion of the hub—a space that allows for the creation of a sense of belonging away from a geographic center—to inform a kind of urban Native resistance that are networked and fluid:

The hub suggests how landless Native Americans maintain a sense of connection to their tribal homelands and urban spaces through participation in cultural circuits and maintenance of social networks, as well as shared activity with other Native Americans in the city and on the reservation. Urban Indians create hubs through signs and behavior, such as phone calling, e-mailing, memory sharing, storytelling, ritual, music, style, Native banners, and other symbols. [...] Moreover, the hub as a cultural, social, and political

concept ultimately has the potential to strengthen Native identity and provide a sense of belonging, as well as to increase the political power of Native people

(Ramirez, 2007, 3).

Native hub-making is a part of the process that creates networked Indigenous knowledge systems as “the modes of communication and interaction between being occur in complex nonlinear forms, across time and space” per Nishnaabeg scholar-artist Leanne Betasamosak Simpson (23). Pascua Yaqui and Chicana communication scholar Marisa Elena Duarte presents in her 2017 book *Network Sovereignty* regarding how building Indigenous networks of informational and material infrastructures help exchange knowledge and strength communities to overcome settler colonial alienations and disconnections.

This article on Pamela J. Peters’ role in carrying on and co-creating crucial native hubs in Los Angeles builds upon the investment in networked Native intelligence by Indigenous scholars, activists, and art practitioners. As a Chinese immigrant settler scholar of film and media residing on the unceded Tongva land, I aim to contribute to the active documentation of continuous and growing Native diasporic hub in Los Angeles through the works of Peters and position her in relation to a long history of Indigenous women’s role in these networks as documented by Muscogee and Cherokee film scholar Jacob Floyd in “On Hollywood Boulevard: Native Community in Classical Hollywood” and Dakota and Apache American studies scholar Kiara M. Vigil in “Warrior Women: Recovering Indigenous Visions across Film and Activism.” Floyd recounts the significant role White Bird (Mary Simmons) plays in the historical Hollywood Indian community in the 1920s and early 1930s, operating community hubs for Native performers such as the American Indian Art Shop and the War Paint Club. Vigil conducts oral history with warrior women Sacheen Littlefeather (Apache) and Lois Red Elk (Fort Peck Sioux) and contextualizes their involvements from the late 1960s to the early 1980s with varying pan-tribal Native hubs in Hollywood like Indian Actors Workshop and the LA Indian Center.

Peters, as a current Diné resident in LA working in the entertainment and advocacy spheres, is continuing the transformative work of building and growing Native hubs at critical physical, cultural nodes like Union Station and the Indian Alley as local area networks to connect the new generation of LA urban Indians. As Vigil writes, “creating islands of Indigeneity outside of the spatial constructs of settler colonialism is essential to both survival and resurgence” for Native in diaspora (174). Peters’ works are historical documents and social commentaries that perform as

curated nodes in the Indigenous network, highlighting Native survivance, “an active sense of presence, the continuance of Native stories” per Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor (5), vis-à-vis pan-tribal Native hubs. This article offers one such reading of the Diné artist by focusing on her artistic, curatorial, and activist practices of Indigenous media- and place-making in LA through two main projects: *Real NDNz Re-Take Hollywood* and *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ*. I conduct textual and contextual analyses regarding how Peters practices an Indigenous spatiohistorical methodology that can destabilize the temporal and spatial logic embedded in quotidian violence against Native Americans in the settler colonial condition. Here, I borrow American Studies scholar Laura M. Furlan’s notion of “spatiohistorical practice” (214) considering temporal and spatial layers to examine how Peters engages with revision and curation to address the histories and afterlives of settler colonialism on Tongva land.

Peters grounds her works in the sociopolitical histories and geographies of the greater Los Angeles, the largest metropolitan region in the United States and the capital of global film and television industry. They can be seen as a continuation of minority storytelling arose from the late 1950s to the late 1970s via network news, public television, and independent collectives (Glick), mobilizing the affordances of various counter-Hollywood modes of storytelling—documentary, photography, poetry, and social media—to recuperate memories and sites critical to Native Americans living in Los Angeles. Peters engages with various levels of MediaSpace (Couldry and McCarthy) and is very deliberate with choosing different sites of production and exhibition. In examining Peters’ triangulating role as a media maker-curator-activist, I also consider her practice as an example of what curatorial activism looks like on the edge of institutional spaces of museums and galleries and beyond. Curatorial activism, proposed by scholar-curator Maura Reilly, refers to a kind of curatorial practice with a counter-hegemonic aim that gives voice to the silenced and omitted. Peters’ spatiohistorical thinking incorporates some strategies of resistance Reilly outlines—revisionism, area studies, and relational studies (23-33)—but also extends beyond the scale and scope of art and media practices. Peters holds a kind of decolonial curatorial thinking that interweaves these sites as spatial-temporal nodes to bring together multiple Indigenous histories and geographies in Los Angeles against the imposed settler colonial conception of time and space. Her works take part in the spatial turn in arts and humanities, which encourages us to think about the interdependence of histories and geographies, the complementarity of time and

place, the ongoing production of (colonial) space/relationships and spatial/racial capital (Wharf and Arias; Baker).

I continue this article with an overview of Peters' *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* and its mediated relations with Kent KacKenzie's *The Exiles* (1961). I then chart how Peters incorporates and carries on the history and survivance of Native diasporas in Los Angeles at hubs like Union Station and Indian Alley in her works with regards to production, exhibition, and curation. This is followed by a discussion of Peters' *Real NDNz Re-Take Hollywood* and its relationship to classic Hollywood stars and film production. My analysis then situates Peters in relation to previous generations of Indigenous women working in Hollywood who migrated and/or relocated to Los Angeles and actively carved out communal spaces that allow for reciprocal "development of relationships based on co-resistance" (Vigil 170). Through shedding lights on Diné artist Pamela J. Peters' practices, this essay calls for more scholarly and public engagement with contemporary Native artists and their active reworkings of Indigenous histories, criticisms of settler time-space, and maintenance of Native hubs.

***Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* (2014/2016): Union Station and Indian Alley**



Fig. 1 Seven Indigenous youths walking together down an alley off Main Street in downtown LA known as the Indian Alley, Source: *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ*

Legacy of Exiled NDNZ initially started as a photo series in 2014 and was expanded into a short documentary film in 2016. As the opening title card of the film suggests, this project seeks to capture the resilience of Native Americans albeit continuous settler colonial displacement. Soon after, drumbeats kick in and are accompanied by a montage of still photographs, mostly portraits, of Native Americans in traditional attires from Edward S. Curtis's ethnographic photography

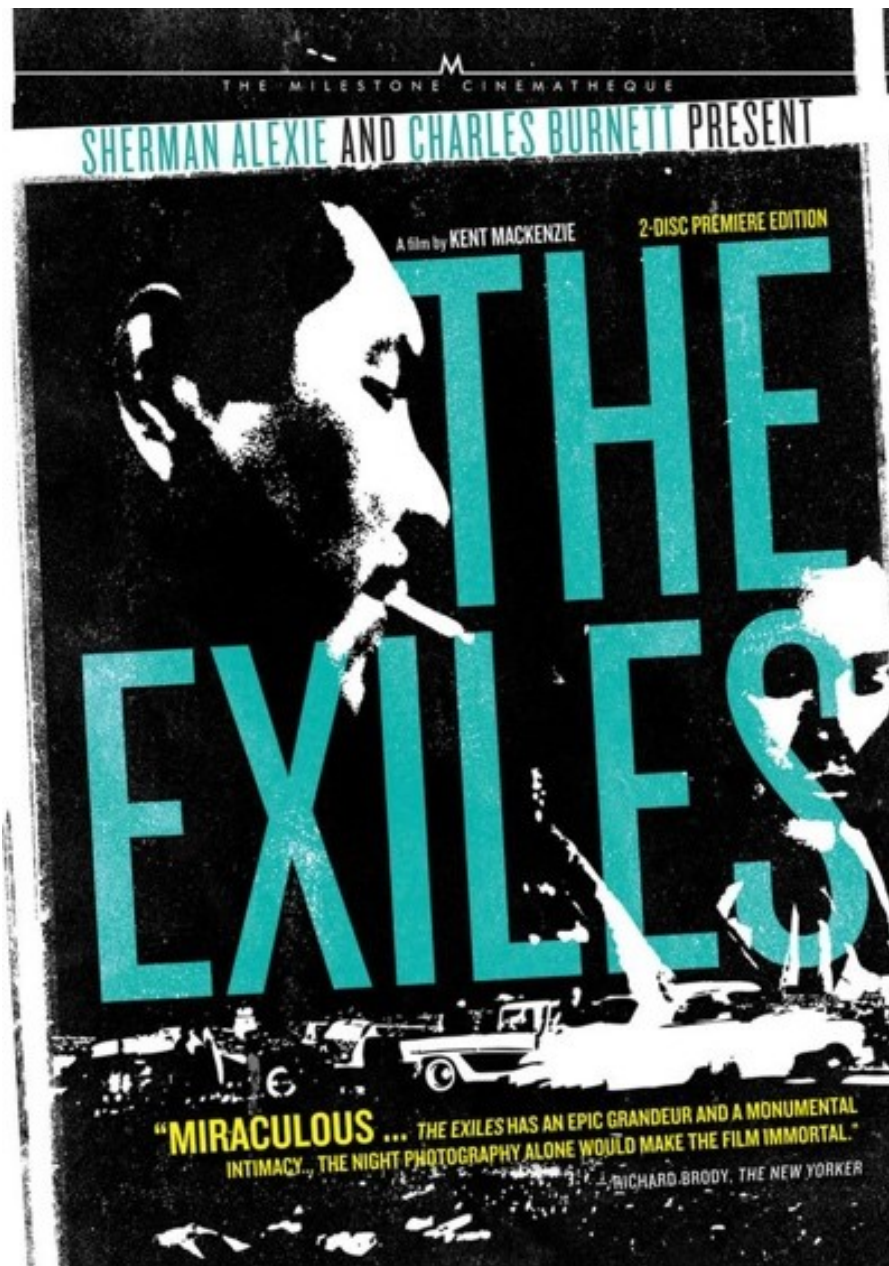


Fig. 2 Poster of Ken MacKenzie's *The Exiles* (1961), Source: Milestone Film¹

¹ From: "‘LEGACY OF EXILED NDNZ’ AND THE FILM THAT INSPIRED MY WORK — A GUEST BLOG BY PAMELA J. PETERS," Milestone Films blog, 27 November, 2017,

collection *The North American Indian*. During the montage sequence, there is a male voice-over narrating the long history of forced relocation. In the nineteenth century, Native American tribes were forcefully removed from their ancestral lands and relocated to territories later established as tribal reservations so that settlers could occupy lands they desire. In the mid-twentieth century, Native Americans were yet again targeted for relocation; this time from the reservations to the cities. This is when the montage cuts to a still image of a young, contemporary intertribal couple Vivian Garcia (Cherokee) and Tony Moran (Diné/Salvadorian), who are holding hands as they walk out of a train station tunnel at the Union Station with their luggage. This is followed by a montage of photos featuring this project's participants, which eventually freezes on an image [Fig. 1] of all the participants walking down the Indian Alley together, and the film title "Legacy of Exiled NDNZ" is introduced. The image, the title itself, and the design of the title all point to the direct influence Kent MacKenzie's 1961 film *The Exiles* [Fig. 2] has on this project, a film we will return to shortly.

Peters sees this project as paying tribute to the first generation of "relocated (exiled) Indians" in Los Angeles from the 1950s and 1960s as a result of the 1956 U.S. Indian Relocation Act (Peters, "Legacy of Exiled Ndnz"). In 1950, six years before the Relocation Act, the Navajo-Hopi Law was passed to fund a relocation program of tribe members to Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, and Denver. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) expanded the program in the following years, leading up to the passing of the Indian Relocation Act in 1956. As mentioned before, this program is yet another iteration of U.S. state-sponsored efforts at Americanization through forceful assimilation of Indigenous Americans and eradication of Native nations and cultures. Los Angeles has been one of the major destinations and tops the chart of U.S. cities with the largest Native population. Many first-generation relocated Indians in Los Angeles were young adults right out of boarding schools, where they had to undergo forced erasure of their Indigenous identities and disconnection from their tribes (Holmes).

Not shying away from calling out the Indian Relocation program as a state-sponsored migration by force, Peters chose the word "exiled" to describe the condition of relocated Indians in her title (Qtd. in Holmes). Peters comes from a family of migration herself; originally from the

<https://milestonefilms.com/blogs/news/legacy-of-exiled-ndnz-and-the-film-that-inspired-my-work-a-guest-blog-by-pamela-j-peters>, Accessed 20 October, 2019.

Navajo Nation, her parents migrated to various cities through the relocation program (Holmes). In 2013, she recruited seven young adults with various tribal affiliations who have migrated from their reservations or are the offspring of the relocated generation to capture the diverse and dynamic intertribal community of urban Natives in Los Angeles (Peters, “Legacy of Exiled Ndnz”). The project was conceived as a black-and-white photo series that seeks to re-stage and capture images representing American Indians in the Relocated Era at important sites in Downtown Los Angeles, including the Union Station, Bunker Hill, and the Indian Alley (Peters, “‘LEGACY OF EXILED NDNZ’ AND THE FILM THAT INSPIRED MY WORK”). The images [see Fig. 3 for example] stand out as they evoke the resilience and vibrancy of the relocated Indians community in creating new intertribal friendships and maintaining tribal kinships with reservation albeit the assimilation and isolation intended by the BIA.



Fig. 3 This photo was taken at Los Angeles Union Station with Spencer Battiest (Seminole/Choctaw), Vivian Garcia (Cherokee), Tony Moran (Diné/Salvadorian), Courtney Alex (Diné), Gladys Dakam (Lakota), Heather Singer (Diné) and Kenneth Ramos (Barona Band of Mission Indians), Source: Pamela J. Peters²

² From: “Legacy of Exiled Ndnz,” Pamela J. Peters website, N.d., <https://pamelajpeters.com/legacy-of-exiled-ndnz/>, accessed 14 June, 2019.

The short film version of the project, which utilizes behind-the-scenes footage from the two-day photo shoot, captures more moments of community formation and the inheritance of intergenerational histories. Peters interviewed these young participants about the Relocation program, their journeys to Los Angeles, and their connections to their tribal reservations (Peters, “‘LEGACY OF EXILED NDNZ’ AND THE FILM THAT INSPIRED MY WORK”). She also obtained a screener of *The Exiles* to show the participants and asked them to reflect on it. These parts—the interactions among intertribal youths, each participant’s personal and family histories, their observations on *The Exiles*, and the re-takes of certain scenes and characters in that film—are interspersed with actual clips from *The Exiles*. If the making of this documentary serves as a catalyst of the formation of a new intertribal community between the seven participants, the montage of these different elements blends cross-generational experiences of urban relocation together to be passed down to the future generations.

The Exiles claims to realistically capture the lives of a group of recently relocated young Native Americans from Arizona living in the Bunker Hill district of Los Angeles in around 1958, right after the passing of the 1956 Indian Relocation Act. This neorealistic docudrama chronicles a typical Friday night of an unmarried couple Yvonne Williams and Homer Nish in the late 1950s Los Angeles, representative of some of the major obstacles and issues relocated urban Natives face, including alienation, urban poverty, homelessness, alcohol addiction, and incarceration (Rosenthal 64). There are two main lines in the film: one follows Homer spending the night carousing at Indian bars drinking, dancing, and gambling before ending up on a hill for an after-hours gathering; another follows Yvonne walking in downtown, passing by the ascent of Angels Flight, Grand Central Market, window displays, and watching a movie in a theatre on the Main Street. Peters tends to incorporate and extend “classic” images through re-creation, whether they are portraits of classic Hollywood stars or shots from the now-considered American neorealist classic by MacKenzie. Not unsimilar to the retake in *Real NDNz Re-Take Hollywood*, Peters recreates moments in *The Exiles* with the current generation of urban Indigenous youths [See Fig. 4 and Fig. 5]. Cherokee historian Liza Black briefly positions *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* as Peters’s remake of *The Exiles* and claims that Peters has continued MacKenzie’s legacy to reveal Native survivance (177).³ Furlan examines *The Exiles* and *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* respectively in the

³ There are also scholars who hold an opposite opinion on *The Exiles*. For example, Southern Tsistsistas and Hinono’ei Indigenous and Settler Colonial Studies scholar Ho’esta Mo’e’hahne (Southern Tsistsistas and Hinono’ei) examines

introduction and the epilogues of *Indigenous cities*, concluding that Peters revises and reclaims stories of the current generation of urban youths in Los Angeles (214).



Figs. 4-5 Left: Courtney Alex (Diné) at the bottom resembles Yvonne Williams in *The Exiles*; Right: Spencer Battiest (Seminole/Choctaw) at the bottom channeling Homer Nish in *The Exiles*, Source: Pamela J. Peters⁴

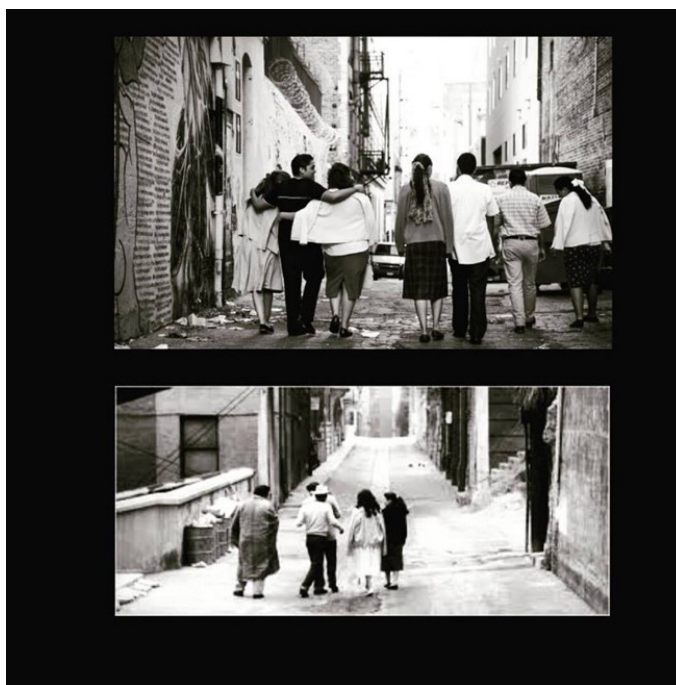
While acknowledging the importance of *The Exiles* to this project, I contend that it is limiting to frame discussions of *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* solely in relation to *The Exiles*. Engaging with *The Exiles*, in my opinion, is a way for Peters to explore spaces and histories of urban Native youths in Los Angeles both on-screen and off-screen. The core of the project is to capture, highlight, and pass down continuous relationships generations of urban Indians have held with locations of importance to the community. In Fig. 3, for example, we see a group of Indigenous youths connecting with each other after their arrivals at the Union Station, the central railway station in Los Angeles. While Mackenzie foregrounds driving and walking as the main modes of movement for newly relocated Native youths in downtown Los Angeles, Peter reveals the importance of the railway. Union Station has been the portal through which many relocated Natives came through when they first arrived in Los Angeles and the initial place where intertribal friendships were formed. By putting the spotlight on Union Station as a hub of transportations and a connector of cities and reservations, Peters presents a mobile and fluid relocated intertribal

The Exiles with close attention to Kent MacKenzie's self-theorization in his master thesis. Mo'e'hahne argues that the film "merely reworked tropes of Indigenous abjection drawn from colonial common sense and regimes of settler sexuality and mapped them onto the exemplary colonial geographies of the settler metropolis" (76).

⁴ From: "Legacy of Exiled Ndnz," N.d., <http://www.exiledndnz.com/>, accessed 14 June, 2019.

Native community in Los Angeles. Relocated Natives are not stuck in the city feeling hopeless; they are travelers between the city and their reservations, who actively maintain their ties with their tribes against settler colonial will as they move across “the lines between city and reservation, foreign and familiar, modern and traditional” (Furlan 217). For Peters, Union Station is both a filming location and a site of exhibition. Around two years after using the station as a shooting site, both the photographic and filmic portions of *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* was on exhibit there on September 25, 2015. The production and exhibition of *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* at this specific locale maps Native past/present/future onto the space and history of Union Station, opening up conversations around affirming continuous Indigenous struggles over geography/histories and imagining where futures lie for the urban Indians in Los Angeles.

Indian Alley, the unofficial name for a small backstreet south of Main Street [Fig. 6], is another essential location for Peters and the urban Native community in LA. Main Street is a



Figs. 6-7 Left: This photo was taken at the Indian Alley with Spencer Battiest (Seminole/Choctaw), Vivian Garcia (Cherokee), Tony Moran (Diné/Salvadorian), Courtney Alex (Diné), Gladys Dakam (Lakota), Heather Singer (Diné), and Kenneth Ramos (Barona Band of Mission Indians); **Right:** The same crew walking down the Indian Alley in *Legacy of the Exiled NDNZ* at the top, resembling Homer Nish and his friends walking down an alleyway in *The Exile* at the bottom, Source: Pamela J. Peters⁵

⁵ From: “Legacy of Exiled Ndnz,” Pamela J. Peters website, N.d., <https://pamelajpeters.com/legacy-of-exiled-ndnz/>, accessed 14 June, 2019; “Legacy of Exiled Ndnz,” N.d., <http://www.exiledndnz.com/>, accessed 14 June, 2019.



Fig. 8 Indian Alley in the early 1980s taken by unknown photographer, Source: Stephen Zeigler⁶



Fig. 9 Indian Alley in the early days of the United American Indian Involvement Center (UAI), Source: LA Time Archive⁷

⁶ From: "THE ARCANE HISTORY OF 118 WINSTON | PART II," *These Days*, 22 June, 2017, <https://www.thesedaysla.com/blogs/communique/the-arcane-history-of-118-winston-pt-2>, accessed 6 May, 2019.

⁷ From: "Skid Row's Indian Alley Adorned with Native Murals to Honor Tragic Past," *Indian Country Today*, 10 January, 2015, <https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/skid-row-s-indian-alley-adorned-with-native-murals-to-honor-tragic-past-R8CfwEqV9EuWeAsF3kDQ6g/>, accessed 1 May, 2019.

in downtown Los Angeles used to be populated by vintage movie palaces, where Yvonne went to watch a movie in *The Exiles*. Located at the back of Regent Theatre, a century-old movie theatre established in the 1914 that was reopened in late 2014 as a live performance space after renovation, Indian Alley is at the intersection of Winston Street and Werdin Place. The alley is right by 118 Winston Street, the original site of the United American Indian Involvement Center, Inc. (UAI) until 2000 and currently occupied by a gallery named These Days. UAI was established in 1973, four years after the release of *The Exiles*, by a Lakota woman Babba Cooper and a Paiute woman Marian Zucco to provide resources and services to members in need.

The alley has witnessed countless of despairs and hope, bruises and joys since the Relocation era. It has been the home for many homeless Natives and those struggling with addiction, the place where intertribal activities take place, and the hub for relocated Native Americans to bond and connect [Fig. 8]. The site today has been celebrated by a wide variety of street arts by Native and non-Native artists to commemorate, remember, revise, and reclaim the histories of Indigenous people in Los Angeles. The walls see the insurgence of Native street arts throughout decades and has become the studio for urban Indian artists [Fig. 9, Fig. 10, and Fig. 11]. Tongva artist River Tikwi Garza, for example, painted the mural “Tongva territory map” in 2018 which seeks to reclaim the land of Tongva at the Indian Alley, i.e., the heart of the Gabrielino-Tongva village named Yaangna (Torres, Alvitre, Fischer-Olson, Goeman, and Teeter), remapping the suppressed history of Southern California and Los Angeles basin Native Americans onto a physical urban site on the unceded Tongva land [Fig. 10]. Another example is the 2015 mural “War Paint” by Kiowa-Chotaw artist Steven Paul Judd that features the Indigenous practice of war painting, interestingly connected to the War Paint Club, an early Hollywood Indian hub that will be discussed in the next section [Fig. 11].

In *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ*, Peters carves out a place for the history of the alley with a simple yet important act, i.e., naming this site the “Indian Alley” by photoshopping this name on the street sign over what was supposedly Winston Street [Fig. 6]. If the iconic final scene of *The Exiles* where those who have been out carousing the whole night come back Bunker Hill and walk down the Indian Alley together suggests the potentiality of a new forming intertribal collectivity, the revised scene in *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ*—including all seven actors walk down the path together firmly and determinedly [Fig. 7]—shows the strengthening of the urban Native collectivity and that the history and space of this alley is and continue will be central to such

formation and expansion of the community. Peters films many of her interviews with the seven participants in front of different Native murals at the Indian Alley. As these young urban Native Americans recount their family histories and how they remain strong ties to their respective tribes and ancestral lands, their bodies and experiences are folded into the locale of the Indian Alley through the process of filming, archived and mediated via screenings and exhibitions. That is, Peters constructs a dialogic time-space or “chronotope” through piecing together polyphonic memories and experiences (Bakhtin). Since *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ*, Peters has continued working at and with Indian Alley as a site. With the help of six Native American mural artists, Peters directed and produced a short documentary titled *Indian Alley*. Released in early 2021, this short film builds upon *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* to share the history of the alley and of American Indians in Los Angeles with a broader audience.



Figs. 10-11 Left: Tongva artist River Tikwi Garza’s mural at the Indian Alley, Source: River Garza⁸; Right: Kiowa-Chotaw artist Steven Paul, Judd completing his mural at the Indian Alley, Source: Pamela J. Peters⁹

Like Union Station, Indian Alley exists as beyond a filming location for Peters. She has chosen These Days, the gallery at the original site of UAII and at the end of the alley, as her premiere location. Her 2014 solo exhibit *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ*, 2016 solo exhibit *Real NDNZ* *Re-Take Hollywood*, and 2019 poetry event *Waging Words* all took place at 118 Winston Street.

⁸ From: “2018 Archive,” 2018, River Garza’s website, <https://www.rivergarza.com/5156898-2018>, accessed 17 May, 2019.

⁹ From: “Skid Row’s Indian Alley Adorned with Native Murals to Honor Tragic Past,” *Indian Country Today*, 10 January, 2015, <https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/skid-row-s-indian-alley-adorned-with-native-murals-to-honor-tragic-past-R8CfwEqV9EuWeAsF3kDQ6g/>, accessed 1 May, 2019.

On July 28, 2019, I attended *Waging Words* curated by Peters in conjunction with the closing of Jemez Pueblo artist Jacque Fragua's solo exhibit *Gun Show* at These Days. The event starred three young Native American women artists—who are from, based in, or have other forms of connections with the greater Los Angeles area—performing their poems: Cahuilla Native American writer-activist-artist Emily Clarke, Diné poet-activist Kinsale Hueston, and performance poet turned director and television writer Tazbah Rose Chavez from the Bishop Paiute Tribe. After the event, Peters gave a tour on the history of Indian Alley. While Peters is not the feature of *Waging Words*, her role as a “curatorial activist,” who “level[s] hierarchies, challenge[s] assumptions, counter[s] erasure, [...], disseminate[s] new knowledge, and encourage[s] strategies of resistance,” shines through (Reilly 22).

I find Reilly's discussions on curatorial strategies helpful in considering Peters' media praxis. A revisionist approach is cited as the most used counter-hegemonic strategy through which the concealed are revealed, the suppressed are reclaimed (Rich; Reilly). *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ*, for instance, uncovers the history of relocated American Indians as what the official history of Los Angeles has neglected, hoping to integrate it into the recognized history. *Real NDNZ Re-Take Hollywood* is different in that, instead of uplifting the forgotten Native American Hollywood stars in history, it is a speculative attempt to map Native American performers onto the Hollywood stardom. In both cases, critical gaps in the canon/history/archive are being filled in; yet these revisions alone are rather reformist and impossible to accomplish in that they barely grapple with and are not able to subvert the system that conditions the neglects (Pollack). Revisionism, however, is not and shall not be the only employed device of resistance. Reilly suggests an area-studies framework—carving out specific spaces to exhibit works by minority artists—as a specialist circumvention or “curatorial correctives” to increase their visibility (27). It is related to Peters's choice to premiere her solo exhibitions at These Days, a gallery that prides itself as prioritizing nonconformist creations and honoring the history of its location. Another tactic is the relational method, which exceeds the additive approach through the dialogic interplay of varied positions and contested practices (Shoat; Reilly). This can be found in the way Peters interweaves different media texts, intergenerational memories, and polyphonic voices in *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ*.

Reilly focuses on ground-breaking large-scale exhibitions at major museums in her formulation of curatorial activism. However, Peters works at a completely different scale and site as both an artist and a curator-activist. Although her photographic works are often displayed

relationally to other artists' works in group exhibitions specialized on Native American arts, these exhibits tend to be at smaller local museums and community centers. Similarly, her films—*Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* and the most recent *Indian Alley*—are not screened in major festivals by the industry's standard but a part of the Indigenous film circuit through places like the American Indian Film Festival, the L.A. Skins Fest, and the San Diego American Indian Film Festival. Neither is Peters an art curator-proper; rather, she is more of a community curator who programs events for different institutions, including independent galleries like These Days, regional museums like the Autry Museum of the American West, and academic institutions like the UCLA American Indian Research Center. By considering Peters' practices of/as curatorial activism, this essay sees the need to locate artistic-curatorial-activist possibilities at the periphery and outside of official, institutionalized art spaces. That is, sites of curatorial activism can and often do break from established nodes and networks within art and film industries that are meant for taste-making and gatekeeping.

Real NDNz Re-Take Hollywood (2016): Hollywood and Beyond



Figs. 12-13 Shayna Jackson (Cree/Dakota) poses as Audrey Hepburn, Source: Pamela J. Peters¹⁰

In her 2016 photo series *Real NDNz Re-Take Hollywood*, Peters recreated “iconic” black-and-white studio portraits of “classic” Hollywood stars in the 1950s and 1960s with seven young Native American actors currently pursuing a career in Hollywood (Peters, “Real NDNZ Re-Take

¹⁰ From: “Real Ndnz Re-Take Hollywood,” N.d., <http://www.realndnz.com/>, accessed 14 June, 2019.

Hollywood”). They confidently reembody old Hollywood glamor in familiar poses and outfits resembling those of Audrey Hepburn, James Dean, and Jane Russell among others. Cree and Dakota actress Shayna Jackson, for example, takes on the challenge of playing Hepburn. In one photo [Fig. 12], she is styled as Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961) in a sleeveless black gown with pearl necklace, opera gloves, and a tiara. In another photo [Fig. 13], Jackson assembles Sabrina Fairchild in *Sabrina* (1954), wearing tight-fitting black top and pants while sitting on her side supported with both hands. Peters claims that she is motivated to create opportunities for Indigenous actors to be seen as actors and even icons, contra how they have historically worked as extras “playing Indians” in the Western genre (Qtd. in Lynn).

Peters is critical of the stereotypical, harmful representation of Native Americans in Hollywood cinema via “a white lens” as “ethnographic ephemera” (Qtd. in Thompson). *Real NDNz Re-Take Hollywood* is an attempt to unsettle the settler colonial public imagination of a static and savage Indian that has been ancestralized as “relics of the past” in the general mediascape (Peters, “Real NDNZ Re-Take Hollywood”). Peters puts Indigenous actors in the spotlight and presents them in “more dignified and more contemporary” way other than in buckskin, feathers, or painted faces (Qtd. in Cram). Peters’ “Indigenous-aesthetic lens” as manifested in this project is complicated (Qtd. in Thompson). Terms like “Re-take” and “recreate” encompass both critique of and accomplice with the system of question. Grew up watching Western movies with her father on the television, Peters holds a “negotiated position” that is simultaneously critical of Hollywood’s portrayal of Native cultures and a fan of classic Hollywood (Hall 137).

Clint Eastwood’s revisionist Western *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) is noted as an impactful film for Peters as a child, as she was astonished by seeing Diné actress Geraldine Keams speaking Navajo on the screen (Qtd. in Cram). The intergenerational connections between today’s Native American actors in Hollywood and those from previous generations are not explored in *Real NDNz Re-Take Hollywood*. Instead, these seven young Indigenous actors occupy the role of “iconic” Hollywood stars via verisimilitude. Peters was inspired by the resemblance between these actors and “their celebrity doppelgangers” (Lynn) and how each of them “could be a Hollywood star” (Qtd. in Lynn) in a speculative revisionist sense. Spectators are confronted with who can and cannot be an “icon” and “Hollywood star” in the process of assessing the re-takes by constantly comparing the Indigenous actors with star images they play as their Native bodies enter a traditionally white space like the American star system. This is an interesting reversal process that

calls attention to the “invisibility of whiteness” considering the long history of white actors playing Native Americans in Western films without being questioned (Dyer, *White 3*).



Figs. 14-15 Left: JaNae Collins (Crow/Dakota) channeling Jane Russell; Right: Krista Hazelwood (Seminole) poses as Eartha Kitt, Source: Pamela J. Peters¹¹

This project also elicits concerns around the role publicity plays in the construct and maintenance of Hollywood celebrity (Pullen). Crow and Dakota actress JaNae Collins, for instance, poses as Jane Russell, who has been regarded as a sex symbol even before her debut as Rio McDonald in Howard Hughes’s *The Outlaw* (1943) [Fig. 14]. In 1941, two years before the film’s release, Hughes had *Life* magazine run a three-page feature on Russell as a rising film star. The photo essay draws attention to Russell’s physical attributes and personality, laying the foundation for her highly sexualized performance role and star image (Pullen). By 1945, two years after her debut, publicity photographs of Russell had appeared in dozens of magazines (Pullen). In comparison, Indigenous actors like Collins rarely have enough access and support on the publicity end. As such, we need to examine the function Peters might serve as a photographer of the community of Indigenous actors and other artists in Hollywood considering the importance of

¹¹ From: “Classic Hollywood images of Native American actresses in Los Angeles,” 29 July, 2016, <https://pamelajpeters.com/2016/07/29/reimagining-classic-hollywood-portraits-with-native-american-actors-living-in-los-angeles-today/>, accessed 14 June, 2019.

publicity and marketing materials. What might these Indigenous actors gain by having photos in their portfolios that showcases their resemblance to iconic Hollywood stars?

Yet the project lacks in unpacking Hollywood's engineering of star images mobilizing whiteness (Loyo) and settler logics. Eartha Kitt, known as the first Black Catwoman, is the only non-white Hollywood star being re-channelled, through Seminole actress Krista Hazelwood [Fig. 15]. Peters has not addressed the role of race in the re-take of Kitt's portrait in which her Blackness is erased. In this context, Peters' reconstruction of Hollywood stardom with Native American actors does not escape the naturalization and mobilization of whiteness in the engineering of celebrity and iconography. Back to Jane Russell, who plays the famous white frontier woman Calamity Jane in *The Paleface* (1948), a historical figure who was involved in many white settler colonialist military campaigns against Native Americans in the Great Plains (Burk; McCormick). Not to equate the characters an actor plays with the actor themselves, but the roles they play are integral to the construction of their stardom. In the project description, Peters does not claim to revise portraits of white settlers; instead, the "iconic" status of these images is assumed and continued. In this light, what might it mean to "re-take" these "classic" images of Hollywood stars with Indigenous bodies?

On the surface, the photo series does not appear to question the exploited nature of classic Hollywood stardom as a mode of production (Staiger), a system of capitalist production (Dyer, *Stars*). It seems to put forward a reformist act like #OscarTooWhite for an alternative star system that would have allowed for more inclusive on-screen representations rather than abolishing the extractive industry altogether. However, there are many possibilities in interpreting this series to more yield fruitful conversations. I seek to draw attention to Peters' nuanced positions vis-à-vis Hollywood as a photographer, filmmaker, industry assistant and consultant, and how her positionalities as a mediamaker, curator, and activist might inform us ways to engage with her larger body of work. This essay further speaks to the intergenerational building of Indigenous resistance in Hollywood and Los Angeles despite the repetition of discriminatory workplace condition and precarious job prospectus for Native workers in media and entertainment.

Besides shedding lights on the importance of Union Station and Indian Alley to Peters' spatiohistorical approach to mediamaking and hubmaking as in the previous section, it is also important to situate her within the history of intertribal community/network-building in Hollywood. As a multimedia artist, Peters brings together young Native American creative talents

pursuing works in the film and media industry through photoshoots and the filming process of her independent creative projects. Peters also has more than ten years of experience in the entertainment business as an executive assistant, a script and talent consultant, and a casting director. Her role as a cultural consultant for HBO, FX, Comedy Central, and MTV with the mission to “reshape perceptions of modern Indians today” (“Real NDNZ Re-Take Hollywood”) is not dissimilar to that of Oglala activist and actor Luther Standing Bear as Cecil B. DeMille’s consultant in early Hollywood. Peters is aware that she and the Native talents she uplifts are a part of the long history of Indigenous involvement in Hollywood.

While the first-generation relocated Native Americans generally refer to those who migrated to cities due to the 1956 Indian Relocation Act, the first major migration of Native Americans to Los Angeles occurred decades ago. As the motion picture industry moved to the Southern California by the early 1910s, Hollywood rose as the new center for this burgeoning field of production and LA attracted a significant number of Great Plains Indians to partake in the rapid development of the extremely popular genre of Western films (Rosenthal; Raheja). Almost all the studios were actively hiring Indigenous performers, entertainers, stunt persons, and technical advisors. Some Native Americans, for example, found themselves working at Inceville. Established in 1911 by film mogul Thomas H. Ince, Inceville was located at the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Pacific Coast Highway. The studio provided temporary housing in a “teepee village” for seven hundred film crews and cast at its peak; many were Indigenous performers for Wild West shows who moved to Hollywood to work as extras in Ince’s Western films, and they became known as the “Inceville Indians” (Smith). These performers often found themselves in stereotypical tropes and uncredited roles that contributed to the paradox of Native American being at once hyper-visible and invisible, mass-mediated yet deemed “threatening, excessive, savage, and less-than-human” (Raheja xii). They sought after various subtle forms of resistance to reconcile the contradictions between the freedoms and the limitations despite the circumstances, carving out what Raheja coined as a “virtual reservation” through the liminal, imagined, and imaginative space of the cinema (9). Native Americans participating in the early film industry were not purely the victims but were also “active agents” who have “intervened in the public sphere via the medium of film and visual culture” (5).

On top of cinematic existence, there was also the formation of the “DeMille Indians” as Hollywood rose, a transnational Hollywood Indian community working to claim social and

cultural space of Native people in Los Angeles (Rosenthal 34). A 1940 petition, organized by Chief Thunder Cloud, called for the recognition of a Native American tribe to be named the “DeMille Indians” whose membership was not based on blood but profession affiliation living on the same soil (Raheja 1-3). It was an explicit example of urban and professional Native identity-formation and place-making that carves out a time-space that allow for care and resistance. The DeMille Indians attempted to repair on-screen Native representations and fought against exploitative studio labor practices in the colonial system of Hollywood albeit the tremendous pressures for them to conform. Their resistance consistently addressed both “immediate material conditions in Hollywood” and “wider issues of community development, federal Indian policy, and cultural identity” (Rosenthal 43-44). The War Paint Club, for instance, was an organization formed by Native actors in 1926 to protect their rights and to establish a network of Indigenous film actors to intervene in Indian representations. The War Paint Club gave way to the Indian Actors Association (IAA) affiliated with the Screen Actors’ Guild in 1936, fighting for better salaries and working conditions for Native actors. They also functioned as a support group for unemployed Indigenous actors, providing them funds via membership fees and money raised from powwows and large parties throughout the city (Rosenthal 44; Smith).

Muscogee and Cherokee film scholar Jacob Floyd writes about the role of White Bird (Mary Simmons), wife of Chief Yowlachie (Daniel Simmons), in operating critical Hollywood Indian hubs at their home and her American Indian Art shop in the mid-to-late 1920s and the 1930s, where at the War Paint Club was based (165). Baffled by casting directors’ claim of not able to find Native actors in Hollywood as an excuse for the common practice of redfacing, White Bird took it upon herself to cast actual Indigenous actors for an upcoming feature. After finding out that many Native talents are disadvantaged by limited access to telephones and frequent changes of address, “she built up a list of active telephone numbers and a ‘scout’ system for reaching those who had no telephone” (Werner 30). White Bird essentially worked as a casting director (one of the many hats Peters also wear), which is a pillar to the primary function of the War Paint Club “to assist Native actors within the industry, to operate as a casting agency for Native talent” (Floyd 166).

A few decades later in 1968, warrior woman Red Elk arrived in LA through the federal Indian Relocation program. Her story is recently unearthed by Dakota and Apache American studies scholar Kiara M. Vigil via oral history. Critical of the relocation process as a kind of forced

assimilation, Red Elk “found community through singing and dancing on the weekends with other Natives in Los Angeles” (173) as captured in *The Exiles*. Red Elk worked in the entertainment industry in the late 1960s till 1983 as a radio and talk show host, actor, and a technical advisor (173). As an advisor, Red Elk intervened in Hollywood’s harmful construction Native characters and narratives by talking to directors and producers and helping them realize issues with their depictions (173-4). Beyond the entertainment industry, Red Elk was active with the LA Indian Center, a hub for the pan-tribal community in LA to organize powwows and health services in the 1960s and 1970s (173).

I position Peters as carrying on the work of White Bird and Red Elk among many other Indigenous women in Hollywood who juggles multiple creative projects while performing feminized and often devalued work of providing consultations and forging connections. As an active albeit marginal participant in the global Hollywood enterprise, Peters pushes for better on-screen representations of Native Americans and more job opportunities for Native talents through her many industry jobs and independent creative projects. Through *Real NDNZ Re-Take Hollywood*, for example, Peters resists in the space of visual imaginaries by re-taking American Indian actors—who tend to be hired as extras—as Hollywood stars in portrait photographs. Who could be stars? What Native representation could look like? What kinds of role Native American actors could play? Displayed in an exhibit setting and further circulated on the Internet, these images might pique the interest from a wider audience due to their resemblance to familiar Hollywood iconography. The project can be seen as a visual strategy to invite more public engagement through which settler perception and imagination of Native Americans can be challenged. These photographs are not only art objects and cultural artifacts that encapsulate a social critique of Hollywood’s settler logic; they also double as functional items that can be included in each of these young Native talents’ acting portfolio. Although not a large-scale collective approach like the formation of the DeMille Indians and the War Paint Club, Peters brings a small group of Indigenous talents together through the process of co-creation. Peters is also anchoring the production and exhibition of her multimedia projects at Native hubs such as Indian Alley and Union Station. Such alignment is crucial in establishing intertribal communities beyond the entertainment sector and ensuring that media creation and curation are at once drawing from the urban Native history and feeding back into the continuance and strengthening of the Indigenous network of community and knowledge in Los Angeles.

Conclusion

At the end of this essay, I want to bring up Peters' 2019 collaborative project *Welcome to Tovaangar* with Tongva artist River Tikwi Garza. Tongva people has been indigenous to and stewarded the Los Angeles Basin for seven thousand years (Gabrielino-Tongva Indian Tribe; *Tongva People*). *Welcome to Tovaangar* features photos of Native Americans from various tribes holding a car plate with "Welcome to Tovaangar" words against a light blue background that is a reference to Garza's mural art—a Tongva territory map—at the Indian Alley. Photos are taken at sites around Los Angeles such as downtown— where the Gabrielino-Tongva village Yaangna located—and the huge land-grant public institute University of California, Los Angeles that is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of Tongva people. While I will not discuss here in detail, the collaboration between Peters as a relocated Native artist and Garza as a Tongva artist is fascinating and worthy of dedication of further examination in future research. Such dynamic is also reflected in the photos themselves, speaking to the complexity within the urban Native community network, and the relationship between Native American migrants in Los Angeles and those from tribes indigenous to the Los Angeles basin.

Cheyenne geographer Annita Hetoevêhotohke'e Lucchesi perfectly recaptures Edward Said's discussion in *Culture and Imperialism*: "struggles over geography are also struggles over representation and imaginations of the land and the people that belong to it—or, in Western thought, to whom the land belongs" (11). The two projects I focus on in this paper, i.e., *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* and *Real NDNZ Re-Take Hollywood*, are not as direct about reclaiming Indigenous spaces (except for the photoshopped "Indian Alley" sign) as *Welcome to Tovaangar* or Garza's Tongva territory map. Yet they do document how specific locations and their histories are being represented, imagined, and centered as key Native hubs. While Peters is not a cartographer, she actively engages in the long-term process of demonstrating how the history of Los Angeles and of Hollywood can be told through an Indigenous spatiohistorical practice that remaps sites and stories of the intertribal urban Native community. Moreover, the making of *Legacy of Exiled NDNZ* itself is a process of rediscovering and reclaiming family history for participants who are decedents of relocated Indians whereas *Real NDNZ Re-Take Hollywood* provides a space for speculative reimagination of what Hollywood could be like if the history of Natives in Hollywood is taken seriously. Peters further the process of Indigenous remapping and hub-making by centering spaces and places with significant Native history in the process of multimedia production, exhibition, and

curation. Together, they transmit networked intertribal knowledge and intergenerational memories to be carried on in the ever-growing and expanding urban Indigenous hubs in Los Angeles.

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