

AT THE HEART OF THE REVOLUTION: POLITICAL LOVE AS PARADIGM SHIFT

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For many recent mobilizations and fronts of struggle, “love” serves as a primary motivational frame, which fall into four major categories: love of self, love of others, love of the Earth, and love as the revolution itself. While the exact definitions vary across movements, for all, love is seen as a strategic, powerful, transformational—and, importantly, actionable—form of resistance to oppressive, hegemonic systems and modes of thought. And, in most general terms, love can be loosely thought of as quasi-synonymous with “empathy” and rooted in a sense of interconnectedness and common cause in each of these contexts. Although there are several currents contributing to the formation and adoption of these frames, evidence further suggests that contemporary political love reflects an important break from the geoculture of capitalism within the Left since the financial collapse in 2008 and due to mounting fears over climate collapse in recent years. Through a mixed methods analysis, this study explores this shift via examination of the many meanings and significance of political love across contemporary movements.

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I. INTRODUCTION: (POLITICAL) LOVE IS IN THE AIR

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality . . . We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity will be transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force.

— Che Guevara

During an anarchist strategy and theory intensive that was hosted by the Institute for Social Ecology in January 2012, one of the instructors asked the class—largely comprised of young, newly radicalized Occupy Wall Street activists—what they defined as guiding revolutionary principles. Given that she was a longtime student and follower of anarchist, Murray Bookchin, and had been a dedicated participant in the eco-feminist movement in the 1970s, she likely anticipated that the students would respond with answers like “direct democracy,” “non-hierarchy” or “egalitarianism.” Instead, the resounding answer was “love.” Visibly startled, she pushed back and stated that love was an emotion, but not an organizing principle. The students, however, did not back down and instead aggressively averred that love was the basis for the revolution that they sought to make.

In fact, while the media focused on the contentious “us versus them” messaging of the Occupy Movement’s infamous motto, “We are the 99%,” there was another common motto among occupiers, “We are the 100% and we love you.” As a participant in the movement, this discrepancy piqued my curiosity and I began to informally keep an eye out for “love” in other activist spaces and movements as well. What I discovered is that it was practically impossible *not* to find references to love. Quotes by bell hooks on love were being widely shared by activists of all political stripes via Facebook memes. Leading political theorists and public intellectuals like Žižek and Hardt were lecturing on it. Several online progressive journals such as *Yes! Magazine* and *Feminist Wire* and *Open Democracy* came out with special series focusing on love and activism. Comedian superstar,

Russell Brand, had even given a BBC interview about the “loving revolution” that went viral. Moreover, it was showing up across the spectrum of contemporary movements—from climate activism to immigrant rights to racial justice and even the Spanish Indignados. Political love appeared to be in the air.

In light of all this, I found myself puzzling over what might account for so much talk of “revolutionary love” in such a range of movements. Needless to say, love as a political concept is not anything terribly new. The flower children of the hippy counterculture are known for their emphasis on love—or perhaps, more accurately, emphasis on free love. MLK Jr. preached on the need to “love thy enemies” as part of the strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience within the Civil Rights Movement. And one can find ready examples of messages of love on the Left dating back to the nineteenth century Christian socialist communitarian experiments. Yet, it seemed to me important to specifically understand the message of “love” within the context of contemporary movement spaces.

To begin with, it is necessary to do so, if simply, for the fact that it has been almost entirely ignored by both the media (who continue to prefer contentious, violent clashes in their stories covering movements) as well as by contemporary scholars. Especially given the uptick of interest in emotions and movements in recent years, the question then becomes, why are movement scholars *not* looking at it? Certainly, there are plenty of plausible reasons as to why theorists have failed to look at political love some of which I briefly explore later in this paper. For now, the more pressing question is; why *ought* they look into it? Indeed, the absence of movement scholarship and theory related to political love creates a critical gap in our knowledge of contemporary movements and the most recent cycle of contention and activism that has come since.

Consequently, I decided to undertake the issue of “understanding contemporary political love” in a more formal capacity through a study “mapping” the discursive use, meaning, and significance of love across movements as a departure point for better theorizing love in contemporary scholarship. More specifically, I sought to explore what political love means among different fronts of struggle, during and since, the most recent cycle of contention—ie. how are different movements discursively using the term and what are the ways they are suggesting it be put into practice? Are there connections and/or differences in these meanings? And are the specific world-historical contexts informing these different understandings of political love?

This paper showcases some of the findings of this investigation. First and foremost, as the idea of “political love” remains an under-studied and under-theorized area within social movement scholarship, throughout, I propose several ways that may contribute to advancing sociological thinking about its relevance that both builds on existing literature and calls for new directions in research and theory. The paper also provides an overview of how contemporary movements define love as a form of radical resistance and revolutionary practice. Ultimately, I suggest some of the possible significance of these meanings for understanding contemporary activism and the current world-historical moment.

I begin by exploring how for many recent mobilizations and fronts of struggle—from the Occupy Movement to racial justice, indigenous rights and climate activism, among others— “love” serves as motivational frame. Broadly speaking, these definitions of love fall into four related yet distinct categories—transformation of relationships to others, transformation of relationship to self, transformation of relationship to the environment, and revolutionary transformation itself. Furthermore, in most general terms, love can be loosely thought of as quasi-synonymous with “empathy” and rooted in a sense of interconnectedness and common cause between all people and the earth in each of these contexts.

This is not a matter of paying lip service to revolutionary love. Rather, while the exact meanings and schools of thought informing these diverse movements vary, for all, love is seen as a strategic, powerful, transformational—and, importantly, actionable—form of resistance to oppressive, hegemonic systems and modes of thought. For this reason, I also detail at greater length some of the more commonly expressed attributes of political love as a radical practice. The real task at hand, however, is unpacking *why* these various movements are appealing to and conceiving of love as such a potent force for radical social change. Consequently, in the latter part of the paper, I shift attention to examining some of the major currents and trends in recent mobilizations that are infusing movements with a language and praxis of love (and the ways they speak to the world-historical moment) such as: 1) crisis and collapse, 2) spiritually-motivated activism and nonviolence, 3) anarchism and prefigurative politics 4) indigeneity and decolonial thought 5) black feminism and the feminist ethic of care and 6) affect theory and the intellectual Left.

More than this, however, evidence from the study suggests that contemporary political love reflects an important break from the geoculture of capitalism. In short, the prevalence of “love” in

movements points to a re-imagining of a new moral economy and emergence of “loving” subjectivities who reject-market logic and seek to reclaim their common humanity, by radically re-making the world along more equitable, cooperative, and empathetic lines. Moreover, this indicates not only a shift in values, but also a sense that doing so is a much needed survival strategy as activists have come to perceive their struggles as interdependent. This fissure can be considered a counterhegemonic and anti-systemic current within the Left, which has grown more pronounced since the financial crisis in 2008 and due to augmenting fears over climate collapse in recent years. And so, in essence, I close with by arguing that the salience of political love for contemporary movements represents nothing short of paradigm shift.

A. ON METHODS AND MAPPING: CODING POLITICAL LOVE

In order to “map” the discursive use, meaning, and significance of love across movements, I combined my inside knowledge as a movement participant with an inductive process based in theoretical sampling content analysis of nearly 400 sources, which I identified by casting a wide net to a variety of the major online activist news sites representing numerous movements and progressive and radical Left political positions using. In addition, it has been through ongoing involvement in several activist networks¹—including both on-the-ground projects as well as online communities such as listservs and social media sites (Facebook, Twitter)—from which I culled these sources and that reflect the issues, conversations and articles receiving attention within these movement spaces. Then, based on these findings, I looked further into particular movements or themes until it was clear I had exhausted new possible avenues. For each of these sites, I did a keyword search for positive hits on the term “love” dating back to 2009 when the Great recession

¹ These activist networks are comprised of former “occupiers” and current participants in a wide variety of social movements (eg. environmental justice, immigrant and gay rights, labor, racial justice, affordable housing and local-level community organizing) and representing a broad spectrum of “left”-leaning political positions such as anarchism, socialism, communism and progressivism.

had begun to take full effect and, consequently, a logical starting point for exploring the most recent cycle of contention.²

Based on preliminary research, it also seemed necessary to search related terms including “empathy,” “mutual aid,” “cooperation” and “solidarity” as a way to clarify how different actors may be expressing similar sentiments, but are not necessarily employing the word “love.” In some instances, I have also had to look at movement specific and general news sites when there has not been enough coverage elsewhere. And I received daily Google alerts for “love and activism,” “love and radical,” “love and movement,” and “love and revolution” from October 2013 to December 2014. Some articles have also come to my attention through activists and colleagues who sent them to me directly. Along with the discursive content of news articles, I have also specifically taken note of visual content represented in these media, including protests signs, banners, ephemera and other digitally mimetic images that have wide or viral circulation within activist communities. See the Appendix for a list of online sources (news aggregators, journals, blogs, and sites) that I examined.

It should be noted, that there are some noticeable limitations to this approach. To begin with, it seems that it may be wise to consider looking at how movements on the Right are using the term for comparative purposes. Evidence suggests that there is even connection across them. (For example, the Ron Paul “Revolution” campaign image, which emphasizes “love” in the word has also been widely used by the Left and is featured in the paper.) And given the role of twitter as a platform for dialogue among activist across networks, it is also important to include keyword searches for hashtagged conversations on twitter such as #occupylove; #love #social justice, which I have not done here.

There is also necessarily a difference between what it is getting officially published and circulated by activist journals and what they are saying in more informal forums or face-to-face conversations. Moreover, although many (if not most) of the authors and editors are themselves activists or associated with the movements they are writing about, this does not always imply that their perspectives represent the views of other participants. One possible way to surmount this issue and to verify the degree to which activists-at-large support the views presented in the articles is to track

² Occasionally, I have also gone as far as 2001, as a way to double check this periodization and confirm my hypothesis that there is a relationship between the Financial Crisis and the rise of political love as a response to the failures of capitalism. Indeed, there also appeared to be a brief flurry of activist publications referencing love, only these were largely in relation to 9/11 and overcoming racial targeting.

the number of “likes” they get, how many times they are shared or re-posted, or to read the comments. Yet, comment sections are often closed or are themselves largely comprised of “outlier” and extreme perspectives.³ Related to this, not all activists use online and print forums as a way to communicate their messages or discuss their movements among one another. In particular, movements that reflect cultures where there is a tradition of oral testimony (for instance, Indigenous rights), or in cases when there may be limited access to digital media (say, poor people’s movements), this may lead to underrepresentation within my sampling. So, although I have specifically endeavored to ensure inclusion of voices from across the major contemporary movements and to compensate where there appeared to be deficiencies, this kind of limitation needs to be acknowledged.

Another challenge is that often in the aggregate news sites, it can be difficult to deduce the political position of the author. This, in fact, may in itself point to an interesting observation, as many currents of thought are circulating across movements. Even so, it remains problematic within the context of a project seeking to map out differences, similarities and connections of the meanings of love among movements. In addition, what I am able to find on each site through keyword analysis may be enhanced or impaired by how a site’s search function works and how extensive the cache of archived articles is. Needless to say, perhaps the best approach to mapping political would be to conduct a mixed-methods study that also includes a widely-distributed survey and targeted follow-up interviews along with the content analysis. While beyond the scope of this study, it is certainly an investigation that might bear real theoretical fruit. And, finally, there is the obvious constraint of being limited to English-source materials and sites.

These difficulties notwithstanding, given the breadth of sources that I am examining, coupled with the range of authors and the numerous common patterns I am finding across them, I feel confident that this approach is still highly effective way to do a general mapping of the meanings of contemporary political love. Furthermore, based on my experience as a participant in the Occupy Movement, coupled with ongoing involvement in several activist networks, I feel that I can adequately corroborate that the sites and articles that I am analyzing are also receiving attention within these movement communities.

³ “Don’t read the comments” or “read the comments at your own risk” is a sentiment commonly expressed along with Facebook article posts.

B. MESSAGES OF LOVE: EMOTIONS AND MOTIVATIONAL FRAMES

When it comes to love in movement literature, theorists have most closely examined it in the subfield of emotions in social movements. In a comprehensive overview of emotions in social movements, James Jasper comments:

Emotions are present in every phase and every aspect of protest (social movements and protest overlap sufficiently for me to use the terms interchangeably here). They motivate individuals, are generated in crowds, are expressed rhetorically, and shape stated and unstated goals of social movements. Emotions can be means, they can be ends, and sometimes they can fuse the two. They can help or hinder mobilization efforts, ongoing strategies, and the success of social movements (2011: 286).

This, however, has not always been how movement theorists have viewed the subject of emotions. In fact, it has not been until the last two decades that there has been conscientious effort to bring emotions back into analysis of social movements. Certainly, in part, the erasure of emotions from movements was informed by methodological inadequacies. It is far easier to read through organizational meeting notes or examine policies than it is to collect data on the emotional state of a protester at a demonstration. The near universal focus on the “rational” choice of activists also spoke to the fact many of the scholars doing this work had themselves been part of the 1960s student rebellions and anti-war efforts, and it seems likely they sought to do away with the idea that “activists were crazy” (Goodwin et al 2000: 71).

Either way, to quote Gamson, the result was a tendency among theorists to “write as though our movement actors (when we actually acknowledge humans in our texts) are Spock-like beings, devoid of passion and other human emotions”(1997: 419 cited in Goodwin et al 2000:73). Since Lofland’s early, pioneering work on the “joys” of crowd action as early as 1982, there has been a veritable explosion of interest and analysis of “emotional constraints on activists and to the strategic use and transformation of emotions (to recruit, challenge authorities, and sustain commitment)” (Lofland 1982; Goodwin et al 2000:77).

Where, then, does love fit into the literature? Scholars have looked at “love” in movements in a range of ways, primarily centering on how they help to form bonds within movement communities. Jasper explains this by delineating how there are both “reflexive” emotions, namely, “the affective

ties of friendship, love, solidarity, and loyalty, and the specific emotions they give rise to” and “shared” emotions, which “are held by a group at the same time” (Goodwin et al 2000:76; Jasper 2011). He further elaborates that a “sense of belonging is a basic human need, involving emotions of love (Berezin 2001), pride (Scheff 1994), and emotional excitement (Collins 2004)” (Jasper 2011:292). Consequently, “belonging to a group often keeps people” involved in social movements (Jasper 2011: 292). Related to this are the ways in which emotions generate formation of a group’s “collective identity” through cultivation of an insider/outsider mentality with love and joy shared among group members and anger towards those they challenged—a subfield of study upon which, as Jasper puts it, “libraries have been written about” (Jasper 2011:294; Mellucci etc.).

There have also been plenty of other ways that theorists have examined the role of love in collective action. Goodwin, for instance, suggests that there is actually a “libidinal economy” in movements—a “pleasure in protest” which includes erotic dimensions and actual romantic and sexual encounters (Goodwin et al 2000: 76). This he argues, of course, can have a downside for movements as couples pair up and drop out either to nest at home or because their relationship ends. And, while she speaks about friendship more than bonds of love, Polletta’s work on relationships in directly democratic movements shows both the strengths (deep loyalty and sense of ownership over processes) and weaknesses (exclusivity and undermining of directly democratic practices) of tight-knit affinity groups and movement communities (2004).

Despite the depth and breadth of research into this area since the 1990s, there still remains much room for further inquiry, particularly as it relates to contemporary movements. While there are numerous possible ways to build on the existing body of literature, a critical starting point would be to further explore how love is used as a motivational frame. As Jasper points out, “Virtually all the cultural models and concepts currently in use (e.g., frames, identities, narratives) are mis-specified if they do not include explicit emotional causal mechanisms. Yet few of them do.” (Jasper 2011:286). In particular, he, Poletta, and Goodwin see there as being a disconnect between emotions and motivational frames, “which would seem to have a great deal to do with emotions, [and] is rarely discussed, although it is apparently what gets people actually to do something” (2001:6).

Borrowing from Goffman’s work on “framing,” movement scholars have used this concept as a way to explain how movement actors interpret and articulate the significance of their aims. As David and Snow explain, framing is “an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the ‘world

out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment" (1992:137). Collective action frames, in other words, are how activists understand what they hope to accomplish as well as why and how they hope to do so. It also allows them to strategically convey this message to the world-at-large, while motivating participants to take action.

To-date, there remains very limited work directly addressing the use of "love" as a frame. Until Sidney Tarrow's treatment of it in *The Language of Contention: Revolutions in Words, 1688-2012* (2013), there were merely a handful of articles that explore the ways in which the right-wing white supremacist groups have used "love" as way to frame their movement as a "love" of their race (Dobratz et al 2007; Berbrier 1998). And although the civil rights movement and other faith-based movements have often appealed to Christianly love and concepts of the "beloved community" in their rhetoric, a review of the literature indicates that few, if any, theorists have explicitly looked at these as strategic, motivational frames.⁴ Necessarily, Tarrow's recent publication on love and framing serves as a major advance for our understanding of political love in contemporary movements (2013).

In "Love and Hate" through "thin analysis of public culture" of case studies, Tarrow explores how love functions as a discursive strategy in civil rights and marriage equality movements (2013: 175). As he explains, by looking at these examples we can see how this can sometimes play out differently. In the case of the civil rights, he traces how the concept became a less salient frame over the life course of the movement. He comments, "love rises and falls within contentious communities, and it too easily gives way to rage when messengers of love are greeted with the police dogs of hatred, as it did with the Ghandian-Christian wing of the civil rights movement" (2013: 175). Meanwhile, he considers the marriage equality movement to be instructive in the way it demonstrates how "the language of love can be used as a way to transform the political status of marginalized groups" (2013: 175).

Tarrow also makes the case that, generally speaking, movements appeal to the concept of love. As he points out, doing a Google search of the terms "love" and "social movement" together result in 1,600,000 hits. Meanwhile, searches for "hate" and "social movement" or "love and hate" and "social

⁴ In fact, I was unable to find anything on the subject, but want to be cautious in my statements as I assume that there must be some literature that I am not finding.

movement” only generated 59,000 and 29,800 respectively (2013: 167). In other words, we can safely say that, activists are far more likely to make references to the term love than either hate or both terms together. Furthermore, he breaks this down and shows that references to love were most common in the civil rights discourse, followed by the feminist, labor, revolutionary, environmental, peace and student movements (in that order) (2013: 168).

Based on my own investigation, there is much evidence corroborating his observations—from the range of movements appealing to the concept in their languaging, to the ebb and flow of these appeals over time, and the strategic use of love in messaging to curry popular support. Yet, given the prevalence of these love-driven messages across such as diversity of movements, it suggests that this type of framing may have taken on new meanings and greater significance in the recent mobilizations. It is also possible to further explicate how contemporary social protest draws on love in their messaging and articulation of goals and principles, by a) breaking these messages into four dominant frames, b) by identifying some of the political currents and theories informing these frames across the movements, and c) more generally, situating these frames within the current world historical context.

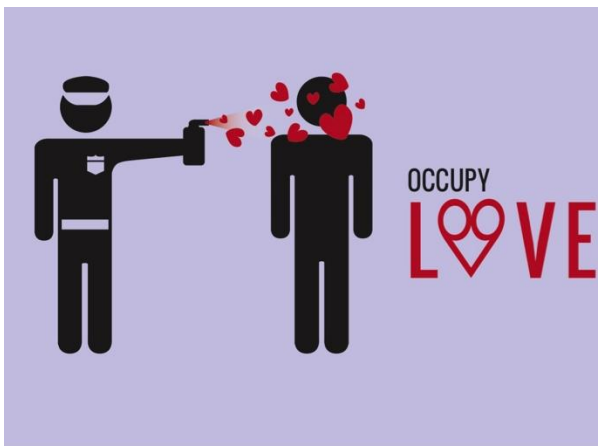
II. LOCATING LOVE: EVIDENCE OF LOVING FRAMES

As photos from the movement attest to, during the Occupy Movement it was common to see messages of love mixed in amidst the other signs and banners. It was not just in the Occupy Movement, however, that one can find ample visual cues of the prevalence of this messaging. Rather, it has become a widely used frame in protest signs, banners, and political art. Love also appears in other messaging contexts as well such as seen in the popular practice of writing “political love letters.” Combining this data with quantitative analysis of content from widely circulated activist online sources unequivocally suggests that love has become a dominant frame in contemporary movements.

A. THE VISUAL CLUES: PROTEST ART AND REVOLUTIONARY LOVE LETTERS

As I first discovered during my time as an occupier, along with the motto of the “99 versus the 1 percent” it was just as likely that one might hear about the need to “love the 1%” or to simply see signs that read, “I love you.” In fact, the loving messages became so prevalent that it inspired an explosion of art work, including widely accessed images through a group called “Occupy Design,” that provided free graphics for Occupy-related groups and projects.⁵

⁵ Images included below in figures 1-6 are sourced from Occupylove.com and other Occupy-related sites. Where possible, they are linked to the original cached location. In some cases, these links no longer exist.



Figures 1-6. Images of protest signs, banners, and graphics from the Occupy Movement.

It was also common practice for occupiers to express feelings of love for one another as a kind of expression of profound solidarity. The use of “heart signals” during the consensus-based, decision-making during the publicly held General Assemblies, for instance, points to this kind of “loving solidarity.” As part of this collaborative process, participants used hand signals to signify assent or dissent (such as by upward or downward “twinkling of fingers”) that was adopted from eco-feminist and Quaker practices in the 1970s (Cornell 2011; Epstein 2001). One of the innovations to these hand signals by the occupiers included use of the “heart signal”—the formation of a heart using both hands—intended to indicate solidarity and love for the speaker or group-at-large and used to diffuse tensions as they arose during meetings.

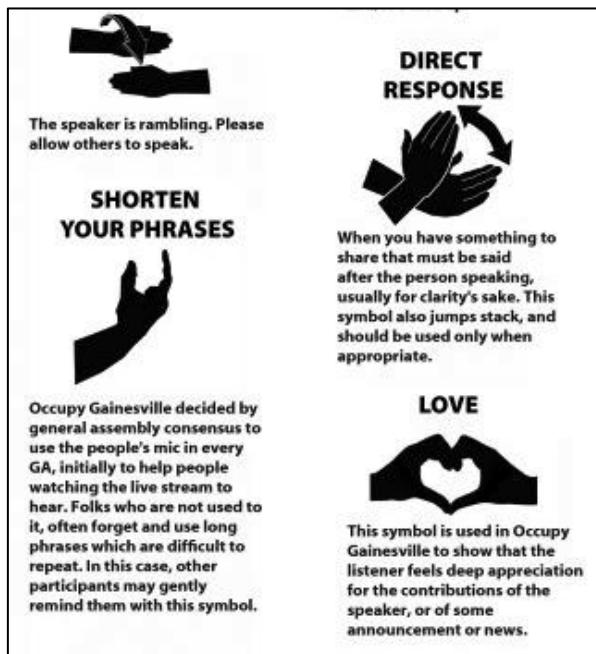


Figure 7 (Left). Segment of instruction sheet on consensus signals from Occupy Gainesville.



Figure 8 (Right). Attendees at an Occupy Love film screening in Sydney doing the love sign.

These messages of love, however, are far from limited to occupiers and can be found throughout the recent mobilizations. In the summer of 2013, photos of and articles about the Turkish Uprising made references to love. So, too, did the Brazilian protests calling for improved public transportation, education and health services, demonstrators draw on love in their messaging (AP 2013). Protestors standing in solidarity with Gaza during the attack in July 2014 called on others to “militantly love” Palestinians by supporting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign (Tidal Magazine Collective 2014). Demonstrators in Ferguson and protesting against the killing of Mike Brown started a group and campaign called “I love Ferguson” (McGreal 2014). During the Climate March in New York numerous groups and individuals held signs and banners calling us to “Love the Earth” along with other love-infused mottos.⁶ And the 2014 student democracy movement in Hong Kong even referred to itself the Movement to Occupy Central with Love and Peace.”⁷

To be sure, it is important to note, that it would be a mistake to attribute the Occupy Movement as the sole genesis for this kind of messaging in this most recent cycle of contention. Notably, the Spanish Indignados of the M15 Movement in Spain, which served as a major inspiration and model for the occupiers, referred to a space where “you could chat about metaphorical matters and meditate” in an occupied plaza in Madrid as the “corner of love” (Feixa, et al. 2013). And, there is a pre-existing trope for movements to circulate “love letters” either as expressions of transnational messages of solidarity and support or as a way to offer “loving” critiques to fellow participants. Just months before the takeover of Zuccotti, for instance, Code Pink and other American activists joined in a peaceful delegation to Palestine “Armed with Love Letters and a Missive from Dr. King . . . thousands of letters from the U.S. people, letters of compassion, solidarity and hope written to people living in the Gaza Strip . . . travel[ing] with . . . ‘unarmed truth and unconditional love” (Benjamin 2011).

⁶ I learned this based on my own participant observation at the NYC Climate March, 9/21/14.

⁷ As Tarrow suggests, it should also be noted that activists across countries have joined in “right to love” protests in support of gay marriage. For the purposes of this paper, however, as this messaging relates to romantic love, I am not including it in my analysis.



Figure 9 (Top). Protests against fare hikes in Brazil, July 2013.

Figure 10 (Middle). Banner from Occupy Central with Love and Peace,

Figure 11 (Bottom). Code Pink protest signs from Black Lives Matters Movement.



Figure 12 (Left). Letter of solidarity sent to Gaza via the 2011 Flotilla.



Figure 13 (Right). 2011 Flotilla press conference demonstration in Athens, Greece.

Similarly, in a “love letter” of support from the protesters in Tahrir to the Occupiers in Zuccotti Park published in the Guardian, “To the Occupy movement – the occupiers of Tahrir Square are with you” the authors averred that “we in Egypt are part of the same struggle . . . against systems of repression, disenfranchisement and the unchecked ravages of global capitalism”⁸ (“Comrades from Cairo” 2011). In the close of the piece they then stated, “We are all watching one another now, and from Cairo we want to say that we are in solidarity with you, and we love you all for what you are doing” (“Comrades from Cairo” 2011). Pieces like “Occupy Wall Street—A Love Letter,” then, can be considered as merely following the lead on this framing, not inventing it (Cohen 2011).⁹ Moreover, other love letters that have come since—like the “Open Love Letter to Folks of Color*,” written by celebrated blogger, Mia McKensie, declaring her love for trans, queer and female people of color, as a stand against racism, sexism, and homophobia—have little to do with the Occupy Movement (2012).

⁸ Although, interestingly, it was the American occupiers and media who described it as a “love letter,” not the “comrades from Cairo.”

⁹ Only, in this case, the “letter” addressed to fellow occupiers offered a “gentle” critique, imploring them to move beyond fetishization of the tactic of occupying and suggests that “In addition to occupying parks and public spaces across the country, let’s occupy and directly open up those schools, libraries, hospitals, subway stations and the like that have been shut down.”

B. THE NUMBERS ON LOVE: FREQUENCIES (AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE)

Along with the ample visual evidence, as explained in the introduction, in order to best capture all the myriad ways these different movements used the term love, I elected to use an inductive approach to developing my coding schematic. I did, however, try to classify them under themes including: 1) Movement; 2) Types of love; 3) Qualities/attributes of love; and 4) Outcome/transformational impact of love. In terms of how I developed these codes, I did not use a single approach. I typically read through my materials looking for patterns of repeated words or concepts. I then chose words to code that were either directly referenced within the source itself (eg. accountability or nonviolence) or that I allocated to represent a noticeable trend (eg. “love of earth,” or “love of community”). It should be noted, however, that I tried to rely on the languaging of the activists themselves when devising the more generable categories. So, for example, authors often expressed their “love” for the earth as part of their climate change or environmental activism, but they may not have explicitly used the phrase my “love for the earth.” Below in Tables 1-4 are listings of my codes, with the frequencies for how many articles (out of a sample of 250) that they appeared in.

Table 1. Frequencies of movements and political currents.

Nonviolence (117)	Peace (15)
- Spirituality/ Mindfulness (38)	Labor (13)
- Christian (20)	Local-level organizing (10)
- Ghandi/MLK Jr. (43)	Solidarity/New Economy (8)
- General (16)	Palestine (8)
Black Feminist (38)	General Social Justice (7)
Occupy (35)	Intellectual Left (4)
Anti-capitalist/Anarchist (33)	Immigrant Rights (4)
Climate (31)	Austerity (3)
Indigenous (28)	
Queer Liberation (22)	
Racial Justice (21)	

Table 2. Frequencies of categories for love.

<p>As a Strategic Frame (61)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Love Letter (6) - What we love vs. what they love (14) <p>As a tool (39)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A new form of activism (13) - Militant (2) - More effective than violence (6) <p>For the Earth (26)</p> <p>For Self (22)</p>	<p>For community (20)</p> <p>Spiritual (18)</p> <p>The movement/fuels the movement (16)</p> <p>For loved ones (15)</p> <p>Decolonial (10)</p> <p>Agape (4)</p> <p>For other movements (3)</p>
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Table 3. Frequencies of definitions for love as a “radical act.”

<p>Counters market logic (52)</p> <p>Undoes divisions/creates connections (48)</p> <p>Humanizes others (13)</p> <p>Re-imagines relationships/society (40)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prefigures alternatives (12) <p>Challenges oppression (28)</p> <p>Offsets Hate/violence (26)</p>	<p>Heals/alleviates suffering (21)</p> <p>Prevents ecological destruction (15)</p> <p>Promotes social justice (12)</p> <p>Liberates (6)</p> <p>Fosters dignity (2)</p> <p>Creates diversity (2)</p> <p>Creates Peace (2)</p>
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Table 4. Frequencies of qualities and attributes of love.

Compassion/Empathy (88)	Cooperation (Mutual Aid) (22)
Transformative (74)	Healing (21)
- Transforms Self (34)	Accountable (16)
- Transforms Society (6)	Spiritual (12)
Creates Connections (69)	Offsets hate (11)
- Humanizes others (13)	Listens/hears (9)
- Reflects an Interconnection (15)	Nonviolent (9)
Anti-neoliberal (46)	Forgiveness (8)
- Rejects market-logic (40)	Respect (8)
Reimagines Society (40)	Trust (8)
Honest (28)	Inspirational (7)
Universal (24)	Refusal/non-cooperation (6)
Powerful (23)	Conscience/Moral (5)
- Fosters empowerment	Selfless (3)

Along with identifying the frequency of how many documents each of these codes appeared in, I parsed out which attributes were most commonly associated with particular forms of love and movement currents. See Table 5.

Table 5. Strength of relationship between type of love and political current.

	Anarchism/ Anti- capitalism ¹⁰	Nonviolence/ Spirituality	Indigeneity/ Decolonization Theory	Black Feminism	Affect Theory
Love of Self	Moderate	Strong		Strong	
Love of Others	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Moderate
Love of Earth	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Weak	
Love as the Revolution	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Moderate

And, finally, Table 6, provides an overall schema for how to understand the ways in which contemporary movements conceive of love as a “radical act” and what this means. As the numbers suggest, across movements, there is a sentiment that put into practice—through adoption of principles of nonviolence, compassion towards self and others, accountability to collective wellbeing, a shared sense of fate and cooperation to surmount challenges—love has the ability to transform individual lives, communities, and society-at-large. And, in so doing, it shifts the paradigm from one predicated on the hegemony of the global capitalism to one based on a “love.”

¹⁰ There were very few sources that I specifically identified as anarchist. By anarchism, I mean the influence of anarchism on the Occupy Movement as well as among other anti-capitalist currents, which emphasize practices such as mutual aid or other anti-hierarchical, anti-State values.

Table 6. Common attributes for love and corresponding practices and outcomes.

Commonly Used Attributes for Love Across Movement	Common Actions Associated with Political Love	Possible Outcomes of Practicing Political Loving
Empathetic/Compassionate	<p>Forgiveness</p> <p>Recognize Shared Experience/Interdependence</p> <p>Care for Self, Others, the Earth</p> <p>Nonviolence</p>	<p>Connection Across Difference/Divide – Collaborative Struggle</p> <p>Heal Traumas</p> <p>Reclamation of Humanity</p> <p>Move Beyond Market-Logic (Selfishness and Competition)</p>
Accountable	<p>Confront Oppression in Daily Practice</p> <p>Listens/Hears</p> <p>Commits to Collaborative Action</p>	<p>Create Sustainable Planet</p> <p>Builds Collective Power/ Stronger Movements</p> <p>Challenges Systemic Oppressions</p>
Cooperative	Engage in Mutual Aid Collaborate Across Struggles	Addresses Systemic Crisis
Universal	Recognize Shared Experience/Interdependence	Transform Self and Society (More Equitable, Compassionate, Just)
Transformative	<p>Self (Consciousness-Raising)</p> <p>Changed Practices (as defined above)</p> <p>Reimagines Society</p>	Paradigm Shift

III. THE MANY MEANINGS OF LOVE: FROM SELF-CARE TO THE REVOLUTION ITSELF

Between the love letters and the widespread use of love in messages across movements evident in Tables 1-6, it seems safe to conclude that regardless of whether or not the Occupy Movement is responsible for helping to catalyze adoption of the term, love has gone mimetic. Or put otherwise, it has become a new addition to activists' messaging. That said, without further analysis, this tells us little about the significance of this loving discourse other than that it exists. To fully understand this requires examining *why* it appears to be so popular. As "love" appears to be term that so many activists are intentionally electing to use (as opposed to solidarity, community-orientation, or other affective terms) this suggests that there must be a reason why they are doing so.¹¹ Further, simply noting the presence of love in messaging alone fails to illuminate *what* it means to the activists using it. It seems plausible, for instance, to deduce that it represents little more than a strategy for drawing a line between those who are 'hateful' (such as oppressive actors like the State, police or one percent) and those who are "loving" (the activists making the claims) as way to curry favor with the public. It can also be used as a way to delineate who is "worthy" of love and who is not. And, while all this may be true, I would argue that this does not capture the real significance of love in contemporary social protest. It is something deeper, more profound. Rather, these movement participants see love as something more than a strategic message, but as a guiding revolutionary principle and practice.

¹¹ Love is often used in conjunction with solidarity and is also closely related to concepts of empathy, compassion, and mutual aid. Yet, it remains separate. Consider, for example, the ways in which the "Comrades from Cairo" expressly used both terms—solidarity and love—in their message to the Occupiers (2011).

This does not imply that the meaning and use of the term is equivalent for all activists and fronts of struggle. There is a great deal of variation in their understandings of how love relates to social transformation that can loosely be classified under four major frames—Love of Self, Love of Others, Love of Earth, and Love as the Revolution. It is important to note that while my own investigation led to this categorical delineation, many activists themselves see these as primary areas of transformation. Scholar-activist and artist, Takiyah Amin, for instance, asserts that “love as a radical praxis draws us into compassionate relations with both self, other and our environment” (2013). Echoing this, Buddhist anarchist, Jamie Heckert asserts that for many, “revolution doesn't refer just to a transformation of a political system. It's also about a change of heart: r/evolution in our relationships with ourselves, each other and the land. With life itself” (2013). Adding all the more complexity to identifying and untangling these disparate, yet overlapping, understandings are numerous, often interwoven, currents giving shape to these definitions. Even still, despite these variations, for all, love is seen as a powerful tool for social transformation that has the power to remake society along more equitable, just and compassionate lines. Indeed, if there is a single thread throughout these understandings of love it is that of empathetic, connection and a sense of shared fate in the face of crisis.

A. LOVE OF SELF: SELF-CARE, HEALING, FORGIVENESS

It is a common practice among activists to circulate inspirational images of beloved icons coupled with their most famous quotes via social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Sometimes this corresponds to the person's birthday or anniversary of their death and, other times, they just go viral. One of the more popular of these among activists from engaged in numerous struggles is of feminist, Audre Lorde, with her statement: “Caring for Myself is not indulgence. It is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.” This idea, that love of self and self-care are a form of political resistance is, in fact, at the core of several fronts of struggle, permeating most activist cultures across movements.

The concept of self-love is largely rooted in the feminist ethic of care and black feminism. Although, like the other love frames it reflects numerous influences, which in this case mostly includes Buddhist “loving kindness,” other spiritual practices of inner transformation, and the practical need to avoid “burn out” or exhaustion among activists (2013). At the heart of it, the basic idea across movements suggests that self-love (ie. being compassionate with one’s self, reclaiming a sense of dignity and self-worth, and literally taking care of one’s basic needs), is a “revolutionary” act of resistance. To begin with, it is a radical act as it defends against hatred and prejudice by offsetting the degradation and dehumanizing forces of systemic oppressions such as racism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. By helping to empower those whom society has deemed “unlovable,” individuals and their respective communities are better able to challenge these systems of domination instead of being crushed under the weight of them. In this way, the act of loving one’s self itself becomes a form of political refusal.

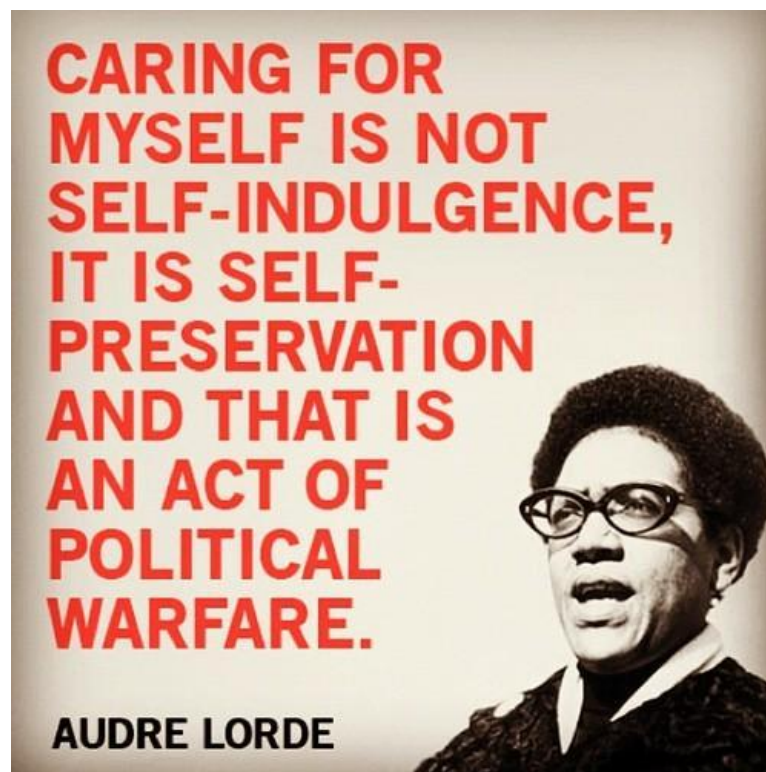


Figure 14. Meme of popular Audre Lorde quote on self-care as political resistance.

As activist and scholar, Anamaría Flores, explains in her contribution to the *Feminist Wire* “Love as a Radical Act Forum”:

In a white male supremacist heteronormative puritanical judeo-christian culture such as the one that characterizes the united states, the most revolutionary act for brown and black folks is to reject the dominant culture and love ourselves . . . To love ourselves FIRST is an act of revolution: to love our hair, our bodies, our way of thinking, our way of being, our skin, our features, represents a return to our African and Indigenous roots, to matrifocal thinking, and our commitment to an ancient future . . . At this moment, at this time, these words still ring true: revolutionary love begins with self love and it is from this self love that revolution will spring (2013).

Self-love, however, is not simply a matter of positive, self-talk. Nor is it only an issue of individual responsibility. Rather, it is seen as a collective healing process, where those engaged in a shared struggle against systemic hatred hold one another accountable to the process of overcoming traumas through loving one’s self. In “For All Of Us: The Importance of Self-Love for Collective Survival,” a “brown boi health guide,” for instance, it stresses the need to recognize the shared experiences of trans* folks of color and, hence, the importance of reminding each other to love themselves. “Self-care includes holding each other accountable,” Alexis Gumbs comments, “because we are interconnected” (2011). This sense of collective, mutual dependence is critical for understanding the tie in between self-love and social transformation. As climate justice activist, Cheyenne Weber, probes, “Cornel West has said ‘Justice is what love looks like in public’ . . . Can you love yourself enough to desire justice for others? (Weber 2014).

Along these lines, there is a widespread perception of shared fate—no one is healed unless all are. Consequently, another critical dimension to self-love is the ultimate ability to rise above divisions. Given this, for many, forgiveness of both self *and* oppressor is considered to be essential for the practice of loving self. In fact, compassionately recognizing a common humanity is seen as necessary for true healing to occur. Notably, this directly draws on Christian notions of forgiveness and the inspiration of Ghandi and MLK Jr.’s practice of nonviolence. To be sure, this does not imply allowing racism, sexism and other forms of prejudice to go unchecked. Moreover, although for some this does promote a kind of “color-blindness,” for others, confronting racism and other oppressive dynamics head on *is* the loving course of action. Forgiveness requires honestly looking oppression in the eye. It also means working together to overcome the trauma. The practice of “calling out” fellow activist and allies when they engage in oppressive behaviors (or “calling them in” the more “loving” way to describe this practice), for example, is seen as a step towards collective healing. As

one activist expresses, “We can only transform and love ourselves if we accept both the honorable and shameful aspects of our history and our humanity” (Brown 2010).

This kind of love is viewed as having a powerful transformative quality for both individuals and society. Furthermore, self-love and inner transformation are not intended to supplant other forms of resistance that are more structural in orientation. Activists see the combination of the two as integral to affecting meaningful social change: “Both are needed to eliminate racism, but social justice will not happen without healing, and healing cannot happen without social justice. This is the cycle of transformation that the twenty-first century demands” (Christopher 2013). Or as veteran civil rights activist, Grace Lee Boggs suggests (citing MLK Jr. as her inspiration), what we need is “a two-fold transformation of ourselves and our institutions” to eliminate poverty, racism and war based on a combination of “mental and spiritual re-evaluation” (Mirzoeff 2014).

The idea of inner transformation coupled with social reconstruction, actually, points to another current informing this idea of self-love among activists—spiritually-motivated activism, in particular, Buddhist mindfulness practices. Much in line with the feminist principle of self-directed love, so too, Buddhist practitioners emphasize the need for “self-compassion.” As peace activist, Niki Smith, defines it:

[S]elf-compassion entails three core components. First, it requires self-kindness, that we be gentle and understanding with ourselves rather than harshly critical and judgmental. Second, it requires recognition of our common humanity, feeling connected with others in the experience of life rather than feeling isolated and alienated by our suffering. Third, it requires mindfulness—that we hold our experience in balanced awareness, rather than ignoring our pain or exaggerating it (2013).

Again, as with black feminist politics with religious and spiritual activism, self-love is both healing and a way to attain liberation for individuals and society. And, while self-love is most often used specifically in the context of challenging oppressive systems, some activists also see this as tied in with contesting capitalism. In the introduction to “Transformation: Where Love Meets Social Justice,” a section of OpenDemocracy—an open platform, user-generated news site—which debuted in 2013, the editor, William Edwards, comments on the need to reunite personal transformation with social activism as a way to contest neoliberalism. He observes that since the 1980s, “the social and spiritual sides of activism began to move apart, perhaps exhausted by earlier efforts or beaten down by the arrival of the neo-liberal revolution, and the celebration of self-

interest and materialism that followed in its wake” (2013). If we are to unseat the hegemony of capitalism, however, this will require “engaging in the daily struggle for dignity and justice in a different spirit that opens up more effective routes to action” and to build new institutions based “on sharing and solidarity instead of the mindless pursuit of competition, growth and power” (2013).

Similarly, as described by scholar-activist, Sean Chabot, who has published several pieces on nonviolence, Gandhi’s repertoire of satyagraha actually proposes a new concept of “loving revolutions.” As he explains, revolutionary love requires transformation of self that better allows us to be selfless with others—something he feels can “help eradicate oppression and alienation, and contribute to a more just and peaceful world that benefits all of us” living under modern capitalism (Chabot 2008). Ultimately, then, while the ideas of self-love and self-care have not explicitly been at the forefront of the most recent mobilizations—which have tended to focus more directly on addressing economic inequalities—this kind of love and “practice of love” has become embedded throughout movement spaces. Activists across the spectrum of struggles refer to the need to be gentle and compassionate towards themselves—the first step towards being compassionate with others as well—and to take care not to allow a degrading system wear down their spirit to resist. Furthermore, this inner work, be it influenced by black feminism, Buddhist mindfulness of other traditions, helps them to connect across divides thereby transforming society-at-large.

B. LOVE OF OTHERS: EMPATHY, UNIVERSALITY, COMMON HUMANITY

Prior to the United States Social Forum in Detroit in 2010, Grace Lee Boggs issued a plea to fellow Detroit activists to bring more of a loving ethic to their communities, insisting that to do so was, in fact, a revolutionary act. “We urgently need,” she declared, “to bring to our communities the limitless capacity to love, serve, create for and with each other that up to now we have practiced only in our personal relationship . . . [to] begin forging a new link between Love and Revolution so that when we gather next June in Detroit we will have already begun the revolution of the 21st century” (2009). As she saw it, in order to create more socially just or “beloved” communities, to use

MLK Jr's language, people needed to extend loving acts beyond the personal and particular to the realm of the political and more universal. Not only does her statement make it clear that King's message of love has remained salient among contemporary organizing spaces, but also points to the most prevalent understandings of love across movements—being empathetic for all, seeing our struggles as interlinked, and referring to this as a revolutionary act of love.

Indeed, the enduring influence of MLK Jr's Christian-informed agapic sense of love, coupled with his commitment to nonviolence, are undoubtedly some of the primary sources of love-talk among current activists, at least here in the US. His belief in the “generative power of love” and its “drive toward the unity of the separated” which “builds—or, more accurately, reveals—relationships and interdependence and wholeness” is very much resonant with commonly expressed sentiments on the need to rise above divisions and to recognize our interdependence with others (van Gelder 2013). There is a real sense among activists that we need to begin recognizing our interconnectedness and to adopt more empathetic frames of my mind as a way to surmount divisions. This, in itself, is viewed as a radical act as it challenges dominant modes of thought. Yet, it is also revolutionary, as it leads to creation of stronger movements that are capable of mounting more successful challenges to oppressive systems, by breaking down structural barriers that prevent communities from building power.

Citing bell hooks, MLK Jr. and Ghandi, one journalist for feminist, *Bitch Magazine*, comments that, “love is an act of will, a call to extend ourselves and sacrifice for our own well being and the well-being of others . . . [that] binds us with our community in action of mutual responsibility and accountability” and it calls on us to “recognize that our liberation is bound up in the liberation of every person” (Mastrangelo 2013). Or as labor organizer, Ai-Jen Poo expresses it: “The way we try to think about it and the way the world is, we're all interdependent and interconnected . . . Those connections are fairly invisible to most people most of the time. We're taught not to see those connections. What organizing with love does is organizes ways for people to see their interconnections and harnesses that connection as a source for change.”

In a similar vein, Aaron Talley, activist and educator for the Black Youth Project in Chicago, asserts that: “We can look at the enemy and say, ‘I cannot separate myself from you—I am inextricably tied in to your passions, your dreams, your future, and your oppression.’ Subsequently, once we realize that what's at stake is ‘our’ humanity, love allows the ‘you and me’ to become ‘us,’ and, we can begin

to connect to one another more deeply” (2013). This sentiment—the need to empathetically recognize that we are an “us” rather than the more contentious attitude of you versus me—is evident in every movement and front of struggle that I examined, from labor campaigners to indigenous rights and climate activists, to occupiers. It is this very belief that led to occupiers to declare that they loved the one percent or to insist that we were the one hundred percent.

It is not, however, MLK Jr’s Christian-infused nonviolence that alone informs this perception. It is also present in many other currents such as anarchism, spirituality, Indigeneity, black feminism, and even affect theory. Idle No More spokesperson calls on us, for instance, to: “love each other . . . Help to create this society we all live in, to be a peaceful one. Love so much that love is the strength you need to take action” (JC 2012). In their discussion of affect and queer liberation, LGBTQ and racial justice activists, Macie Bianco and JT Roane, question if “Love is born out of sympathy for the self’s fallibility and suffering and expands to the other when we comprehend that she, too, is fallible and suffers. Empathy is love that incorporates another, outside of the self. Can we, the LGBT community, imagine love as the force that allows us to build and foster a community not based on traumas of the past, but on a vision of the future not based in trauma?” (2013). And Buddhist practitioner, Stephanie Van Hook, suggests that, “one of the first ways of sustaining ourselves for revolution is by an awareness that I cannot do harm to another without harming myself” and, hence, admonishes activists to check their hearts to see if they “are burning with hatred and blame or with compassion and love” (2012).

In each of these currents, they insist that transformed relationships with others—others in our lives, communities, in the world at-large—has a potent potential for transforming society. And, in each of these, the idea of reciprocity, mutuality, empathy, interdependence and common humanity play a pivotal role. Again, much like with self-love, for those encouraging love of others, the idea of interdependence is key and corresponds to a perception that liberation for one demands liberation for all (which, notably, is highly anarchistic in principle and also derives from interlocking analysis of oppression that has largely emerged from black feminism). All movements for justice, according to this view, are interrelated. At a practical-level, this means increasing coalition-based work and augmenting solidarity and alliance efforts. Returning to the wisdom of MLK Jr. as cited by one climate justice activist:

King cautioned against the view that injustices could be divided into neat isolated silos . . . King reminds us to think in terms of the “beloved community” in which we are all interconnected. That means that the injustices that we experience are also intertwined. For many climate activists, thinking about racism, sexism, or poverty are side issues; after all, if there is no habitable earth, then those problems won’t really matter” (Orosco 2014).

At a more emotive or affective-level, this implies a changed subjectivity, where contemporary activists are beginning to see themselves as intimately connected with others outside their own individualized lives or direct experiences. There is a transcendence of divisions—a sense of coming together. Again, while for some, this leads to a naïve erasure of difference, for many others, it means honestly acknowledging these differences in privilege and working together to address oppression while collaboratively creating more equitable communities. And, for all who espouse this kind of sentiment, it means reclaiming our basic humanity from the alienation of market-logic that foregrounds cooperation over competition.



Figure 15. Protest by Unitarian Universalist organization, Standing on the Side of Love.

C. LOVE OF THE EARTH: INTERDEPENDENCE, COLLECTIVE SURVIVAL

Almost 400,000 people, representing hundreds of organizations and numerous broad-based coalitions attended the Climate March held in New York City in September 2014, making it the largest demonstrations for climate justice in history. At this march, love abounded. Signs, banners, posters and even individuals sporting messages painted on their bodies called on the world to “love the earth.” Along with other slogans such as “capitalism=climate collapse,” it was clearly apparent during this demonstration that love has come to serve as one of the major frames within the movement for climate justice.

Undoubtedly, this likely speaks to an older motto in environmental activism, that of “love mother earth.” Yet, there are ways in which activists are thinking about why and how we should love the Earth that may reflect newer trends across movements as well, namely, another form of interdependence—interdependence between human survival and environmental devastation. It also bespeaks other trends, including: a perception that capitalist ethics of greed are to blame for climate collapse; the influential force of indigenous cosmology and social-ecological spirituality on climate activism; and collaborative efforts across movements.

Currently, there is a growing concern that we are facing climate collapse, lending an almost apocalyptic sense of end times to climate activist discourse. There is a tendency among climate activists to think in terms of crisis and collapse and to express a real urgency in their messages. The time is now, most green activists would agree, to reverse the deleterious impacts of environmental damage. As the editors of the *Yes! Magazine* Summer 2013 issue on “Love and Apocalypse,” comment: “We’ve never faced bigger threats to our well-being and to the health of our planet. Accepting that reality could be paralyzing” (Van Gelder et al 2013). It is for this very reason, that they put together the issue as a way for other activists to feel greater hope by learning about “the people who are, instead, moving forward with love, imagination, and renewed respect for the Earth” (Van Gelder et al 2013).

For some, confronting climate collapse means more environmental regulation. For many, it means a rejection of capitalism in entirety. For all, however, there is an expressed feeling of interrelated fate between people and the planet. Tara Lohan, for instance, implores people to recognize that “these

issues are important if you're human – if you care about your community, your family and essentials like healthy food, a livable climate, clean air and water" (2013). As she illustrates, there is a feeling that, "Our age-old survival strategy of opportunistic predation has reached its sell-by date. A vital part of our defense against this strategy is not to give offense in the first place. Going forward, the only thing as important as how we treat the Earth is how we treat each other" (2013). Or as another activist, Rivera Sun, expresses:

When we realize how fleeting our opportunity for life is, joy and love become more precious than gold. A brush with death deepens our conviction to live, to make the changes in lifestyle, health, and diet that may prolong our time on this beautiful planet. All around the world, people face the destruction of extractive energy industries. On top of that, climate change is shifting the framework of mortality from our own individual deaths to that of our communities, our regions, and life-as-we-know-it. The Earth and all her ecosystems are struggling and we humans must grapple with the largest concept of mortality that we have ever faced (2013).

In short, as evident with self-love, within climate justice, activists again see "love" as requiring both personal and structural changes. And, as with the other frames, love of Earth also reflects numerous political currents and a confluence of divergent fronts of struggle that see common cause in their plights. Undoubtedly, contributing to this perception of "interdependence" is the central role of indigenous activism and cosmology on climate justice. It is common among the Idle No More movement to call for a need to "love the Earth" as part of joining the "peaceful revolution" (Idlenomore.ca/about). Redsky, one of the key organizers states that, "There's an unconditional love that we have for our kids. That protection that we have for them is the same protection that we need to have for Mother Earth" (Graham 2013). Or as one participant explained, "it's a politics based in love . . . fights against the pipelines have really been about falling more deeply in love with the land. It's not an "anti" movement—it's not about 'I hate you.' It's about "We love this place too much to let you desecrate it" (Graham 2013).

Indigenous spiritual worldviews are not only what is shaping the messaging of love as it relates to exploring the connection between greed and environmental destruction. Although there are no direct references to "love" in Bookchin's anarchist theory of social ecology or most other socio-ecological models, there is an emphasis on the interdependence between humans and environment (Bookchin 1971, 1987). There may be a case to be made that this reflects a kind of "loving" and interconnected relationship between the two. Once again, Buddhist notions of loving-kindness and compassion also come to bear on this framing. Thich Nhat Hanh is a Buddhist teacher and author, celebrated on the American Left for his work connecting the principle of loving-kindness with social

justice issues (2013). In his work, *Love Letter to the Earth*, he avers the need to extend spiritual love to the earth and environment if we are to avoid climate collapse. He writes:

We can't wait any longer to restore our relationship with the Earth because right now the Earth and everyone on Earth is in real danger . . . When a society is overcome by greed and pride, there is violence and unnecessary devastation. When we perpetrate violence towards our own and other species, we're being violent toward ourselves at the same time . . . When we know how to protect all beings, we will be protecting ourselves (Hanh 2013).

Along with compassion, activists also emphasize the importance of a spiritual awakening and raising of collective consciousness to help usher in this climate-orientation. One hopeful activist suggests that this kind of shift is in fact underway and that capitalism is giving way to more sustainable systems, practices, and modes of thinking: "There is too much collective intelligence to allow corporations to rule the world and imperil the sustainability of planet Earth. As a result, we may be surprised to see just how quickly these remaining concentrations of power and authority begin to crumble as the current sea change in collective consciousness really gets underway" (O'Dea 2013). Or even more to the point, "A spiritual revolution is needed if we're going to confront the environmental challenges that face us" (Hanh 2013, cited in Roland 2014). And, while not all climate activists may subscribe to this perspective, they would, certainly, agree that radical—*and immediate*— changes need to happen. Moreover, it is not simply a matter of saving the planet, but saving humanity from itself. In other words, it is an issue that relates to, and will require participation from, all movements and struggles.

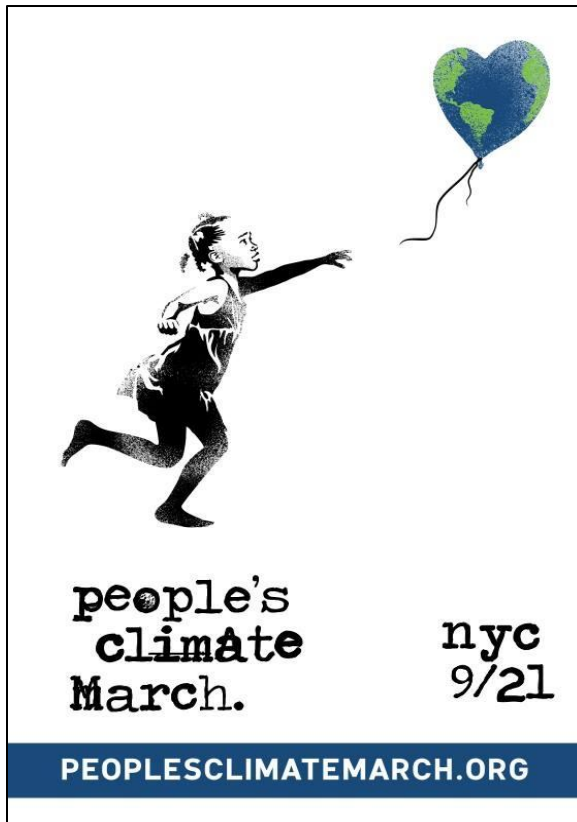


Figure 16 (Top Left). NYC Climate March 2014 poster by César Maxit.

Figures 17-18 (Top and Middle Right). Sign and digital flyer from NYC Climate March, 2014.

Figure 19 (Bottom). UK climate coalition—For the Love Of—at London Climate March, 2014.

D. LOVE AS THE REVOLUTION ITSELF: STRATEGY, ACTION, POWER

In the spring of 2013 radical activists from across numerous countries were solicited to submit to an anthology of “Revolutionary Love Letters” (forthcoming) through a call disseminated through Facebook among other activist sites and forums, which explained:

For many of us, revolution doesn't refer just to a transformation of a political system. It's also about a change of heart: r/evolution in our relationships with ourselves, each other and the land. With life itself.

Are you drawn to, moved by or curious about revolutionary love? Would you like to share something of your love(s)? Do you know of others who might want to contribute? If so, please do pass this invitation on them.

This letter to you, to many of you, comes from a vision. In it is a book of love letters. They come from around the world, beautiful in their diversity of form and focus, beautiful in their shared love of freedom and equality, their love of life . . .

You might consider yourself a revolutionary, with or without adjectives. Or maybe you sense the power of love to transform consciousness, relationships, entire cultures. If not, would you like to? (Heckert 2013).

As explored earlier, love letters like those being featured in this anthology are only one example of many, which illustrate that love has become one of the dominant frames since the last cycle of contention. And as illustrated in the three other major loving frames, across movements, activists are appealing to love as a way to radically reshape our lives, relationships, communities, cultures, and systems. This *self-conscious* motivational framing is precisely what indicates that there may be an attitudinal, paradigmatic or discursive shift underway. Central to understanding the extent of this shift, however, is recognizing this fourth motivational frame—that of love as the revolution itself. For many activists, love is not merely an emotion. It is an action, a tool, the act of revolutionary transformation. In a blog post entitled, “Love as the Force of Revolution: The Occupy movement and Beyond,” Oakland Occupy participant, Monica Mody, comments:

Last year in May or June I realized that my political views were not quite what they used to be. It occurred to me that the words “Revolutions + justice” on my facebook profile were no longer adequate to what I felt was my politics. It occurred to me that love was a crucial element of politics, and I proceeded to add “Love” before “revolutions + justice”. It felt like a radical act . . . The Occupy movement, in taking love seriously, is attempting to forge new dimensions to our cultural and political definitions of reality . . . we are just beginning to

learn that, and how, love can function as an instrument of radical critique: through releasing the energy of acceptance; through recasting hierarchies as participatory communities formed by individuating members; through its visionary creativity; through its willingness to take concrete actions; through allowing itself to be embodied in different forms (2011).

Charles Einstein, spiritual teacher and activist echoes this in his comment that, “I think the ultimate purpose of Occupy Wall Street or the great archetype it taps into, is the revolution of love” (Eisenstein 2011). Necessarily this raises the question—what exactly does this mean? In essence, by embracing love as an actionable practice in daily life one will begin to transform self and society through radical remaking of individual consciousness, social relations, and systems. Love, in other words, is a practice and radical process. As anarchist activist and public intellectual, Cindy Milstein, notes about the mobilizations of 2011 and 2012, love was the action driving these movements and also made possible through them:

This is what the Arab spring in the place still called the Middle East, the occupy movement in the place still called the United States, and the student strike in the place still called Quebec were born of and started to do. This is the fresh air, the kiss of life, of all the uprisings globally of late. Love as desperately trying to break with the commodity logic. Love as freed and a freeing verb (Milstein 2012).

In fact, perhaps one of the most popularly cited quotes among activists by feminist scholar, bell hooks, is “The word ‘love’ is most often defined as a noun, yet . . . we would all love to better if we used it as a verb” (2000). Yet, if love is an action, what are the practices associated with it? Across movements, activists suggest a myriad of attributes associated with love as a radical act. Undoubtedly, as evident in the other frames, the most important of these are compassion and empathy. And, integrally related to this, is the sense of interdependence between people, the Earth, and the movements themselves. Darnell Moore captures this sentiment in his article exploring affect and neoliberalism: “Love is a movement. Actually, love is the movement. It is that which moves each of us toward one another. That to say, it is the eradication of the distance that exists between us and the other. Indeed, the radical potential in love is its ability to destroy the walls, fortifications, edges, spaces, which work to separate us (2013).

Love, however, is not simply an action. It is also viewed as a powerful strategic tool. Queer liberation, disability rights and feminist, Ngọc Loan Trần, explains that in her sessions, “I want us to use love, compassion, and patience as tools for critical dialogue, fearless visioning, and transformation. I want us to use shared values and visions as proactive measures for securing our

future freedom” (2013). Buddhist activist, Stephanie Van Hook, shares this feeling and insists that “It is time we moved away from cruelty and alienation, and refused to give it a place in our toolkits of revolution . . . [E]very small victory in becoming kinder is fuel for the fire for the long-term struggle for freedom” (2012). Yet, again, for these activists, love is also even more than a strategic tool. It is survival. It is a way to collectively navigate the alienating, de-humanizing and demoralizing effects of life in late stages of Global capitalism. It is a way to find common cause with others struggling against neoliberalism and to assert that humanity can—and *must*—do better. As they see it, the survival of the Earth and our own lives depend on it.



Figure 20. Photo of graffiti/protest art in Athens, Greece, May 2014.

IV. CURRENTS AND CONTEXTS: INFLUENCES ON POLITICAL LOVE

Before any considerations as to what may help explain the intentional adoption of this type of language—or even the exact meanings of these messages—one must first consider the temporal dimensions to why occupiers and other activists were so quick to speak of love in the most recent mobilizations. As Tarrow suggests, timing is key to when and why movements draw on concepts of love. In the early phase of a movement, revolution or moment of collective action, there tends to be a feeling of “euphoria” that permeates the air. Participants experience a kind of heady elation and sense of closeness with fellow actors, brought on through the shared experience of empowerment through action. Drawing on Turner’s concept of liminality in ritual, there is a temporary break from the norm where there is “an instant of pure potentiality” (Turner 1979:41) During these liminal moments, which are characterized by “freedom, egalitarianism, communion, and creativity,” there is a sudden rejection of former rules and norms, and individuals adopt a new egalitarian ethic communion, or *communitas* . . . a rejection of alienation from the generic bond of humanity (Yang 2000: 384). In fostering emotions and glorifying personal ordeals, communion helps refashion the self. Often, a sense of euphoric ecstasy accompanies this newly found *communitas* and feeling that “anything is possible” (Yang 2000: 384).

This experience of liminality is most certainly evident in the recent cycle of contention—from the revolutionaries of the Arab Spring to the Occupiers in Zuccotti Park. Throughout the personal narratives in “Occupied Stories,” a collection of testimonies and eyewitness accounts of the Occupy Movement, occupiers frequently averred their love for one another. Interestingly, there appears to be a correlation between moments when activists felt empowered or connected to others during a “successful” demonstration or instance of collective action. And in “From Montreal: An Open Letter to the Mainstream Media,” a student protestor in the Quebec student strike comments that for her and her fellow protestors, despite the media’s emphasis on clashes with police, the significance of

the strike is not about the anger and contention, but the sense of collective joy in collaboration. As she comments, “We use the word “love” a whole lot. We feel empowered. We feel connected . . . We are so proud of each other; of the spirit of Quebec and its people; of our ability to resist, and our ability to collaborate” (Anonymous 2012).

Consequently, when thinking about the role of love in contemporary movements, one must be sure to consider the impact of liminality on the discursive adoption of love by activists. That said, for most of these mobilizations, even after the liminal phase was long over the frames of love continued to spread. Moreover, there are numerous other political and theoretical currents, which also appeal to love as a powerful and strategic tool for social transformation and that are entirely independent from any professions of love during the euphoric honeymoon phase. If anything, perhaps it was the widespread experience of this liminality during the height of the recent cycle of contention in combination with these influential threads that has helped to give “love” such a potent traction across so many movements. Above all, however, we need to situate this analysis within the broader historical moment to fully explain a) why “political love is in the air” and b) what this even means.

A. CRISIS AND COLLAPSE

By September 2011, when thousands of protestors began to flood Zuccotti Park in the Wall Street district of lower Manhattan, millions of Americans had been struggling under the weight of a stagnant economy, historically high unemployment rate and crippling credit card or student loan debt for nearly upwards of three years. After having their savings go belly up when the housing bubble burst and the economy tanked in the winter of 2008-9, they then saw their homes and jobs disappear due to foreclosure and massive layoffs. Adding insult to injury they also watched the government system, which was purportedly there to protect them, plunk trillions of dollars into bailing out the banks, while simultaneously slashing the economic safety net. Indeed, the egregious impacts of neoliberalism deregulation and “crony capitalism,” which had contributed to a dramatic acceleration of economic inequality and preferential treatment to corporate interests were finally being exposed (Langman 2013). And the American public was incensed to say the least.

In particular, it was the college-educated students and other progressives who had been ardent supporters of the Obama administration that felt a profound sense of betrayal and disappointment with the state of affairs. Having served as his foot soldiers in his campaign, Obama had not only failed to deliver on his promises, but was actively choosing to support big business at the expense of the little guys. These young people who went on to make up a significant portion of the participants, now had to reconcile this with the fact that their President was more invested in saving Wall St. than addressing the trillion dollars in student debt and extremely bleak job market (Milkman 2013). To use the Occupiers words, “the banks got bailed out, the people got sold out!” It was precisely this disillusionment, which catalyzed interest in looking for alternatives. Or as one protestor expressed it, “The Obama presidency was disillusioning to a lot of people, and that’s why Occupy Wall Street spread so much. We’d tried to get the best liberal we could, and then we got more of the same shit. Then it’s either cynicism or we’re going to try something completely different. And people are, like, ‘Let’s try something completely different.’” (Milkman et al. 2012: 18).

It was not, however, simply disenchantment with that particular administration that had the American public primed for action. It was the entirety of the democratic system, electoral politics, and capitalism that were increasingly viewed as unfair and were, hence, beginning to sour on them. As was so aptly captured by the Mother Jones article, “It’s the Inequality, Stupid,” which went viral in April 2011 and was later a mantra among the movement, at the root of America’s problems were runaway capitalism and the ever more vast disparities in wealth (Gilson and Perot March/April 2011). This perception points to what Lauren Langman describes as a kind of crisis of legitimation of global capitalism that arose from the Great Recession. “Economic crises, implosions, and structural contradictions that threaten survival or the maintenance of living standards, or render social status, dignity and self-esteem problematic,” he comments, “lead to questions and challenges to the legitimacy of the economic system, political leadership, and legitimating ideologies” (2013: 512). The Occupy Movement and the principles it espoused, in other words, served as a way to fill that vacuum, offering alternative, more attractive, values and political opportunities.

The occupiers and other disaffected Americans were certainly, however, not alone. Throughout the world, communities were feeling the crushing weight of the financial crisis as nation after nation implemented stringent austerity measures, as employment rates plummeted to plummet, and

poverty-levels only continued to rise. As several scholars noted, a steep rise in global economic inequality fueled by neoliberalism had led to “a sharp polarization of incomes, the exclusion of a rapidly growing class of educated yet unemployed youth, raising prices for basic commodities, the retrenchment of government services, and, in turn, a growing Precariat” (Langman et al. 2013; Standing 2011). In Spain, one of the Eurozone countries most deeply in trouble due to the crisis, nearly 43.5% of young people were unemployed, which fueled the Spanish M15 or Indignado Movement (Arestad 2013). In Greece, meanwhile, nearly one-third of the population joined in protests against the stringent austerity measures (Karyotis and Rüdig 2013). And the mobilizations continued to spread as the crisis deepened. On October 15, 2011, for example, which was one of the most dramatic moments of worldwide collective action during the recent mobilizations, demonstrations were held in some 951 cities in more than 80 countries. The largest of these was in Spain where over 400,000 outraged citizens took to the streets (Brady, Cohen, Miller, Reeves 2011).

Since then, the global economy has remained destabilized at best. And despite even the most Pollyanna of prognoses and assessments, economic inequality continues to grow and we still have not fully recovered. Meanwhile, scientific evidence for climate change also continues to pile up, there is talk of peak oil on the horizon and extreme weather disasters are becoming par for the course. For many, there is a very real sense of “end times.” Or at least there is a perception that if we do not take drastic steps to ameliorate these issues we face societal collapse and an end to viability on the planet altogether. It is within this context, that one must read the presence of love—as well as the currents both generating them—in contemporary mobilizations. Indeed, there is a reason why these political trends and traditions are so pronounced in this moment. They speak to the times, offering much welcome alternatives and potential challenges to the dismal, dehumanizing effects of global capitalism, particularly, as it seems to have reached a crisis point. Love is at the heart of this.

B. NONVIOLENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

In the wake of George Zimmerman's highly controversial acquittal for the murder of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teen, upheld under Florida's Stand Your Ground statute, Heidi Lewis, commented that:

I thought about my son. He is one of the sweetest kids I've ever had the pleasure of knowing . . . And after that verdict, I thought, "I don't know if we can keep raising this boy to be as kind and loving as he is. He's a young black boy living in the United States. He could be shot dead just for walking down the street." I thought about shedding my feminist skin and raising my son to be hypermasculine and hard. I didn't want him to become the next Trayvon Martin . . . But deep down inside, I knew that wasn't healthy. Martin Luther King, Jr. warned us, "We must not become that which we despise," and I knew I didn't want to become George Zimmerman or the attorney that defended him or the jury that acquitted him . . . love—for ourselves and for each other—is still the answer. A world in which black and brown bodies are in constant danger is a world that requires us to hate. We can't afford to hate. If I am to give my children a world that is healthier than the one given to me, I must find a way to love my way through to progress and change (Lewis 2013).

For Lewis, it was more powerful and important to choose love over hate, something which she attributes to the wisdom of MLK Jr., known for his practices of nonviolence and nonviolent civil disobedience.

Inspired by Gandhi and popularized by MLK Jr. during the civil rights, nonviolence and nonviolent civil disobedience have been prevalent in movements since then, including the anti-war protests of the 1960s, the anti-Communist revolutions leading to the fall of the Soviet Bloc as well as the Global Justice Movement. As many scholars have noted, it was also one of the common Spring in 2011 as well as the Spanish M15 and Occupy movements through 2012 and, arguably, throughout the waves of protests that continued to swell in areas disparate as Turkey, Brazil, and Montreal. As commented by Benski et al. in a special issue of *Current Sociology*, *From Indignation to Occupation: A New Wave of Global Mobilization* (Benski, Langman, Perugorria and Tejerina 2013):

The contentious repertoire of these movements has entailed, as well, the active refusal to obey certain laws, demands and commands emitted by local governments. These acts of *civil disobedience* have come, in large part, hand in hand with the nonviolent resistance to forcible removal of protest camps and police repression. The movements have portrayed nonviolence as a strength (2013: 383).

Despite the frequent conflation of the terms, nonviolent civil disobedience and nonviolence are distinct from one another. As Erica Chenoweth and Kathleen Cunningham explicate, nonviolent civil disobedience or direct action is a strategy that employs organizing tactics such as disruption, non-compliance, and symbolic demonstration to attain instrumental ends such as the building of political power or material goals (2013). Nonviolence, meanwhile, is actually “conceptually different phenomenon—the eschewing of violent or armed action because of a moral, philosophical, or principled commitment” (Chenoweth and Cunningham 2013: 273). And although scholars have focused on the role of nonviolent civil disobedience in the recent cycle of contention, they have not explored nonviolence to the same degree. Yet, often, the two overlap as was the case for the Occupy movement and other ongoing mobilizations, including climate justice and spiritually-informed movements calling for global awakening.

In fact, nonviolence is often closely associated with appeals to love as it is common practice for spiritual and religious activists to refer to divine forms of love as guiding their commitment to social justice or having transformative powers. Gandhi’s term “satyagraha,” for instance, which describes his moral reasoning behind his strategy of resistance during the Indian Independence struggle, actually directly references love. He notes, “Truth (satya) implies love, and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement Satyagraha, that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence” (Gandhi 1968:106-7). Meanwhile, MLK Jr. further infused spiritual meaning into nonviolence with the incorporation of Christian conceptions of the power of love, charity, forgiveness and the “beloved community.” Similarly, Christian Liberation Theology and, certainly, other protestant-based forms of Christianity also emphasize social justice and principles of “loving your enemy.”

Indeed, there is a great deal of spiritually motivated activism in contemporary social protest.¹² Obvious in Lewis’ statement as well as that of other activists such as Boggs, this is rooted directly in the legacy of MLK’s and Gandhian nonviolence. This legacy is very much a core part of newer mobilizations such as evident in the Love-In-Action Network. Blending many of the practices of the Occupy model, including consensus decision-making and autonomous groups, the network describes itself as dedicated to MLK and Gandhian-inspired, nonviolent action as way to prepare “for the necessary struggle to ensure our health, well-being, and a future for humanity” (Sun 2013).

¹² Certainly, Christian-based activism and faith-based groups are also still very prominent in American movement spaces, including those committed to upholding the legacy of MLK, however, I have found more evidence of Buddhist and New Age forms of spirituality through my investigation.

Notably, it is the Love-in-Action Network that is one of main sponsors along with hundreds of other organizations describing itself as part of “a movement of movements” that launched a three-month “wave of action—toward a new paradigm” that began on MLK’s birthday on April 4th, 2014.

There are also Buddhist and loosely Buddhist-informed spiritual currents that see themselves as supporting global transformation through promotion of radical loving values. Corresponding with what is coming to be known as the “mindfulness revolution,” Buddhist notions of loving-kindness and radical compassion, primarily through the teachings and writings by Thich Nhat Hanh—including, *Love in Action: Writings on Non-violent Social Change* and *Love Letter to the Earth*—have gained great popularity among American activists participating in both domestic and transnational movement spaces (1993; 2013). In fact, there is a growing anarcho-Buddhist community throughout the US and elsewhere, which explicitly brings anarchist values and social justice-orientation to their practice. Others are more connected to what some criticize as “corporate Buddhism”—ie. the “mindfulness movement”—which has generated an entire industry out of packaging meditation as a way to handle the stresses of daily life (Loy and Purser 2013; Rubin 2015).

Critiques aside, for many of the activists who are part of the “mindfulness movement,” the recent mobilizations reflect a spiritual awakening that is rooted in love of humanity. For instance, “The Love Mob,” which grew out of a flash mob in Los Angeles in response to Hurricane Sandy, aims to serve as a “multi-generational movement that promotes love as a lifestyle” (thelovemob.org). According to the group, by providing “a place for community to grow . . . self development, creative expression, and acts of service and connection that effect our immediate and global communities. Our events encourage deeper connections with self, and with others.” This, they state, helps to heal the planet and create a “more sustainable way of life.”

This type of humanity-oriented, ecumenically-motivated social activism is echoed in “The Rise of Compassionate Direct Action,” in which self-described “spiritual anarchist,” Gary Roland, recounts his arrest along with 397 other students and activists, as part of XL Dissent, a nonviolent action in front of the White House protesting building of the KXL Pipeline in March 2014. For him, the experience was an opportunity to practice meditation. As he further explains, quoting fellow activist, Ben Thompson, participating in the action was a chance to “show the world how much we can love. Our actions amount to a series of actions of love. Today in love, we will stop the Keystone

Pipeline.” Roland, though, is not alone in his mediation-as-action. It is even arguable, that mediation is coming to be a form of nonviolent repertoire of contention. Activist Pancho Ramos-Stierle, for example, who also feels that the world is witnessing the “emergence of [a] new paradigm” as the system shifts “from violence to courage and respect and love,” was arrested for meditating at Occupy Oakland, something that received wide coverage by prominent activist news sites including *Yes! Magazine*, *Popular Resistance*, and *Waging Nonviolence*, among others (van Gelder 2013; Rivera 2014). It was also common to see occupiers meditating in the encampments.

Whether Christian, Buddhist, Muslim or other forms of non-denominational “spiritualism,” however, it is clear that there is a real draw towards the humanism of these traditions and worldviews. The shared emphasis on loving all of humanity, of practicing compassion, and finding inner peace and awakening has a distinct appeal for those finding life in the global age of capitalism wanting. To be sure, while not all spiritually or religiously motivated activists are overtly anti-capitalist, many express dissatisfaction with the competitive market-logic as our dominant value. It is further arguable, that within radical circuits this attraction to faith-based activism, may also bespeak a feeling of disillusionment with the anti-ecumenical attitudes of classic Marxism and, even, anarchism. The activists participating in these movements see spirituality as critical to transformation of society, bringing it to bear on how they understand both the process of re-making relationships, awakening consciousness and undoing systemic inequalities.

C. ANARCHISM AND PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

As is commonly remarked upon by scholars and activists alike, one of the more unique features to the recent mobilizations was the practice of “reclaiming the commons” through occupation of public space. Moreover, these encampments came to be little “prefigurative” experiments in alternative moral economies, where activists sought to radically re-make the world along directly democratic, non-hierarchical lines and value systems other than those associated with capitalism. As one participant in the Indignado movement remarked about the camp in Madrid:

The camp was configured like a small city. From the beginning streets were established where people could walk. Different areas were marked by colored tape, including spaces for walking, sleeping, eating, and leisure. Diverse commissions were created to organize the camp . . . there were places where you could get a massage after a tiring day at the camp; and there was even a children's library with a small nursery . . . we were not just a youth movement—the people from the area and the homeless also helped. They undertook logistical tasks, they made tables and chairs for us, and put up canvases when it rained. It was a very heterogeneous movement, you could find anyone: students, precarious workers, regular workers . . . It was like a small world inside a world, but fantastic. So spontaneous, and yet so well organized (Feixa et al. 2012).

Although anarchism is certainly not the only organizing logic in the most recent mobilizations, it is becoming increasingly accepted that since the Global Justice Movement, the importance of anarchism on activism has grown, and possibly eclipsed other radical schools of thought or revolutionary “sensibilities.” Or as some scholars suggest, there has been an “anarchist turn” in contemporary movements (Duane and Evren 2011). This shift arose in the last decades of the twentieth century, as the deleterious effects of neoliberalism began to impact communities throughout the world and activists found the range of traditional alternatives wanting—national governments appeared to be kneeling before the demands of corporate interests; the United Nations was politically impotent; Communism was a failure; and the social welfare State was collapsing under the weight of neoliberalism.

Consequently, anarchism's emphasis on direct democracy and prefigurative modeling of socially just alternatives made it a deeply attractive solution. For this reason, in 1994, when the Zapatista's demonstrated that it was possible to push back against the forces of global capitalism and effectively put forth a new form of anarchist theory and praxis directly challenging neoliberalism, it reignited a sense of political possibility among the Left—tipping the scales towards anarchism—effectively, ushering in the birth of the Global Justice Movement and laying the groundwork for the many of the most recent mobilizations (Cornell 2011; Marshall 2009; Epstein 2001; Kingsnorth 2003; Martinez and Garcia 2004; Markoff 1999; Prokosch and Rayond 2002; Rousselle, Duane and Evren 2011; Solnit 2004; Smith 2007, 2012). And, while prefiguration is not exclusively associated with anarchism, in the most recent cycle of contention, both scholars and activists alike have attributed anarchism as inspiring the prefigurative dimensions to the M15 and Occupy movements (2013).

As explained by Marianne Maeckelbergh, prefiguration is a political practice which “means removing the temporal distinction between the struggle in the present and a goal in the future; instead, the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present” (2011:4). This suggests, among things, that activists engaged in prefigurative politics seek to radically transform social relationships along more equitable lines and aim at building community power through affective ties, which are often forged in the context of small, deeply connected “affinity group” structures. Related to this is also a deep commitment to “mutual aid” or cooperative ethics. Consequently, re-thinking friendship, love, solidarity are an essential component in prefigurative political movements.

Given the explicitly prefigurative aims and organization in the most recent mobilizations and the emphasis these place on transformative relationship building, it is therefore necessary to understand how love serves as binding tie in their conceptions and practices of establishing friendships and community. Moreover, analysis of how many activists within prefigurative movement spaces use the term “love” as a form of “radical politic” indicate that they see it as a germane aspect of how to transform the political economy, by supplanting capitalist cut-throat, competition and inequality with cooperative, compassionate “love” of others—in short, prefiguration is a kind of praxis for the imagining of a new moral economy and basis for new forms of “loving” subjectivities.

Perhaps one the most clearly identifiable examples of this prefigurative “love in action”—or the reimagining of a new moral economy—is in the adherence to practices of mutual aid, which in the context of the M15 and Occupy movements draws on the ideas from anarchist Peter Kropotkin’s work *Mutual Aid* (1902). In this work, Kropotkin argues against Darwinian analysis and insists that in the natural world animals are more likely to co-operate to survive than to compete, consequently, so too, human progress also requires the same cooperative relationships. For the occupiers and Indignados, mutual aid served as the underpinning for their communities and social arrangements. As they saw it, this not only minimizes reliance on capitalist-driven economic systems, but also challenges the competition, inequalities, and alienation encouraged by capitalist competition.

This practice of “love in action” or compassionate cooperation through mutual aid was perhaps most obvious in the experimental social arrangements in the occupied spaces. Virtually all the

encampments included services for the camp-dwellers such as “comfort stations,” that offered free clothes and bedding, along with other free provisions such as medical care, food, mental health and religious counseling among numerous others. Since the end of the Indignado and Occupy encampments in the US and elsewhere, perhaps the most active and prominent related project to emerge has been Occupy Sandy. Initially established as a volunteer relief group that helped to distribute supplies to neighborhoods affected by Hurricane Sandy in the fall of 2012, Occupy Sandy has been very clear in the intentional use of “mutual aid” as their overarching principle and even refers to itself as a “mutual aid network.” As Jeffrey Lawrence and Luis Moreno-Callubad note in an article about mutual aid in the Occupy Movement and Occupy Sandy, “Within the first week of setting up camp in Zucotti Park, people in Occupy started talking about the importance of systems of “mutual aid” rather than systems of “charity.” Charity means: “I’m fine, so I’ll give you something.” Mutual aid means: “We’re all in this together, so let’s help each other out” (2012).

It is not simply mutual aid, however, that speaks to the prefiguring and forging of transformative relationships within anarchism. The idea of “love as revolutionary” is actually very much embedded in anarchist principles and practice dating back to the classic 19th and early 20th century thinkers. Like the Lorde meme, there is even one of Italian anarchist, Ernesto Malatesta, that gets a great deal of circulation among anarchist milieus, which declares:

By anarchist spirit I mean that deeply human sentiment, which aims at the good of all, freedom and justice for all, solidarity and love among the people; which is not an exclusive characteristic only of self-declared anarchists, but inspires all people who have a generous heart and an open mind . . . (1922).

Evident in the popularity of this quote, love continues to feature largely in contemporary anarchism. In her blog entry “Shade of Love”—which is, incidentally, one of the essays in a forthcoming collection of *Revolutionary Love Letters*—reflecting on the meaning of love in the context of Occupy Wall Street, Cindy Milstein, expresses that prefiguring more meaningful, supportive connections serves as a bulwark against the alienating forces of capitalism and commodity logic. She writes:

I began to again perceive love not as a hollow slogan but instead as a heartfelt bulwark against the psychic impoverishment of present-day capitalism. I started to understand it as a catalyst for and even complement to resistance against the material impoverishment of capitalism as well . . . I’m discovering the potential within one of the most tender of revolutionary slogans: “we carry a new world here, in our hearts.” What if we shifted this

phrase from mere words into the slightly reworded practice of enacting “a new world here, from our hearts”—as an integral, prefigurative component of social transformation? What if we also reworded it as the basis for why we want to reorganize society—“a new world here, for our hearts”? Where would that loving world be situated?

And here’s where the revolutionary potential of love makes an entrance in the shades of love . . . In the manifold ways in which we’re able to emerge—with dignity and solidarity . . . Because we know there is joy to be had in being a participant in and creator of love, communities of care, in the self-determined gifting and sharing of multifarious forms of loves and loving (Milstein 2012).

Notably, along with emphasizing the importance of both personal and community transformation through the adoption of love as a revolutionary ethic, she also specifically identifies the ways in which it reclaims human dignity from the clutches of the geoculture of capitalism. Again, this sentiment—that prefiguring compassion, cooperation and togetherness are the antipode to global capitalism—is echoed across movements, from the Indignados to climate justice. Velcro Ripper, director of *OccupyLove*, a documentary, which aimed to “turn today’s crisis into the world’s greatest love story,” also sees this correlation. As he describes it, “[b]y remaining firmly grounded in love, we are practicing ‘prefigurative politics.’ Instead of waiting for some far off dream of a peaceful, loving world, we are living it, right now, in real time.” While Ripper may not be an anarchist, this kind of utterance absolutely reflects the influence of anarchism. Similarly, the notion that no one can be free until all are—ie. all struggles are interrelated—also reflects one of the foundations of anarchist thought. And, as is manifestly evident throughout current forms of social protest, this also, has become a common perception among activists. The influence of the anarchist turn, it would seem then, might just be helping to catalyze this sentiment of desire for a more “loving,” interconnected, and practice-based dimension to contemporary struggles.

D. INDIGENEITY AND DECOLONIAL THOUGHT

If you are looking for “a future that won’t destroy life on earth,” according to Sarah Van Gelder and the other editorial team members at *Yes! Magazine*, you need to look to “Indigenous people worldwide [who] are on the front lines of the battle against climate change” (2013). As they go on

to explain, indigenous movements and indigenous-led activism are at the forefront of organizing against everything from blockading the blockading tar sands pipelines to fracking and, general protection of the land from corporate exploitation and devastation. All this is true. Indigenous activists have become key figures in mobilizing for climate justice. In terms of their impact on contemporary activism, however, they are also changing the culture and discourse of activism, including though an infusion of a loving-ethic and message in their organizing.

Without reducing indigenous politics (or cosmology, for that matter) to a singular thing, there is a strong spiritual current to the way movements like Idle No More understand their struggles to protect the land. Along with the legacy of MLK and other Christian focuses on nonviolence and the “mindfulness revolution,” movements for indigenous rights (and its interrelated goal of preventing ecological devastation), are the other prevalent forms of spiritually-motivated activism that bring a “loving lens” to contemporary activism.¹³ At the center of this, is the perception that we need to radically transform our relationships (once again, much in line with other contemporary currents of radical thought) to both the Earth and each other. Furthermore, it requires a more holistic approach to activism, one that sees the interconnections across all forms of dominance, from colonial appropriation of land to exploitation of the environment to racism and patriarchy.

This, many indigenous and allied activists see, as possible by drawing on traditional worldviews and practices that emphasize a more equitable relationship between all peoples and the planet. As one activist explains:

It is this thread that goes to the heart of our global ecological crisis. While indigenous cultures differ widely from one another, what they collectively present is an alternative relationship—to the earth, to its resources, and to each other—a relationship based not on domination but on reciprocity. Any movement that seeks to create deep, lasting social change—to address not only climate change but endemic racism and social inequality—must confront our colonial identity and, by extension, this broken relationship (Klein 2013).

This reciprocity is often expressed as a kind of love. Again, many of the key organizers of Idle No More refer to their movement as explicitly rooted in spiritual love. Leanne Simpson, a scholar-activist with ties to the movement, for example, comments that as she sees it, “the politics of

¹³ It is important to note, that it would be problematic to make broad swath generalizations that all indigenous activism foregrounds love or spirituality. This might lead down a slippery slope to romanitization and fetishized understanding of indigenous cultures. Evidence suggests, however, that spirituality and love do feature largely among the discourse, framing and principles in the Idle No More Movement.

indigenous women, and traditional indigenous politics, it is a politics based on love” (Klein 2013). Moreover, she feels that it is expressly due the large participation by indigenous women and their historical exclusion from patriarchal, colonial governing systems that the Idle No More movement organizing has “been outside of that system and . . . based on that politics of love” (Klein 2013).

Lori Mainville, another Idle No More participant, shares this sentiment and comments that even in the face of personal risk, “I keep remembering that the greatest equalizer is love . . . no fear, no surrender, only love . . . For me, it's about love as a mother and a grandmother and a sister and a community member” (Graham 2013). Indigenous rights activist and feminist, Siku Allooloo, further corroborates the connection between indigenous traditions and loving politics:

Because we live in a society that normalizes violence, injustice and dysfunction, it might be difficult to imagine a reality based in systems of respect and mutual well-being. However, as Indigenous peoples we must remember that we actually come from such societies. We have laws that ensure respect and reciprocity, and we have ways of restoring balance.

Protocols. Stories. Ceremonies. Love and respect are the currencies of our relationships.

Indigenous societies are built on love that lifts up, that replenishes and acts to strengthen the vitality of our relations, including ourselves. Intentional relationships of mutual care, respect and nurturing are intrinsic to our values, laws and protocols, and I advocate that we draw on these in our collective efforts toward decolonization and ending gender violence in our communities.

I advocate for love because it is the most powerful, life-giving force and it is our greatest strength (2013).

Along with Idle No More, other indigenous activists are also engaged in climate justice. This kind of reference to love of the earth is also evident in the anti-GMO efforts in Hawaii. “Aloha ‘āina” is a frequent chant and message used during these protests. As explained by one activist, this is translatable to both “love of the land.” Interestingly, though, the term also means “love for the country” and was historically used to call for Hawaii independence. In effect, then, here we see a direct correlation between climate justice activism and decolonization—something also very much as the core of the Idle No More movement (2013). These struggles are inextricably viewed as interrelated. To be sure, this reflects the long history and practice of appropriating indigenous lands for colonial purposes.

There is also an explicit tie between some forms of indigenous activism with nonviolence practice and other fronts of struggles such as peace. As an action intended to raise awareness about the

highly polluted condition of the Mississippi River—the most polluted river in the United States—Sharon Day, executive director of the Indigenous Peoples Task Force, walked the river from Minnesota to Gulf of Mexico along with a handful of other Ojibwe women. This, she averred, was not about resistance, however, but about love, nonviolence and global transformation:

... the Water Walk is not about resisting anything. It's really about love—love for ourselves because we are the water and love for the rivers ... I did the Mississippi River Water Walk because I live a block from the river, and I cross it several times a day. I have a relationship with the Mississippi River. But it's about love. It's about moving toward something, as opposed to resisting anything. The old people say that if you want peace, you must be with love.

One day when someone asked, "Why do you do this? What do you hope to accomplish?" I said I was walking because I want world peace. And ultimately that is why we walk. If we can treat the water with respect and love—not violence—then perhaps that sentiment will spill over into our relationships with each other and our relationships with the earth (Conrad 2013; Day 2013).

Given the centrality of indigenous participation in climate justice and the seamless ways reciprocity, mutuality and an anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal stance dovetail with other contemporary political trends—such as other spiritual forms of activism or anarchist prefiguration—it is no wonder that the ideas of Indigeneity and decolonization have begun to permeate many movements. From the Occupy movement's struggle to rethink the language of "occupation" to more generalized calls by scholar-activists to "decolonize" our minds from patriarchal, racist, predatory and exploitative ideologies, the principle and language of decolonization has been adopted across the spectrum of contemporary mobilizations.

Certainly, just as there is no single indigenous worldview, there is neither a single definition of "Indigeneity" or decolonial thought. Rather, to engage in struggles for decolonization takes on many forms. Yet, there are some commonalities across them. At base line, decolonization can be thought of "as oppositional to colonial ways of thinking and acting" while demanding "Indigenous starting point and an articulation of what decolonization means for Indigenous peoples around the globe," (Sium, et al 2012: 2). And, while the "desired outcomes of decolonization are diverse and located at multiple sites in multiple forms," there is a shared desire for "Indigenous sovereignty over land and sea, as well as over ideas and epistemologies" (Sium, et al 2012: 2).

Above all, however, it is the importance placed on the remaking of relationships and seeing this as inseparable from contesting the interrelated colonial-capitalist project that is key to understanding

the influence of indigenous activism on contemporary mobilizations and movement discourse. Indeed, Indigeneity is a way to “fill the gap left by hyperindividualism and consumption,” by “re-evaluating our relationship to the sacred and embracing our place in the sacred circle of life” and re-establishing the “connection we have to the sacredness of Mother Earth has been damaged by the psychotic Western industrial experiment called capitalism” (Thomas-Muller cited by van Gelder 2013). Or put otherwise, the indigenous rights movements prove that “as we tear down the walls of colonization, a previously unimaginable future can become reality”—a more loving one (Thomas-Mueller cited by van Gelder 2013).

E. BLACK FEMINISM AND THE FEMINIST ETHIC OF CARE

In 1983 the Combahee River Collective issued a statement that their politics “evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters, and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work” (1983 in Nash 2011: 1). Perhaps one of the earliest articulations of self-love and love of community explicitly as related to black female politics, this idea has since become a cornerstone in black feminist theory and scholarship. Celebrated author, bell hooks, for instance, is known for her work on love, including *All About Love* in which she asserts that, “all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic” (2000: xvii). Along with hooks, many other second wave black feminists also explored how love relates to a politics of liberation such as Traci West, Chela Sandoval, and Patricia Hill Collins. Contemporary feminists such as Joan Morgan, Gwendolyn Pough and June Jordan also talk about love (Nash 2011). During an address at Howard University in 2003, Jordan, for instance, declared:

It is here, in this extreme, inviolable coincidence of my status as a Black feminist, my status as someone twice stigmatized, my status as a Black woman who is twice kin to the despised majority of all the human life that there is, ... it is here, in this extremity, that I ask, of myself, and of anyone who would call me *sister*. *Where is the love ?* (2003, 270-71; italics in original cited in Nash 2011).

As noted earlier, it is certainly common to hear about self-love and the need to be compassionate with oneself and for collective healing in most fronts of struggle, including broader anti-capitalist efforts. In part this suggests an infusion of black feminist throughout many movement spaces (the importance of which gets overlooked by many movement scholars). It is arguable that there has been a process within movements where there has slowly been a shifting from the margins to the center, in terms of the prominent practices and principles. This has resulted in a more intersectional, often spiritual, “love-ethic” or “ethic of care” in activist spaces.

This notion of “love-politics” first emerged in the seventies and eighties, when “pleas for love were [specifically] consolidated into a sustained call for a black feminist love-politics . . . [and] has long been celebrated for its advocacy of love as a resistant ethic of self-care.” (Nash 2013: 1). Or as feminist, Charyl Clarke puts it, black feminists began to realize, “[w]e have spent so much time hating ourselves. Time to love ourselves” (Moore 2012). In essence, then, this form of politics served as a way to value the lives of black women through “claiming, embracing, and restoring the wounded black female self” (Nash 2013: 1). Similarly, as Alice Walker maintains, self-love is an “artful advocacy of unconditional love that starts with our acceptance of ourselves as divinely and humanly lovable,” (Sanders et al. 2006: 152). Related to this, however, a love-ethic is also universal in its celebration of difference. While valuing black females, it also values all difference. To be sure, not all feminists subscribe to the same definition of love-politics. Audre Lorde, for example, spoke of caring for herself as a radical loving act, but also emphasized the importance of harnessing anger and confronting fear of otherness. Still, common to most, is the idea of self-love as a project, necessary to heal, transform, and liberate.

Returning to the Combahee River Collective, when considering the influential role of black feminism on contemporary activism, one must also look at the impact of “interlocking” understandings of oppression—an idea that dovetails seamlessly with other currents that emphasize an interconnection across struggles like anarchism and various forms of religious and spiritual activism. In reaction to the colorblind, privileged perspectives of second wave feminism, feminist theorists of color have sought to find ways to best capture the messiness and conceptual complexity of the overlapping, interactive nature of multiple oppressions. One of the first expressions of this was Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of “intersectionality,” however, there have been numerous theories that have sought to underscore the myriad of ways in which multifaceted identities are shaped by the many structures of domination and ever-shifting contexts, including everything from

Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's "Theory in the Flesh," to María Lugones' "Curdling" and Patricia Hill Collin's "Matrix of Domination" (Chavéz and Griffin 2012). Of these, the idea of "interlocking" oppressions perhaps most highlights the ways in which all forms of subjugation and domination are integrally related to one another and that striving for an end of any form of oppression necessitates struggling to end all oppressions. They are not only intersecting, but are inextricably tied together.

Writing in 1977, the collective—comprised of a group of black feminist lesbians—issued a statement averring that:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face (1977: 210).

As they argue, it would be impossible to address only a single issue at a time. Hence, their instance that "... we are not just trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppressions ... if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (1977: 215). Moreover, the collective members further averred that along with also addressing racism and heterosexism that "the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy" (213). This holistic understanding they put forth on the interrelated and interlocking dimensions to systems of domination is essential for understanding how contemporary activists understand power, privilege, and subjugation operate in contemporary society.

Along with the explicit influence of black feminism, the ethic of care in second wave feminism is also one of the feminist currents evident in loving rhetoric and practice in current movements. The concept of an "ethic of care" derives from Carol Gilligan's theory that more than men, women place high moral value on empathy and compassion (1982). And, while some feminists critique this as reinforcing gender-based stereotypes, it has had a critical impact on feminism and led to the emergence of "care-based" feminism. This school of thought subscribes to the notion that "Care-focused feminists regard women's capacity for care as a human strength" (Tong 2009: 162-165).

Over time, the theory has moved away from the exclusive emphasis on female caring, and now suggests that compassionate care work is a social responsibility for all, regardless of sex. Furthermore, later feminists such as Joan Tronto, have added to the philosophy by elaborating how this type of ethical practice requires attentiveness, responsiveness, responsibility, and competence (2005).

Ultimately, the idea of a love-politic and the ethic of care, have come to inform contemporary activists understandings of what it means to love themselves and their communities. Takiyah Amin, summarizes this well—from citing feminist ethics of care and black feminism as his inspiration to explaining that at the heart of this type of politics is a deeply empathetic consideration for the well being of others:

This ethics of care, a contribution of feminist thought, requires that we consider context in our interactions and uphold the value of relationships — the sense that we are interdependent — at the core of our being/life/work. To enact love, then, requires that we move — that we “do” — that we act — with a commitment to creating spaces, engendering practices and fostering relationships that recognize and honor our connections to each other and upholds compassion, understanding and a willingness to act on the best of what we know to be right. This is about waking up each day, choosing to be conscious of our interdependence and acting accordingly. Love requires that we must want for others not only the best of what we want for ourselves, but that we are willing to listen to the deepest needs of another and to respond with gentleness and care (Takiyah Nur Amin 2013).

Again, this concern for others should not be mistaken as rendering inequity and difference invisible. In fact, it foregrounds them. Yet, it does suggest the need to forge relationships with those whom one shares experiential similarities as well as with those who are outside that realm of shared experience. “If black feminism’s commitment to love has been amplified as an interest in a transformative labor of the self,” Nash explains, “it has also manifested itself through an advocacy of the formation of affective political communities”—communities based in an ethic of care (2013: 4).

In a time when one in three black men goes to prison and every twenty-eight hours another black man is killed by security forces; and globally one in three women will suffer from sexual violence and abuse in her lifetime, there is an undeniable persistence of racial and sexual social inequity (Hudson 2013; Boseley 2013). This, necessarily, points to the enduring need for these types of supportive political communities and the importance of black feminist love-politics to-date. These caring communities, however, are no longer limited to feminist activists of color or white feminist spaces, for that matter. Rather, activists in virtually all of the contemporary fronts of struggle are

coming to see this as central to their politics. Indeed, as Jo Reger observes, in many ways, feminism in the 21st century must be thought of having diffused throughout other movements to the point where it effectively exists “everywhere” (2012). This may not only reflect a generalized desire for more connections in an age of precarity and alienation, but also greater diversity in movement spaces as activists increasingly work together across racial and other lines. It also suggests, a growing perspective that this type of collaborative work is necessary in order to confront systemic oppression.

F. AFFECT THEORY AND THE INTELLECTUAL LEFT

On Valentine’s Day 2014, the editors of *Tidal Magazine*, the journal of theory associated with Occupy Wall Street, featured an interview with political philosopher, Michael Hardt and affect theorist, Lauren Berlant. In the interview they discussed their thoughts on political love and its function in transforming societies. In the piece Hardt suggests “that substituting love for money or property as the means for organizing the social can open up new social and political projects” (2011). Berlant, meanwhile, expresses that love possesses possibilities for catalyzing social change, only she emphasizes how “love disorganizes our lives, opening us to move beyond ourselves” (2011). Like other affect theorists, she seeks to understand, how emotions “work to align some subjects with some others and against other others?” (Ahmed 2004: 118). This, includes, explorations of the affective relations of love. The interview was tweeted, posted to Facebook, and shared widely by readers.

Love, in fact, has received a great deal of attention among disciplines such as affect and queer theory, political philosophy, and anthropology as well as non-academic movement scholars (May 2012; Gubracic and Lynd 2008; Hardt 2005; Hardt and Negri 2004; Hardt and Schwartz 2007; Žižek 2013). Long before the interview with *Tidal Magazine*, Hardt co-authored *Multitude* with Antonio Negri, in which he first explored the topic. As he and Negri see it, love as a political concept can be a deeply revolutionary. For them, expanding love to encompass a continuum from personal to political—or as they describe from Eros to Agape—is a way to contest the limited understandings of love as reserved for the heteronormative bourgeois couple and their family. Similarly, they

suggest that this form of love must be a more inclusive “love of the stranger,” lest it be used for racist justifications of “love of the same.” As they summarize:

People today seem unable to understand love as a political concept, but a concept of love is just what we need to grasp the constituent power of the multitude. The modern concept of love is almost exclusively limited to the bourgeois couple and the claustrophobic confines of the nuclear family. Love has become a strictly private affair. We need a more generous and more unrestrained conception of love . . . We need to recover today this material and political sense of love, a love as strong as death. This does not mean that you cannot love your spouse, your mother, and your child. It only means that your love does not end there, that love serves as the basis for our political projects in common and the construction of a new society. Without this love, we are nothing (Hardt and Schwartz 2007: 813, 817).

Following this, Hardt went on to deliver a series of lectures entitled “Identity and Difference” for the European Graduate School on the political implications of non-romantic and love of humanity. Since then, he has followed up with several lectures explicitly entitled, “on love,” including his text, *The Procedures of Love: 100 Notes* (2013). With the aim “to understand how love can be the central, constitutive mode and motor of politics,” in *The Procedures of Love*, he further asserts that:

On the one hand, a political love must be a revolutionary force that radically breaks with the structures of the social life we know, overthrowing its norms and institutions. On the other hand, it must provide mechanisms of lasting associations and stable social bonds and thus create enduring institutions (2013: 5).

Hardt, Negri, and Berlant are not alone in their interest in the relationship between love and other affects with shaping our social relationships in the “Age of Austerity.” Another leading public intellectual and political theorist, Slavoj Žižek echoes this sentiment in his assertion that “Agape as political love . . . means that the unconditional, egalitarian love for one’s neighbor can serve as the foundation for a new social order” (Žižek 2013). Similarly, anarchist and professor of Philosophy, Todd May, who published *Friendship in the Age of Economics*, argues that “friendship” and turning to each other for support is a way to contest the competitive, alienating effects of capitalism and simultaneously undermines our dependence on the State and profit-driven exchanges (2012). Like many activists, he calls for a turn to friendship as a way to stave off market logic from influencing our social relationships. Yet, rather than explicitly calling for love, he suggests that it behooves humanity to adopt the Aristotelian notion of “true friendship.” This type of social relationship, he maintains, is not guided by self-seeking pleasure or gain. “Shared experience” is what grounds this type of relationship, not “economic-orientation” (2010).

May's non-market driven friendship and Hardt's "love of the stranger" or Berlant's conceptualizations of revolutionary power of love to "move beyond ourselves" and even the Christian notion of agape as referenced by Žižek, are all very much in line with the understandings of love articulated by many of today's activists. Certainly not all activists are steeped in academic theory. Yet, it says something that the Berlant-Hardt interview was being read by OWS activists. Just as it says something that Žižek is heralded as a fellow revolutionary voice and the political Left cannot get enough of public intellectuals like Noam Chomsky.

This affinity between these theoretical meditations and activist discourse is made clear in a piece by Darnell Moore, lead editor of the "Love as a Radical Act Forum," a special series hosted by Feministwire.com in September 2013. Drawing directly on affect theory he poses the question:

What would it mean to consider the radical potential of affect—of love, empathy, and pleasure—in a time when hostility, disconnection, and apathy are often employed? What are the uses of love, empathy, and pleasure in these times: temporal moments when intimate connection between friend and stranger is seemingly obstructed by a type of capitalist individualism that refuses community? What are the uses of love, empathy, and pleasure in the lives and work of those who seek to advance human rights and social justice in age when even "rights" and "justice" are co-opted and commodified terms/ideas in the neoliberalist enterprise of social justice and human rights organizing? (Moore 2013).

For him, "it seems [there is] no better time to analyze love than now in our neoliberal present—a moment when the love of one's nation, for example, becomes the impetus for the non-love of other bodies, of other nation states . . . love, or, rather, our "deep participation with each other," might very well be the affective force necessary to move us beyond neoliberalist preoccupations with the self, which is really a disdain of "the social" and the collective" (2013). As Moore sees it, love is a way to surmount neoliberalism and re-orient us to "the social." Meanwhile, activist journalist, Niki Seth-Smith explains that the Greek conception of *philia*, is "antithetical to the selfish drives of the market . . . an intrinsic challenge to *homo economicus*, the rational, self-interested actor invoked to legitimize the model of our unjust economy" (2013). In essence, love represents both *a break from*, and serves as a way *to break from* the hegemony of global capitalism. So, while, affect and political theory may not be the core influence on contemporary movements, at least in some spaces, these thinkers are helping to give language to the idea that love can be revolutionary.

V. CONCLUSION: MORE THAN A MESSAGE



Figure 21. Protest sign from Occupy Sydney.

Given the centrality of love to the messaging of so many of today's movements, the question remains on the table as to why scholars have for the most part neglected to explore this emergent discourse. At this stage, I can mostly offer speculative remarks as to why movement scholars have not paid more attention to political love, but it seems important to suggest at least a few. For starters, in the wake of the 1960s, with the rise of the "me generation," ongoing struggles over racism, sexism, and economic inequalities in a world that continues to be torn asunder through myriad violent conflicts, messages of universal love seem naïve at best, if not, altogether superficial.

Clearly, it is worthy to note, that there appears to be far more willingness to talk about love as revolutionary coming out of black feminists circles. As my study illustrates, it is also prevalent within spiritually-infused activism such as Christian socialism, the newly emergent “mindfulness movement” or some indigenous rights movements such as Idle No More.¹⁴ This raises some very interesting questions regarding the relationship between movement scholarship and marginalized voices in motivational frame analysis. Moreover, the reticence to talk about love as a frame very well may speak to the “ghost of Marx,” enduring claims to “scientific objectivity” within our discipline and reluctance to think of collective action or revolutionary motivations as falling outside of class-based contentious discourses or as being informed by faith-based activism.

These points strike me as reason enough to explore the concept of political love—it challenges potentially western-centric analyses of movements and interpretations that are (advertently or not) erasing the theoretical and discursive influences of movement scholars and activists of color. In addition, it helps to shift movement analyses towards inclusion of newer currents influencing contemporary social protest. In sum, then, based on this research, I would argue that contemporary meanings of “political love” as relevant to activism are a direct reflection of several developments, all of which call for new theoretical analysis:

- 1) The perceived failures of neoliberalism and global capitalism, especially in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008/9 and a related urgency around fears of climate collapse;
- 2) A resurgence of “spiritual” forms of activism, perhaps reflective of ethics of nonviolence, disillusionment with the alienating forces of capitalism or the growing influence of non-western movements and connections across global movements;
- 3) What some scholars are referring to as the “anarchist turn” or the growing influence of anarchism and prefigurative politics on contemporary movements and radical thought;

¹⁴ It also seems to have traction among queer liberation and gay rights activists who are challenging conventional notions of heteronormative romantic love and, hence, call for more all-encompassing, less bounded forms of love including in political spheres (a subject that I have not addressed here at length and which certainly calls for additional research and analysis).

- 4) An increasingly influential role of formerly marginalized voices and political currents/theories among Left-leaning movements—including black feminism as well as Indigeneity and decolonial thought;
- 5) The influence of other political theories of love (including affect theory) and general emphasis on the political implications of love among public intellectuals;
- 6) The emergence of a new motivational frame manifest in protest messages, art, “love letters” and practices; and
- 7) The confluence of movements as activists increasingly recognize the interconnectedness of their struggles and the need for a more unified anti-systemic, counter-hegemonic struggle.

This latter point, suggests an even more pressing reason behind the importance of further exploring political love for understanding contemporary mobilizations through a world-historical lens, however—*the theory of love as paradigm shift*.

Asef Bayat’s notion of the “paradigmatic shift” apparent in ordinary acts of resistance and “nonmovements” suggests the need for a more highly calibrated lens when identifying radical political breaks (Bayat 2010). Although his work must be read in the context of actors who seek to resist authoritarian governments rather than exiting altogether, it nevertheless, shows that sometimes you need to look in less obvious places for evidence of profound paradigm shifts and rejections of dominant discourses. In this case, I would argue, the appearance of political love in numerous activist spaces is one of those instances. By adopting a world-systemic framework for analyzing the way activists are conceptualizing love as revolutionary, it becomes evident that contemporary political love reflects an important break from the geoculture of capitalism and related systems of domination such as racism and patriarchy.

Certainly, to capture something as slippery as “paradigm shift” in value systems expressed through discursive adoption of a term, is tricky at best. Moreover, as some scholars suggest, love is not the only concept out there pointing to this shift. The Indigenous notion of “*buen-vivir*,” prevalent in the Global South, for example, is another sentiment that contests the Western-driven, corporate ethos.

It, too, appears to be gaining traction among the Left, in particular within the World Social Forum (Smith and Duncan 2012). Furthermore, it is essential to note that love has its limits. Just because occupiers may have been espousing a loving ethic, for instance, does not mean that they were doing so in practice. Indeed, across the camps, there was ample evidence of oppressive dynamics, including race and gender-based violence (Smith and Glidden 2012; Costanza-Chock 2012). Also, as Poletta suggests in her work on prefiguration, often closely knit political communities with strong bonds can lead to exclusion of those outside the group, which clearly runs counter to a more universal notion of “love” as a way to connect across boundaries. (2004). In fact, this implies that love may be most operational within certain political contexts and organizational structures. In more professionalized movement spaces or coalitions, for example, where there may be weaker affective ties among participants and trust is more tenuous, the idea of rooting ones work in a loving practice might not be as salient as within smaller, affinity groups.

Even so, “love” is one these conceptual and discursive indicators and merits serious interrogation if we are to begin to glean understanding into the changing culture and values within contemporary movements. Across movements, there is a sentiment that put into practice—through adoption of principles of nonviolence, compassion towards self and others, accountability to collective wellbeing, a shared sense of fate and cooperation to surmount challenges—love has the ability to transform individual lives, communities, and society-at-large. It does this, not only by building powerful movements, but by raising consciousness. In so doing, it shifts the paradigm from one predicated on the hegemony of the geoculture of capitalism to one based on a “love.” This sense of interdependence, moreover, is manifest in a changing perception that if we are to successfully mount any meaningful challenge to capitalism and structural oppression, we must do so together. In other words, there is growing perception that our struggles cannot be tackled individually, but must be taken on in collaboration with one another. This means that climate activism; indigenous sovereignty; racial, gender and sexual equality; labor rights; and movements for peace and democracy are all bound together. And, perhaps needless to say, threaded throughout is a deeply held anti-capitalist politics.

This again points to an augmenting confluence of these movements as they come to see their struggles as inextricably related in a common anti-systemic cause—hence, necessitating collaboration across fronts of struggle. It also suggests, that we are experiencing a cultural,

attitudinal and affective shift, where we seek to reclaim our sense of humanity from market-logic. In an interview, indigenous rights activist, Pancho Ramos-Stierle, captures this sentiment:

We are the early adopters of a revolution of values, and we are the evidence that the totalitarianism of corporate capitalism—the machine that has devastated the planet and human beings—we are the demonstration that system doesn't work and that we need a new system . . . Our movement is trying to give birth and move from scarcity to abundance, from transaction to trust, from consumption to contribution, from isolation to community, from perfection to wholeness, from terror to fearlessness, from violence to courage and respect and love, and this is the key. The emergence of the new paradigm and our victory is not putting people in power but power in people (Ramos-Stierle cited by van Gelder 2013).

Indeed, the promotion of these alternate modes of “loving,” transformative relationships and subjectivities reflects the re-imagining of a new moral economy and desire for more meaningful, egalitarian, and cooperative connections; a reclamation of dignity; and concern for our environment in contradistinction to a world-system based along division, inequity, competition, alienation, degradation and profit over sustainability. The appearance of love in movement discourse, then, represents evidence of a counterhegemonic and anti-systemic current within the Left—that has grown ever more pronounced since the Great Recession and Financial Crisis of 2008 and, even more recently, due to fears of pending climate collapse. In short, the salience of political love for contemporary movements corroborates claims that global capitalism has reached a crisis point and, arguably, indicates that there is a paradigmatic shift underway. If, for this reason alone, it seems prudent for movement scholars to begin exploring some of the many possible avenues out there that may help to advance our theory and knowledge of political love in contemporary forms of activism.

APPENDIX

Table 7. LIST OF SOURCES AND DIGITAL JOURNALS

General Activist and Progressive News	Movement Specific Sites and Blogs
<i>Popular Resistance</i>	<i>Colorlines (racial justice)</i>
<i>Waging Nonviolence</i>	<i>FeministWire (feminist)</i>
<i>AlterNet</i>	<i>Black Girl Dangerous (feminist, racial and queer justice)</i>
<i>Yes! Magazine</i>	<i>OccupyLove (Occupy and spiritual activism)</i>
<i>Mother Jones</i>	<i>Libcom (anarchist)</i>
<i>OpenDemocracy</i>	<i>AnarchistNews (anarchist)</i>
<i>In These Times</i>	<i>Labor Notes (labor)</i>
<i>Truthout</i>	<i>Socialist Worker (socialist)</i>
<i>Common Dreams</i>	<i>Challenge (communist)</i>
	<i>Occupy.com (Occupy news aggregate)</i>
	<i>Tidal Magazine (Occupy journal)</i>
	<i>IdleNoMore.ca (Indigenous rights)</i>

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