

Voices from the Grassroots Oral History Project

Detroit Equity Action Lab

Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights

Wayne State University Law School

Detroit, MI

IshKote Nene

Interviewed by

ORIANA YILMA AND PETER BLACKMER

May 25, 2019

Detroit, MI

Narrator

IshKote Nene is an Ojibwe/Anishinaabe and Xicano artist and activist from Southwest Detroit. He performs under the name Sacramento Knoxx. He is the co-director of the Aadizookaan, an artist collective which does storytelling about southwest Detroit through music, film, design, and multimedia art.

Outside Sources:

“Aadizookaan.” Accessed March 21, 2020. adzkn.com.

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Interviewer

Oriana Yilma is an undergraduate student at Wayne State University majoring in Psychology and minoring in African American Studies.

Peter Blackmer is a Research Fellow at the Detroit Equity Action Lab, an initiative of the Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights at Wayne State University Law School.

Abstract

IshKote Nene discusses personal topics such as his experiences growing up in Southwest Detroit, how his family came to the area, and the influence of his mother and other matriarchs in his family on him. Other major topics include how settler colonialism, displacement, and gentrification have affected his communities, the beauty that his community creates despite oppression, how he views himself as an “ancestor-in-training,” the work of the Aadizookaan, and how his sound is shaped by his Indigenous heritage, the history of Detroit, and technology. He stresses the importance of enjoying life, making beauty out of disaster, and building relationships with the people in one’s community.

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Aadizookaan; Art; Detroit, Michigan; Gentrification; Indigenous knowledge systems; Music; Rap music; Settler colonialism; Storytelling; Techno music

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Transcript of interview conducted May 25, 2019 with:

Ishkote Nene [IN]

Detroit, MI

By: Oriana Yilma [OY] and Peter Blackmer [PB]

IN: Ishkote Nene ndishnikaaz [My name is Ishkote Nene], and where I live is in southwest Detroit [Michigan], which is also Waawiyaataanong and many other identifying names of this land right here, and then my organization... I work with a few organizations, but I help co-direct an organization, Wygiznigye (???), and it's called the Aadizookaan.

OY: Could you describe your neighborhood growing up?

IN: Neighborhood growing up... The neighborhood growing up was...it was fun. It was fun, and it was a learning experience, and it was everything, just like how each time would be...but that one was a...yeah, it was good. It was incredible.

[0:00:58]

OY: How has the neighborhood and the city changed since then?

IN: I think since--I guess, if you're saying from being a kid to this moment in time right now?

OY: Yeah.

IN: I just...I've grown to know that this is just the contin--like, it's just a project called settler colonialism that keeps on working and going. So, it's just a...a process. It's just the events formed... It's the evolution of settler colonialism.

OY: What do white...white supremacy and the legacies of colonialism look like in Detroit today?

IN: Oh, just kind of back to that, like it's...it's...it's moving and operating and breathing at all times, and it's al--it almost feels like an inescapable force, but that's what...that's what my relationship to it is always learning myself, community with things, education, and, you know, what...what...what it looks like to... It's like a fantasy world to live, like I...I can't see it right now like 'cause it's...it's futuristic stuff, but like, you know, if that was gone that'd be cool, but it's gonna...it's gonna take a lot of effort and...and with that, like, it's just...I don't know. It's...it's just like an unfortunate disease or like a...it kind of feels like the boat when it's sinking, like, but it's sinking slow. It's like shhhh...kind of feels like that. But now, I'm just seeing like if it's gonna re...preserve itself and find its way to being a new evolution of it, like how it keeps on doing that, but where, you know, maybe not. Maybe it'll just be a concept of Earthlings and Martians.

[0:03:00]

OY: How did you first become active in activism and organizing work?

IN: That one...so that...that...that changes as...it's... It's like the season, so each season you change and move and work in different ways with that, and that's what I've grown to learn that is like everything's not really stagnant. Like in specific types of work, I think if you're...if we're to put a...a section on it, it just...it'd just be indigenous resurgence. You know, it'd be that. That's...that's the work, but indigenous resurgence requires a lot of relationships with land, water,

people, education, arts, culture, value, economics, things like that. So, that's like a resurgence process, rather than maybe I'm trying to destroy racism, you know what I'm saying? Like, it's a...it's a...that's where the work would be, but collaborations and coalitions and partnerships do make those...we do make those efforts to... Like in...in...in my views, it's like alleviating those things, like alleviating those symptoms of oppression like as...as much as possible to the point where like we can make the final blow to amputate some things like that, you know.

But...yeah, that's where the work sits. Right now, I think that's...I think that's what it is. Maybe it will change in 20 years, like, fuck, I was doing that? [laughs] But, I think it's...it feels it's...is Indigenous resurgence with...with all that of what comes with being a native person, like a conscious Native person, Anishinaabe, in a place everyone calls...refers to as Detroit and like just that concept, you know. And also, identifying with Detroit 'cause it's my home, too, so it's like, yeah. I think...I think that's the answer to the question. [laughs] I think I went off on that end, so my fault.

[0:05:11]

OY: No, that's fine. [laughs] What or who have been some of the greatest influences in your consciousness, music, and organizing work?

IN: Influences? Man, I'mma say my mom because that's a...that's a hustler, and it's, like, hard worker. It's like...like learning to give and like...like amazing...like amazing person. So, my...my mother is my influence for strength, and...and the matriarchs in my family, just 'cause they're like so strong. Like, if you keep thinking about like the line, you know, it's just like settlers show up here. It's like, bam! Die Indians! And then, it's like oh, shit. Then, there's like a bunch of extra things going on and then like to survive, you know. Especially having relationships with diasporic Black people and...and people of Africa, you know, like hav...having those...those unique senses of history, moving to Florida and things. So, I think the women have done incredible amounts of work for everybody in the whole world, and that's where I also get my influence from is just the women in my family and my relations, meaning like everybody I can see and I know that's doing good work.

You know, even if they're, you know, babysitting kids or...or...or gardening their own yard in the back and teaching their cousins, you know, like it's all...that's what's influential.

It's to see all the amazingness in the hood that may not hard to see because I mean, you know, just, power and social stratification shit, but the...to see those things in the hood and to know and...and it's like it's balancing itself like that, so that's where the influences for a lot of things are. It's just real life people, like the p...the...the pain and...and the joy and the rage and the happiness, like all those things. To live...to live an experience like that, you know, like... Yeah, to be influenced, to be influenced by that, and then this process of what I call just making beauty out of disaster. So, it's just like that's what I like...that's influential, you know. Like...you know, like a challenge, and then you...you'll still be able to be beautiful regardless of shit storm a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, like, you know, like all the terrible things, so that...that's...that's my influence is people, the strength of the people, seeing people like that, seeing people thrive and...and...and be incredible and great.

[0:08:06]

OY: Going kinda in a different direction, how have emergency management and bankruptcy impacted your communities?

IN: Impacted? Lots of different ways. I'd say that's a...that's a...a complex synthesis of power, and it's like can be...it can be very complex, and it can be also kind of dry and simple to think about what it's doing, but what I relate that to is just...it's a...it's a new form, and it's a new expression within the settler colonialism toolbox of living. So, it's just...it's like, damn, like some more shit's popping off in the history of colonialism and...and displacement on Turtle Island. So like, interacting with it in hindsight right now and seeing it, it's just like, you know, that's what it is. It's just like some kind of advanced tool, but then like you know maybe it takes the scien--you know, some more science and power to move around things and get things, shakes where the power...the power of the people would be even incredibly stronger and like just in...incredibly resilient from a shock wave, but it

may...you may not see that just being, too. You know, it may take couple decades or something, you know, like time and space.

Yeah, so impacted... I feel like it...it impacted a...a lot because there's relationships to it. So, you know, maybe a lot of our family and community didn't have time to break what was going down. They're just like same shit, same things popping off, just have to adjust. I have to pivot, and my circumstances are gonna pivot and move that way, and then it's...it's on with like the...the struggle, like the... It's continuous. It doesn't, you know...like, and it changes the relationship when, you know, you have people that are learning, elders and youth and adults of all kinds, coming to learn with this...this problem, like this...as this problem progressive formed and can--and swelled and all these things. It's like learning how those impacts work, like to continue to see like the beauty of knowledge being shared and the beauty of like action and education and all these things in...in the...in the...in the face of disaster, you know. Or, like making...that's the way I'm looking at this impact is how it's like you're making beauty out of disaster, and a disastrous situation is always like happening, you know. It's like...it's like apocalypse training every so framework of history of coloni...colonialism on Turtle Island, like it just, whoo. It just pops up, and these activities happen. So, impacting the community, like there's like a few ways to look at that. It's like the...the land and how that land's affecting people around that power, and we...for things that foreseen, we can't see yet, especially as things...especially as things seem like confusing for a lot of things and people, you know. So, there's yet still impact...impactful things still. It's in process. You know, it's like a...things are breathing and moving in...in all types of complex ways, and the impact I feel is just...it's...it's constant.

It's just when...when you talk about impacting the communities in that way, I feel like it's impacting...making people more resilient and stronger to...to really...re...really like, you know, trying to think of a better word, but just like get stronger, get stronger and get smarter and get more beautiful, get more cohesive, like I don't know like... So like, when those things happen, too, you know, you have different things that are born from that, you know, from different struggles that make a new thing. That's what I meant, like this beauty out of disaster. So like, those impacts of emergency management, like there could be--and which there is is a horrib...this horrible name and relationship to the city with that stuff, but like it's also, you know, like looking at all the beauty that's being built and formed from the disaster. So when we look at the impact, I'm...I'm trying to...I'm

trying to double down on those impacts, like what are the positive things that are rolling and moving from the circumstances, those that are controllable and uncontrollable, and making the best...making the best move from there, you know, like working on...working on all the playing...playing...playing double on the positivity, you know, like making things grow. That beauty, and then just being able to catch more...more beauty from the struggle that's born from there, you know, relationships, physical people that are born from movements, and then like ideas and...and cultures and businesses and things that move from there. So, the impact of that, looking at that... Like, I...I like to position or be in position to help...help make beauty out of disaster. I feel like that's the best way I can say out of all the...the relationship of how...what that is right there, things.

[0:13:58]

OY: What would you say are some of the biggest issues confronting your communities in Southwest Detroit right now?

IN: The biggest issues? From...from what I'm organized with, like just different campaigns or...or...or pieces, there's a lot of issues of displacement and...and looking at like what the...the future is, you know, as...as settler colonialism uses its form of gentrification to impact the neighborhood in Southwest Detroit. Like, there's a few things, you know. There's...there's always themes of immigration, themes of jobs, themes of safety, themes of health. There's always these themes that are constantly needed because of the way colonialism makes those things thrive that way. So, that's what's things are facing in Southwest. The biggest issues of just like safety, and a lot of safety in terms of just having a home and a place to operate the home, to pay bills, plug...plug in, be a part of those things, so. There...that's a lot of...that's a...that's a lot of visible field things, you know.

I feel like there's also...it's getting worse because just the impact of time with pollution, so we... There may be tons of neuro...neurotoxins and things in the air that we have not discovered yet, and it's doing certain things for people, you know, for the whole city of Detroit, you know, like...like I don't know who's studying that stuff, but that's...that's an issue. I myself, being actively poisoned a few months ago by the Marathon down the river, like so that's just... There's

ton--there's like different issues, and when you look at it, it's a...it's an issue of like health, but then tho...those things are complex 'cause you got health, safety, education, right to happiness and thriving, like you can't...when you... When one of those things don't fit into place, it j...it's just gonna be really difficult to do that, and in Southwest Detroit, it...it can seem like those things are there and not there. So, there's just different levels of concern in Southwest Detroit and because there's--to be frank, 'cause there's so much shit going on, like, ahhhh, you know, it's hard to really focus on trying to solve all the problems, you know.

So a...as we work with the Aadizookaan in the neighborhood, we move our power, and we like to organize around economics and culture. We like to stay in those fields because that's our strengths, and that's what we're gonna, you know, move and keep moving. Of course, we'll get better on our med--street medic skills and learn how to patch people up without having to go to a hospital, you know. Of course, we'll continue to keep thriving that way. So, there's just different levels of issues in...in Southwest that relate to institutional power, people power, and grassroots power, economic powers. So, I'll say it's in a...it's...it's in an interesting and historic moment, you know, a...as the world happens and as things move, technology comes, you know, like so... You know, we'll see as things go and making shift, but that's...that's al...that's always gonna be the problem of the hood and...and the people of the [air quotes] "other" is trying to maintain and survive 'cause settler colonialism makes the game that way, so Southwest Detroit will always face those types of issues because of the way we sit in the structure of colonialism. So, it's just... Right now, it's just, you know, more needs of health concerns and education and just, you know, no one wants to live a fucking shitty life. So, I mean, like it's just that...it just gets down to that, so, you know, whatever opp...whatever things can make the...improve that, that's what is needed. It's always needed in the hood. Everywhere, it's needed everywhere. Just quality of life...we'll say quality of life, and the quality of life structures through all those parameters.

[0:18:29]

OY: How do your identities influence the work you do as both an artist and an organizer?

IN: How does it what? [laughs]

OY: [laughs] How do your identities influence the work that you do both as an artist and as an organizer?

IN: I don't think I know what that means.

OY: Like, do you feel that your personal identity, be it cultural or just being growing up from here, has an influence on the way that you create or the way that you organize?

IN: [claps hands softly] Hmm...I'd say I would like...or what I do intentionally, I would say this, is that all the ancestral technology systems that seem old or it's old Indian shit or whatever the thing of keeping things in the past is called, it's like playing on the...playing on the strengths of those, and it's in the future, and it's right now, and it's evolving as well. So, I'm...I'm...if you look at what that artist and organizing things, like what things happen from that, you get an Anishinaabe artist, you know, you get Anishinaabe arts and sciences. So, it's like, you know, the science of the world, because it, you know, trees and grass and...and water, like those are all things that are gonna operate a particular way, and my work is...is ancestral technology mixed with like ways of being. So, that's how my work has moved. And sometimes, I mean, it reflects those things 'cause that's my time, you know. I hope...I hope I'm not an ancestor, and I'm looking down, I'm like, "Damn, y'all still doing that shit. Like what...like still playing settler colonial games, like damn." So like, the...the...the way my work... I've been looking at more 'cause it's a lot of being like how can you use your arts to wake people up or...or invoke action or involvement to now it's like a it...it...it kinda does that--or it's like that's intention by default, but it's also looking at ways that how do we evolve. Maybe...maybe I don't want to say evolve. I want to say...say advance and to grow the continuous knowledge systems of Indigenous Native people, Anishinaabes, and to do that.

And then, what that process looks in the future because instead of building my relationship to this time of like damn fucking colonizer, like I got to speak this English right now, and everybody else does too 'cause that's the...that's the language of the master right now, and like instead of thinking like that and being like just this bad relationship with an unfortunate situation, a terrible situation, and then, you know, does it with yourself to movin' it forward to like, you know, like what...what's a better situation. Like, I'm starting to call myself I'm an ancestor-in-training. Like you know, I'm like I'm on my way to do that. I'm very, very, very like, okay, you know, I'm finna die. Everyone's gonna die. I know I'm gonna die. I just don't know when, but like what can I do with my time that's really fucking good like and very intentional and then like be organized and like leave stories because that's what some of the Native people didn't get, like they didn't get their whole vast knowledge, like infinity systems of incredible knowledge and things like that to survive, you know what I'm saying, like. So, you know, what does that look like as, you know, I pull from the past presently for the future, you know.

So, that's what my...my work and organizing is, you know. It may not see...seem like traditional organizing of Marxism and things and those...and those structures of power, but that's the power of a contemporary, right-now Anishinaabe-in-Detroit person, like of...of an artist and a person involved with moving power for...for better well-being for the collective of people. So, that's...that's my identity and [inaudible] things, like just to continue to grow with the place, with the circumstance, and with the beauty, and with all these things, so like I think that answers the identity within the...the arts and organizing, like that's what's...that's what's happening and that's what we're doing, creating archives and work, pieces of work and education and things for...for the future generations, and other people that would be the future generations, you know. So, that's the work.

[0:23:12]

OY: How can we be reimagining our relationships with the land and with water in this area to transform our society?

IN: [laughs; slaps knee] My bad. Just, I was like damn, like. 'Cause I gotta...I gotta do this flip. I'm gonna do the same thing to some other friends. We're gonna inter--like do...talk crazy shit like that like how can we make better relationships. Well, it's not crazy, it's important, but... What I'm hearing is a process and where does that process start with that and how do we move and I...I would recommend helping info--helping bring Native people back to a place of like it's o...it's okay, and if they're unsure how to be more Native or...or live in that, like how do you help those relationships, you know, like where's the process of building relationships to land and the water because that's very specific things. And if we're speaking in a Detroit context, like how has it been... Like, let's speak frequencies, maybe not...maybe not time waves and time zones. We'll speak frequencies, and how can you honor the frequencies that have always been playing these harmonious songs for a long time? How can you restore those? And then, part of that is the land and the water, but that's part of like also indigeneity, where native people are.

So, if Anishinaabe are primarily, we'll say, one group of people, Anishin--and, to be clear, Anishinaabe is...it's a term for like the people, and the people are...they have nations which are called Pokagon, Potawatomi. There's bands of nations. I want to get out of this notion of saying tribes. Like, we're gonna dead that here. Tribes is European intelligence of saying what things are in this things, and that's their classification things, and here on Turtle Island, we identify those as nations, nations of people and bands of people. So with those nations and bands of people, you...you know, how are we honoring those groups and those knowledge systems that are there and to uplift them because that ultimately informs land and water because it is passed down, and like there's...there's just certain relationships with land and water.

Like, I would say this for example. Like, you know, 99.9 percent, we're all gonna wear shoes to walk out on the street. Like, it's just because there's a...like, there's science to that, you know. Like, there's science to...you have to...you're protecting your feet, you know, and doing those things. So, there's just a way of...a relationship that is formed and move like that. So, you know, like looking about restoring those relationships with land and water in forms of like how Indigenous groups are doing it and leading that and being a part of that, and that's ultimately what it gets down to when we have these conversations of land and water. How are you honoring the relationship to that, you know? Yeah--or restoring it, 'cause

maybe it's been a bad relationship to it recently, you know. But it changes, you know. So that's... In Detroit context, I would say that would be...that would be a good-looking move, and as an organization we try on very small levels, you know, just...whether it's visiting places or...or water ceremonies or water songs and constantly bringing in people, reminding them it's there, and it's prevalent, and it's important, and there's...yeah, there's with that...with that concept of land and water, that's...that's...that's...it's important to follow Indigenous knowledge systems that are--when I say Indigenous, that are here, because the Navajo nation is different because they're down in Southwest. That's gonna be a different set of Native people and structures. So if we're talking here, then that'd be cool to honor the...the ways that this place has always been and will be, so.

[0:27:39]

OY: Can you speak a little bit more about the significance of rejecting information as it's told to us through a European lens and preserving language?

IN: Yeah. [long sentence in Anishinaabe]

[0:28:06]

OY: Can you tell us--and I'm so sorry if I mess up the pronunciation. I'm gonna do my best. Can you tell us about the Aadizookaan and the significance of storytelling through art and music and community building?

IN: So, the Aadizookaan is Anishinaabemowin word. It's a frequency, and it's Aadizookaan, or there's different ways to say it, you know. Aadizookaan, Aadizookaan [says word two slightly different ways]. What does our people say? Aadizookian? We just be...there's...that's an inside joke, but the organization is just...it's a home, you know. Like, it's a home because flowing and working with multiple collaborations and partnerships, you know. It's like where does a home fit for Native people to lead in this type of work? So, we built that home and sta--Aadizookaan, and it's more or less just fulfilling our destinies as Native

people. And in particular, we're gravitating and following our life of being these modern-day storytellers that use music, rap, beats, film to z...all these...all these current technologies to continue to tell that sacred spirit 'cause, you know, it's gonna keep going, and it was here before us, and it will be here after us. So, you know, we're doing our part of connecting in with that sacred spirit and...and...and building that together. So, that's like...that's the... At the end of the day, that's what it's about. It's also a few other things, the Aadizookaan. It's also like a community network, you know, of artists where people can grow and learn skills and...and apprentice and...and build and learn these complex educational things in our history right now with each other. You know, we don't have anything formal, but, you know, the...the con...the conversations in the studio while it's happening and all that stuff is incredible, so.

Yeah, the Aadizookaan's...the Aadizookaan is, to me, right now, it's water, the way it moves, and that's...and that's...and that shouts out to Bruce Lee, how Bruce Lee gave that metaphor of water and to be like water. So, that's where we are right now. And then, we're...storytelling is water right now. So, our...our duties change and move. So, that's where Aadizookaan is at right now, and just being fluid with the times and the moment. So, that's our...our work on the people level, on a...on an innovative level or artistic level or just... We're just trying to make more crazy-ass art shit where people can break their minds open, and we'll get to the next best thing we got to get to. So, that's what's also the art is to like cracking heads open and be like, oh, we...here's some multiple paths. This one is up. This one's done. Racisms, what, that...that technology don't work no more, you know, like, boom, chhh. So.

[0:31:04]

OY: What kinds of impacts have you seen from your art, music, and storytelling have on individuals and movement work?

IN: I'm...I'm sure there's a lot, you know. A lot of--when I say a lot, I mean like a lot of unforeseen things that I'm not...not rec...seeing or recognizing. I just know just trying to be intentional with the artwork, whether it's through information or grooves or entertainment, education. So, there's just multiple impacts. I think

what impacts I like seeing is when people like relearn...I would say relearn music, or I like re--bring it around in a different type of way or interact with it differently, you know, oh like, wow, like, I'm with music differently this time, and you're--you know, 'cause it's kinda...it's kinda like certain level of artistry. There's kinds of thing you can just be stuck as a thing, but that's why I like Aadizookaan because we're this water of artistry that...that tells a story, and I hope that would be the impact to people to encourage water, you know, like that concept and...and move that way. But the impacts, I don't know. I see people smiling and...and feeling good. So, that's...that's... I'm like, alright, like at least...least that's happening right now, like...like drumming and singing and moving and everyone's like yeah, like. So, that's the immediate im--impacts is the, you know, so. I hope...I hope it's doing a lot of things for people too, you know, even if it's one or two or...or four thousand, you know. I don't know, like. I...it's...it's hard for me to see sometimes. I don't know. Yeah.

[0:32:56]

OY: Can you talk about the plan for the Aadizookaan headquarters and what that work has been like?

IN: It's going...it's...it's going down and--I mean down like it's...it's James Brown down, like it's getting down to get down, like it's going down like. It's...it's moving and grooving, and it's a challenge, but it's...it's a fun challenge, and... What was the other part of it?

OY: What...what the work has been like.

IN: Oh, the work. The work is fun, and it's...I...it's...we're just getting starting, so. Like, you know, I'm excited, so. I feel like it's...it's in that...the Venn diagram stage where like this other thing and then this new one's coming, and we're in this little peak right now, so. And then, we're gonna keep doing that, and then phase into another one. So, it's just getting started. It's fun, challenging, beautiful work, so I'm ex--I'm excited for it to grow. It's already been growing, and it's...it's, you know. So, it's...it's dope. It's dope. I think...I think of Biggie Smalls right now with

what that stuff is, and he says, "I never thought hip hop would take you this far," so. So, I was just trying to make beats and rap and then all this extra shit's happening, so. [laughs]

[0:34:18]

PB: Can I ask a question? What's gonna happen there? Like, what...what's the plan for the use of that space? Like, what...what are y'all gonna be doing there?

IN: Mult...multiple things. I would say community-based projects, education. I wish I had my...my...my correct list of language 'cause I could say the language better, but yeah, a lot...a lot of that. You know, it's gonna be a resource center, asset for people, and I don't know if Christy [B.] can help me out, 'cause she...she leads that project, so is there any keywords I'm leaving out for like the activities and the...just like the goals of the building?

Christy B. [CB]: I think connecting world-wide people of the same mindset...

IN: Mmhm.

CB: ...of working in their communities and talking about that specifically with arts to create change and... Yeah, connecting that network of people that we can learn from each other and have like a wider...a wider impact and learn from each other's lessons.

IN: Mmhm.

CB: Like, that stuff and that global component, but very rooted. Like, when people visit this place, that they're visiting people that are rooted here and doing work here, and that they are welcomed into that space rather than like an outsider who's looking in and [loud car noises makes next words inaudible] ____???. And

then, talking about the community-based arts stuff, so we're getting access to people to technology tools, and community space for that ___???

IN: Yeah. So, I would...I would say that's what...what we're...that's what we're doing in a sense on a...on a different level tip, you know, in all types of ways. And, I feel like as more people get involved or come around with the project, it's gonna just...like more dope shit's gonna happen. So, that's just kinda what we're...we're working with right now with it, international work and music and...and film-based things. I feel like as more people come around, the...the projects and goals are gonna like develop and be cool.

[0:36:19]

PB: So, say somebody watches this video. They say, "That project sounds dope."

IN: Mmhm.

PB: "I want to either support or help or get involved in some kind of way,"...

IN: Mmhm.

PB: ...how can they do that?

IN: They can just send Anth--like, they'll send some information, and then we really just have to have a conversation 'cause, you know, we're not sure... Like, I don't know. I don't know. Like, we just have to meet...meet, relationship-build, and then see what's the best way for the...the person to be involved. That's pretty much how it goes. Like...and that structure of relationship-building and visiting, and that's like a...we're using a Native, a Native concept of that, like, let's just visit and...and be intentional in our visiting, and there's gonna be some good things

from that, you know, so. Yeah, I'd say just reach out, and then we'll see how...we'll see how to grow together. Yeah.

[0:37:12]

OY: How is your sound shaped by the histories of this area and its peoples?

IN: It's... I would say the sound is shaped by the grittiness of the city, by its soul of the city, by its technological oddities of cars and electronic things that, you know, people made 'em do other shit, like just go crazy, and it's techno. And, it's techno weekend right now. So, my sound's technology. My sound is also native, as being like... I hope...I mean, I would hope other artists would do that more modern--I won't say modern, but just, I don't know. I got...I just feel like I'm bringing to the table like this Native sound, sonic...sonic sound, of everything that's here and that's been here and keeps going. So, the sound...the sound of grit, the sound of beauty, like it's just an experience of the city really kinda informs those things. You know, you'll be in a place, and it's like how do you...how do you get to the music sounding like just this rugged and raw and just like, okay, you understand that certain kind of struggle. So, that's like the sound of that versus, you know, something else. Like, different life experiences inform that music, and my sound is just kind of reflection of personal experiences of being...what's...what's the--an Indigenous person of color or poor person in the hood, like, you know, just those...those relationships to life and like help make a sound a certain way. So, that's just kind of that. And right now, I'm just trying to get to the next...next sound. Made something super crazy last night. [laughs] It was so crazy. It was like, okay. But yeah, yeah, that just...just that. A lotta... I think that's the question, the sound, how does the sound like...

OY: Yeah.

IN: Okay.

OY: Like what's influenced the sound, basically.

IN: Yeah. The city, the people. It's always the people in the...in the story.

[0:39:39]

PB: What'd you make last night?

IN: I had an old beat, and we were exploring how to fit some lyrics in this...in...in just like a sequence, and then we found a...a piece, and it's just like the tempo got flipped double within the time signature of time. So, everything stays the same, but the sound just...it just...I don't know how to describe it. It drives me nuts, like...like a...like just like, [slaps legs] ohhh! Like, I don't know. It's like the...it's the new shit, somehow. Like...but I don't...I don't know. I'm just...I'm just joking like that, but it's just whooo! Damn, like it's...it w...it was good. It was...it was good. I think it was good because of this freedom. There's a lot of freedom, so. Freedom went into getting to that sound, so. So, it was made last night.

[0:40:35]

OY: Can you tell us about the concept of--and I apologize again [laughs]--mawadisiwag [visiting] and the importance of relationship-building in organizing work?

IN: Yeah. Mawadisiwag is...it's just the... If we're thinking about in terms of like building community power in those lenses, mawadisiwag is a tool to kinda gives you that way to unlearn and relearn process of being because it's...it is simple. Oh, you guys are just being and visiting and doing things. Yes, but it's also like what...that... Being with people also informs time, like time...time and how colonialism operates all the time, just stuff like that. So, if you're just being in a different way, you know, you just...different things emerge, and especially if you're being each other with doing artwork, I think that that definitely stretches places and people and ideas and...and views and all these things to move.

So, that project is...it's a community project, and I would...I would love to see it to be, you know, just a continuous campaign of using art and community-building power to...like a method technique that many artists can jump in and out and use, so. Whatsoever, we're moving right now. So, as it...as it, you know, gets its wheels turning and...and...and its base and stuff moving, definitely I'll just see that project keep going and to where many artists can be a part of it to move it in a style. So, it's...it's cool, yeah. It's...it's from Anishinaabe philosophy of visiting one another, and with that there's like a...there's an intentional visit, you know, like medicines are burned, stories are told, food is shared, breath is shared. Like, there's a whole process. So, it's using that technology mixed with like, you know, there's beat machines out today and there's microphones and cameras so just do stuff like that together.

[0:42:42]

OY: What are some of the most valuable lessons you've learned since you began doing this kind of work?

IN: Shit, like be...being grateful. Being grateful and just really exploring the living life and death, you know. Like, that's what this work feels like, like the both 'cause you're living and...and working and... I think...I think that's what the question is saying is like what has...what has this been feeling like, right?

OY: Yeah.

IN: This work? Yeah, it just... It's...it's life and death 'cause I'm an ancestor-in-training, so I got work to do, but I'm also enjoying life, like...I don't know. I got a...a fat pet cat named Kitty Smalls. He makes my basement smell like shit, but like I enjoy...it's like it's fun. It's like damn, alright, it fucking smells like shit, and I gotta make beats right now, like. Like, that's part of life, too, like enjoying that and being like, "This fucking asshole, like, go outside! Shhh," and kick him outside. And like, "Go! Get a job outside."-- [laughs] Nah, I'm just joking.

But, just that...just enjoying life like that, you know, or being stuck somewhere and just that...that...that's what this work informs 'cause then the work takes you, and you get those little moments and be like, oh, life stamp right now. This is cool. So yeah, that's what this work is and just enjoying the process of being, having this human experience, being a spiritual being and...and having this moment right now. So, that's what the work is right now. It's just there's assholes making other people live bad right now. So, it's just...that's...that's another hard thing right now. What oppression.

[0:44:36]

OY: What is your vision for the future of Detroit that guides your work?

IN: Defi--well, what do I see?

OY: Yeah, like what do you see for the future of Detroit? [pause] Or what do you want to see?

IN: On some...on...on a fantasy tip, like...like languages everywhere, like we understo--we understand how to live the life of being here again with our new relatives, meaning like, you know, we have new relatives of all cultures here. So, it's like when it's saying going back to those things, it's like going with those things and kinda putting priority on that, you know. The language, the...the context, you know, and bringing that. That would be cool to Detroit. Like, Detroit was like, alright, we're retiring Detroit. Detroit was a part of a bad project called settler colonialism, and we're just gonna honor the treaties and restore Indigenous sovereignty and rights back to the native people, and they're gonna take us to the new wave of things and... And then, I don't know. That's...that's so complicated to say it so easy like that, but it...it'd be like that, like, you know. Settler colonialism is done. This project is fucking ridiculous. It's done retired and shit. Put this shit in the garbage disposal and then throw it in the compost, whatever. Like that's, you know. Part of that's retiring the name of Detroit and making something new, like the...the new shit, [laughs] the new album, the new album, and that's what...that's what a cool future would be, like just like humans...humans fucking

did it, and now we're...we're on some other cool, cool-ass shit, and...and then Detroit's gone. I mean, Detroit's still there, but just the name Detroit and the structure of what makes Detroit Detroit it's...it's...it's done, shhhh, no...nothing. So, that would be the future of Detroit. See you later, Detroit! It was nice. It was something else. So, that would be the future.

[0:46:46]

OY: You mentioned earlier about the impact of mothers and matriarchs on just your view of the world and your view of life, so can you talk a little bit about the importance of those connections across generations?

IN: The importance is it's necessary and vital, and it's gotta be done and...and gotta help, you know. Gotta help be very intentional about that stuff, you know, 'cause it's just having the matriarchs lead or, you know, positioning power in that way is just...it's the one tactic in the face of patriarchy, and it's also one tool that was here in...in Turtle Island. So, in this area. So, that's just the importance, you know. Trying it out, maybe it's not for everyone, bu...but that's definitely a...a way of life and a tool to use.

[0:47:45]

OY: Who else do we need to speak with if we're trying to document Detroit's recent history through the lens of grassroots organizers?

IN: You know, it depends. Like, there's a few people. There's a few people. Who would I nominate? Like, it's on the Internet, like we're gonna do the ice challenge, like that shit like that?

OY: [laughs]

IN: Alright. Shit, who would I nominate? I nominate my brother Info. I nominate my brother Soo (??). I nominate Young Boy Freddy (??). I nominate...I nominate Moddy (??). I nominate my younger sister Christina [B.?]. I nominate...let me see. I nominate my aunt Lucy (??). I nominate...who else? [pause] Yeah, this...this could go on. There's like tons of...tons of things, so. And, I feel like that's part of my duty is trying to listen to all those...those voices and trying to help move 'em when it's like, you know, they may not come around to certain things or, you know. My...my grandpa probably still don't know what my job is right now. [laughs] You know, so. Like, that'd be a cool person. But just like that, you know what I mean?

Like there's all types of people to talk to, and it's just if you...if you live in the shits and the trenches and all that, you'll ta...you'll...you'll have tons of convos with everybody. It's just relationship, you know. So, if you're like a new gentry that's living somewhere in Southwest, it's gonna be harder to build 'cause anybody, aw man, with the other gentries living house or this house or something. And, you know, there's difference of...you know, just difference of feelings and stuff, but...yeah. The hood, the hood. We're trying to do our best to move fast, but we don't have enough people. [laughs] Like just capturing stories of the hood with people, creative things like. What's our neighbor, Christy? What's our neighbor? Is it Felipe Alupe (??)? No. Yeah, yeah. Man, I gave him a nickname, though, that's why I fucked up. But, my...my homie next to our project, he's cool, but it would be cool to listen to him. Yeah. But yeah, there's tons of people because, I would say, circumference of impact, so their...their stories of Detroit are different like right now in the trenches of how power is being shaped and moulded in the city. So...so, I'm like...I'm in things and situations like this, but there's tons of people in the hood that are impacted in cool, different ways. Yeah.

[0:50:54]

OY: Is there anything that we missed that you want to get on the record?

IN: [pause] On the record, let me see. [pause] Yeah, I hope I was clear. I want to be clear that I have...I...I mumble sometimes, and I try to stop doing that, so let me be clear about that. This...this fucking guy says hmmbbble [makes mumbling noises]. My bad. I need to be clear about that. I mumble, and that should be my

bad, my fault. I don't know how to fix that yet. I try. There's that, and then what I also want to be clear about is my mind, like. Yeah, I think a lot of things, so I may, at moments, jump on some other shit 'cause I was already in time zone B making a move. Like right now, I was like, damn. Y'all ___??. But the clar...just that, just clarity, you know.

I'mma...I'mma fun dude, you know what I'm saying. I'm a fun...I'm a fun being. I don't need to say dude. I'mma a fun being, and I really hope this is useful to many people. You know, to...to...what's it like for native people in Detroit right now, you know what I'm saying? Like I...I try to represent that a lot, you know, and be with the people and help uplift native people and many people that are just not doing so good by oppression, you know. It's a... Power...power is very specific and just doing my best out here to...to help, and I want to be clear about that, you know what I mean. Like, that's what it's about at the end of the day is helping people, and that's...that's what should be clear out here, you know, and... Think that's about it. I hope it's...it's good. I was real comfortable today, y'all, so my bad if like...like, I don't know. If I...I don't know. I know how the interviews are, you know. I do some interview work, too, and people are like, "Umm...you know, I don't know."

OY: [laughs]

[0:52:53]

PB: Can I ask you one more question?

IN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

PB: If you got a minute.

IN: Yeah.

PB: You...you mentioned a couple times about like how you envision yourself as an ancestor-in-training, right, like.

IN: [drinks water] Mmhm.

PB: So, if you were looking at this particular moment in time--what, it's 1:25 on May 25, 2019. If in this moment, you were to like beam a terrestrial message for generations to come through the experiences you've had so far, the wisdom that you've gained so far, what would that be?

IN: [pause] Shit, like enjoy life and like to...don't...don't be an asshole, like. [laughs] Nah, that's...I'm...I'm joking on a basic (??) shit, but that's what it is, you know. Be...be a great person for you and your family and your friends and do honorable actions and make honorable things and sounds easy, basic, but that's what...that's what that is, you know, like how much beauty could you leave for the next person and being super okay with that, you know. So, that's what I would say. Like, you made it this far, you know. You made it this far, and it's a blessing, you know. It's even a blessing that, you know, all of our relations, you know, all connected at certain times, and then we all lined up to be in this exact moment in this church, or this church had not...had such a good relationship a while ago, and there's a native person inside the church talking...talking that shit. [laughs] And, it's like it's the future right now, so it's... Good things are ahead and...yeah, good things are ahead and...and it's, you know. It's...it's part of the journey. Part of the journey, and it's...it's...it's a beautiful life. It's a...actually, Mino-Bimaadiziwin. That's what I'd say. Mino-Bimaadiziwin because they'll remember that, and because it's...it's a frequency here, Mino-Bimaadiziwin. And, it means the good life. Remember the good life.

[0:55:01]

PB: Thank you.

Herbert Taylor [HT]: I have a question.

[all laugh]

HT: Sorry, I don't want to hold you up. [loud echoes, someone coughs] So, recognizing that you identify as an in...Indigenous nation rather than a Latino...

IN: Mmhm.

HT: So, I grew up in the Northwest side of Detroit, and coming up, my...my...my assumption was that it was just Latinos who lived in Southwest.

IN: Mmhm.

HT: So, do you mind sharing a little bit about your...your family story and how they--not how they got here, but what...

IN: Mmhm.

HT: ...you know of your family's beginnings in Detroit?

IN: So, there...there's a moment of unforeseen tales, which is meaning like the establishment of Detroit, but the...the records--I just visited this last weekend, too. I just visited some family because they're pushed to a reservation 45 minutes up the river here called Walpole Island. So, I went to go visit there their gravesites, and that's the story of...of my family is a story of displacement and a very long, long story of displacement. And Detroit, we're...we're guided by the...the settler colonial project of capitalism through the cars and the infrastructure of things, so that's what informed of us how to like be pushed in the situation. So, the story of my grandmother is she went to boarding school, which is the basically...to make it

short, it's a brainwashing school to be a white person, to make capital and money and fit in the system, you know, more or less be a robot cog for the system, and she was sent up north, captured up north, and then released back down there, but since it's a time when settler colonial separates people there's a lot of different...there's a lot of disconnections and connections. So, there's a lot of reconnections and disconnections, so just reconnecting back here in Detroit as of recently. As of, I would say, like the...want to be... I want to say like...I'd say like the 1940s, maybe, like as they have to participate with settler...the settler project and things developing. So, they get...they join the project here in 1940 as a mixture of things.

One, my relatives and family from what's called Mexico came up through here because of the cars, and they're part of the revolution down there, and it wasn't safe for them to be in, you know. They got to get the fuck out. So, they...it's like, okay, America's great. You can...American dream. You work hard, you get it. So, that's all being, that propaganda around the world, the Industrial Revolution. So, they're driven here because of the cars and...and the jobs and things like that, and that's...that's just as of recent history of displacement and moving and that's pretty...that's like in a...in a light variation of it, and it's because of how that train station works. I was explaining to my friend, that train station is the spot to get into Detroit at the time, and it just happened that, you know, a lot of Mexicans were coming during that time with Polish people. You know, there's...it's an immigrant wave. So, Southwest has that. That...it's like, I'd say, a gate...gateway for immigrants 'cause there are also...there's Caribbean communities and there's Arab communities. So, it's like a...it's like an area for that and to, you know, grew like that for decades. It kinda...it'll get... You know, it has that...that little wave, you know. Like, after it all gets gentrified, it may not have that wave no more, you know. Maybe...maybe different. Like, be white people story, you know, about Southwest Detroit, so. I think that answered it, like over there. Yeah.

HT: Thank you.

IN: Yeah. So.