

Here to Stay: Building a Tenant Association Against Displacement

Original

Here to Stay: Building a Tenant Association Against Displacement / Vilenica, Ana; Albright, Katrina. - In: RADICAL HOUSING JOURNAL. - ISSN 2632-2870. - 5:1(2023), pp. 211-222. [10.54825/OCLF5321]

Availability:

This version is available at: 11583/2981560 since: 2023-09-04T10:06:21Z

Publisher:

RHJ

Published

DOI:10.54825/OCLF5321

Terms of use:

This article is made available under terms and conditions as specified in the corresponding bibliographic description in the repository

Publisher copyright

AIMS postprint/Author's Accepted Manuscript [con art. gia' pubblicato]

This article has been published in a revised form in RADICAL HOUSING JOURNAL {<http://dx.doi.org/{dc.identifier.doi}>}. This version is free to download for private research and study only. Not for redistribution, re-sale or use in derivative works.

(Article begins on next page)



**Conversation series | Pursuing Tenant International:
Learning from struggles for home in Abya-Yala
Edited by Ana Vilenica**

From politics of what's possible to politics of what we want

Kenia Alcocer

Leonardo Vilchis

Union de Vecinos and Los Angeles Tenants Union

in conversation with

Ana Vilenica

DIST, Polytechnic and University of Turin,
Radical Housing Journal and FAC research

Union de Vecinos is a grassroots community-based organization in Boyle Heights and neighboring cities. It is the East Side local of the Los Angeles Tenants Union. **Ana Vilenica** is a member of the Beyond Inhabitation Lab, the Radical Housing Journal editorial collective and the Feminist Autonomous Centre for research (FAC research). **Contact:** ana.vilenica@polito.it

Abstract

In this conversation, organisers and base leaders Kenia Alcocer and Leonardo Vilchis from Union de Vecinos and the Los Angeles Tenants Union reflect on the struggle for housing in Los Angeles and beyond. They address issues such as the eviction moratorium, the necessity of providing full protection to tenants, the efforts of the growing tenant associations, building movement infrastructure, and scaling up the movement.

Keywords

Evictions, tenants union, internationalism, Los Angeles

After helping at the food distribution point at one of the unionized buildings in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles, I went to meet Leonardo from *Unión de Vecinos* at the City Hall. Many people that wanted to attend the council meeting that day were prohibited from accessing the building. There were people in Black Lives Matter jackets, London Tenant Union red t-shirts and people holding signs reading 'Kevin De Leon [LA city councilmember] must go'. Angry crowds blocked the road where people continuously gave speeches and chanted: 'Who keeps us safe? We keep us safe!' Leonardo and I talked the same day at Leonardo's home where we were soon joined by base leader Kenia Alcocer from *Unión de Vecinos* and her three-year-old son.

Unión de Vecinos is a grassroots community-based organization that addresses issues related to environmental justice, the right to housing, and the right to healthy and stable neighborhoods in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles and neighboring cities. Our principal work is community organizing around issues identified by community members in Boyle Heights. *Unión de Vecinos* is the East Side local of the Los Angeles

Ana: We first met today in front of the City Hall where there is an ongoing road blockade. Can you tell us what's going on there?

Leonardo: The long story is that since the 1980s labor and community organizations have been fighting to get inside City Council. Before the 1980s the city was very conservative, it was mostly white and the progressives were not able to win. In time through changes in demographics and through changes in politics and labor, some community organizations developed a long-term strategy to get inside. They got in and some good things started happening. But in the last 20 years, they've become more conservative following the Liberal line, and supporting all sorts of privatizations. This city was declared a sanctuary city for all immigrants, and now they are becoming more militant against immigrants. We have three Council members that come from the struggle. Gil Cedillo, who was part of the migrant rights struggle. He's the one who struggled to make sure that immigrants would have a driver's license in California. He came from labor. Then Kevin de Leon from the migrant rights struggles. He was one of the organizers of the largest march of immigrants in the history of Los Angeles, and he also was a part of a movement that was working with Marxist-Leninist organization that was doing a lot of work with immigrants, working class and African Americans. And finally Nury Martinez, who is part of the movement for environmental justice.

These are the people who were actually leading the fight in the recent couple of years against tenants. For example, Martinez. We had an emergency protection for tenants in Los Angeles that said that as long as there was an emergency protection, tenants could not be evicted for not paying rent and even after that. Martinez was leading the fight to end those protections. There is also a 41.18 law that prohibits encampments across the city for homeless people, that uses the language of environmental justice about sensitive areas. They used the exact same language to describe where these encampments could not be. These sensitive areas are churches, parks, schools. That means basically banning the homeless from any area that was actually safe for them, where they become small communities and were actually able to protect themselves. See, they all voted in favor of this policy. In parallel, there was a whole Black Lives Matter movement for defunding the police and throughout this period of their governance, the police funding has gone up.

They recently got caught in a recording where they were saying all sorts of racist things against the African American Council members basically attacking everybody. That conversation was about consolidating power for themselves and consolidating resources and assets within immigrant, working-class and African-American districts at the expense

Figure 1

Protest outside
LA City Hall.
Credits:
Ana Vilenica



of everybody else. They got caught and that created a scandal. Martinez resigned and the two guys decided to stay after letting her sink. Meanwhile, in the middle of all this mess, elections happened. Three new progressive candidates were running for office. Two of them, one an abolitionist and another one who comes from the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), got elected. They too haven't said anything publicly about this, so today we came to protest so, they get a message that they need to start taking action. Council is trying to go on with business as usual, pretending like nothing is happening.

Ana: Who is protesting in and in front of the City Hall?

Leonardo: There is a group of organizations: LA CAN, Stop LAPD Spying, the LA Tenant's Union (LATU), Black Lives Matter, and African American Immigrant Rights organizations. We decided to go to Council and basically stop all the meetings from starting. And the whole point for us is to call attention to the corruption and call attention to the fact that they haven't done anything to push these guys to resign. The housing people also came to say, we want full protection for tenants and we want to make sure that you don't pass any laws that punish the tenants. On the other side there are people who come to support Kevin de Leon. There are these three campaigns coming together at the same time in City Council.

Ana: And what are these groups hoping now to push for?

Leonardo: I think that at this point we need to rethink this whole thing. Just looking at today's events I don't think that the power is going to be in fighting City Hall anymore.

Kenia: The struggle is shifting to the streets. I think that each local in the LATU is now defining its own organizing strategy in their different districts and with their different representatives. Among all of the districts, I think ours is the one that has a lot of power because we've been able to show that we do not need all these politicians to continue moving forward. I mean we've been without a council member for a long time. He was indicted. So, it seems like for us, at least here in Boyle Heights, we don't need Kevin De Leon to do anything for us, but what we do need is to figure out how we're going to be working around Kevin De Leon and those are conversations that within the community, we have to start. We're building our own relationships with the different agencies and the

different departments within the city, so we don't have to go through his office to get what we need or what we want.

Ana: In LA there's quite a big base of people in tenants' associations. They are organized in different city locals and there are occasional assemblies at the level of the city. A strong tenant base is one of the pillars of the LATU. How are tenants in LA building base and mobilizing their neighbors?

Kenia: That is part of the work to grow our tenant associations. Our neighborhood committees are expanding to different neighborhoods, and I think that one of the things that has been clear, at least for the tenant associations, is that their fight in their building, it's not just their fight. They are getting their neighbors involved because their neighbors are also on the same boat as them. And right now, for example, one of our newest tenant associations on 1st Street they're going to have a *posada* and that is what they're going to use as a mechanism to talk to the rest of their neighbors on their block.

Leonardo: Do you know what the Posada is?

Kenia: Posada is a traditional festivity.

Leonardo: In the Catholic tradition.

Kenia: ...a catholic tradition where basically we enact Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem for Jesus to be born. The story's not in the Bible. Mary and Joseph go into town, knock on doors and ask for shelter and they get denied twice and the third time they get accepted. They get offered a stable for Jesus to be born. We utilize that as a process of reflection on where we've been denied. Tenants are going to make two stops, one is going to be with the unhoused community on Evergreen and Cemetery.

Leonardo: When is this?

Kenia: On the 22nd [of December]. And then the other, it's going to be at the business of the owner that just purchased their homes and that wants to evict them. The last stop will be at their neighborhood alley where they're taking ownership, not just of their home, but of their neighborhood.

Leonardo: We should talk about that, because on the 21st LA CAN is going to do something, it's the National Day of the Remembrance of the Homeless.

Kenia: Yes, let's do it. Those things are interconnected. The understanding in this TA is that part of the growth, is that they need to expand. Now they are only three units and they will not be able to fight the landlord by themselves.

Leonardo: Little by little, the Tenants Union and other organizations have been building their own network, their own relationships, their own power. You still have the nonprofits that have been allying with the Democratic Party and Labor to defund services and move towards privatization processes, but we come to a place where actually people are now willing to challenge the whole structure. We're building a different kind of politics and different kind of relationships in the city.

Ana: And how would you describe this politics?

Leonardo: In the last six years we saw a movement of people organizing and pushing and fighting everywhere. People taking things into their own hands. At the same time we were trying to build an organization that supports that movement and that is also able to provide leadership and direction, so this movement can stay. I'm going to go for it. Look at what happened with Black Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter in Los Angeles fizzled out and lost all its leadership because they didn't build the structures within which people can come together. We want to build bridges with other movements, but we have the organization that is able to bring people together.

Kenia: And I think one of the things that it's important to be said is, that it has been a movement that has moved across lines of division. If you talk about language, language is not a barrier anymore to organize and mobilize tenants. Within the LA Tenants Union, we're thinking about race.

Leonardo: If we talk about gender, women are the leaders in LATU.

Kenia: Yeah. Every single line of the division has been utilized in our movement. We are no longer just talking about tenants, we are talking about local business tenants that have been there for years and are now facing eviction. We're also talking about healthcare. We're talking about different parts of our livelihood that need to be respected.

Leonardo: LATU is a bottom-up movement. When you look at the nonprofits, they always try to negotiate what's possible. We're saying, no, no. We're going with whatever the community is asking. For example, when we launched the campaign Food, Not Rent, it was against everybody's logic of what is the right campaign to have in Los Angeles. We were saying we're just not going to pay rent and everybody just went bonkers. The lawyers went crazy. The nonprofit workers were going crazy. The social workers. Our own organizers went crazy because we said yeah, don't pay rent. And guess what, nothing happened. We went massive on that, and we were able to expand the protections for tenants. We said, well, fuck it, we're going to fight against all these evictions. We're going from politics of what's possible to politics of what we want.

Kenia: I would say it's more than just breaking the rules. We're saying that the laws that exist as the rule, right now are not what we want or what we need. I think that consciously and unconsciously our community, is more willing to act on civil disobedience. Every single time that a tenant refuses to leave their home is an act of civil disobedience and, it's an act against the laws that are telling them that they don't deserve it. And I think that that's the education that we're doing on the ground with our community. Laws are not going to confine us to determine what our community should and needs to look like. We are deciding that for ourselves.

Now they're celebrating Karen Bass [Major of LA since 2022] for putting protections for homelessness, so you will only protect us when we're homeless. That's basically the

Figure 2

Anti-eviction
action outside
local flower shop.

*Credits: Ana
Vilenica*



messaging that they're giving. It's like it's ok because you'll be protected once you're homeless, so it's ok that we end the eviction moratorium, because once you lose your home, there's protection for you.

Leonardo: The other thing that the Tenants Union is doing is doing things across the geography of Los Angeles. We've always talked about how difficult it is to organize Los Angeles, because it's so big, but now we're doing it everywhere. You have a local across the whole geography of the city.

Ana: How did this movement build such a strong base in the community?

Leonardo: When we started, we started at the housing projects. We started growing within our neighborhood. Politicians are going to come and go, but we are going to stay here. I'm going to stay here because we are part of this neighborhood. Everybody who's part of the Union is a resident of the neighborhood. When the tenants union grew, that was one of the models that we had, you know, locals in their neighborhood. Not just fighting for the rights of tenants, but also looking at what's happening in our streets.

Kenia: If there's things that people need, like we cannot just be blindfolded and saying all we care about is our housing. For us first it's your home, then it's your block, and then it's the city. Organizing all of it together makes sense, and, it's not just LA Tenants union. We've also supported the Glendale Tenants Union to come together. We've supported the Pasadena Union to come together. We've supported Inglewood to have its own tenants union, so it's not just about what we're building locally. It's also how it's expanding and now you have all these tenants unions across the state that are coming together and now you have a network of tenant unions across the country that are also coming together. It starts like block by block and then it comes city by city and then it becomes state by state and then now an entire country like organizing around the needs of tenants but not just tenants, it's that we're organizing around the needs of people in general.

Leonardo: I just forgot I have to return the truck that we used to distribute the food. So, I have to go pick it up. You guys can stay here and continue talking I'll be right back. Could you come and pick me up?

Kenia: Yes! ... Where were we?

Ana: In terms of scaling up the movement, can you tell us something about the ATUN meeting in June?

Kenia: It was really amazing to have all these tenant unions from all over the country coming together and having conversations. When they came here, a lot of the eviction moratoriums had ended nationally, especially the more Republican states. The repression and the evictions have risen and people were just eager to organize and come together and push back. Sharing their experiences and what they've been doing, whether it was food distribution processes, mutual aid or even just talking about the victories that they had in their buildings and in their work it was important for us to, hear that we're not alone, that we are organizing across the country to also create something that is powerful and long lasting. The fact that there was a recognition and a conversation around what is the future of housing and what type of housing you want to live in, talking about socializing housing as something that we were all considering. It was clear that we were all on the same page. We also talked about what is communism and what is socialism? And is that something that we're working towards as tenants? People are no longer saying these things just happen out of nowhere they are aware that there is a system and there's a structure that is called capitalism that has created this crisis for us and that is up to us to figure out how do we get out of this structure and build our own structures. That gives us the ability to see what our needs are and to push for those needs and to make sure that those needs are met. We had Ines from the Flower Driver that came out at the end of the ATUN convergence and said, you know, I keep hearing communism a lot in this spaces

Figure 3

Eviction = Death. Unión de Vecinos organized a commemoration action to remember a fellow tenant who tragically felt he had no other choice when the sheriffs came to evict him. This event served as a solemn reminder of the devastating consequences of eviction and a renewed commitment to fight for homes and challenge the systemic forces responsible for his death.

Credits: Ana Vilenica



and she's like I don't know what communism is but, if it's community, then I am a communist.

Ana: The crisis that we face is transnational and it's affecting us all. I know that you have been thinking about how to shut down this system together. How are *Unión de Vecinos*, LATU and ATUN building this network across borders?

Kenia: I was invited into a political educational school through PEP, which is a popular education project and through that process I met a lot of organizers that got together after Ferguson [uprisings in 2014] trying to figure out, what was the political education process and how to critique that 'spontaneity' in the United States. People riot and rarely go beyond that. The riots surge up, they play a role in a purpose, but then they end up dying. The only long-lasting movements that we have history and that we can take from are the Panthers movement. Unlike contemporary movements they did have political education. They did have a theory of why they were doing the work that they were doing and they were trying to unite other people coming together.

Going to that school was my first experience of being a part of a school that was international. We had people from South Africa, people from India, people from Colombia, Mexico, Brazil and we were all there having courses, learning about capitalism and figuring out what was our call. Obviously it's very difficult. It was a very difficult process because we all come from different backgrounds we've all been taught that identity politics is the thing here in the United States, or that issues need to be soloed separately. You can't connect immigration with healthcare or if you're fighting for housing, you just need to focus on housing you cannot fight for your rights as workers. All these things have been separated from each other as if I'm a woman one day and then the next day I'm a tenant and then the next day I'm a worker and then the next day a mother. Our political activities are separated in different ways. If I really wanted to work on all the issues that impacted me, I literally have to be part of ten organizations. Right? That's the way that it works in the United States. Our Members are part of more than just one organization because they feel like certain organizations only address certain issues and that they need to be a part of that, so you'll have a member from the *Unión de Vecinos* that was a member of CHIRLA, because they're immigrants and they need to fight for immigration rights. They've been a member of ELAC because ELAC's builds homes and promises homes for the poor. And they need a home. They are part of inner-city struggle because their children go to schools and they're fighting around the school system. They'll be part of CBE because CBE talks about the environmental injustices that are happening. They have to find different organizations to fit into because there's not one organization that is saying we're going to tackle it all at once.

With the *Unión de Vecinos*, it's very different. We are not a service organization, we are also not an organization that limits itself. If the air that you're breathing is an issue that we're going to figure out what the problem is, what's causing that air to be an issue. We're going to fight back, if the water that's coming out of your faucet is an issue, then we'll figure out how we can fix that collectively. We try to figure out every single issue. This became very clear to me, that we have a different understanding of what organizing is

than other comrades that were in the space with me at this school. Being part of that process allowed me the space to learn about this process and I got more integrated into the work of PEP and that's how I started inviting Leonardo and different other folks from the *Unión de Vecinos* to come into the space.

Recently PEP created the International People's Assembly. It's organized like base based organizations, with political parties and unions from all over the world, that are coming together to create a new structure, a new international structure that addresses the needs of everybody. It's very important for us to see how movement work looks like in different parts of the world, to understand that we are not limited to address only single issues or stay within the limits of the state borders. A lot of our organizations are already negotiating their defeat before they're even defeated. A lot of organizations are limited to what they think they can win or how they can win it, and for our Members it is important that we understand that there are no limitations and that we create our own limits, and that if we are willing to push through even our own limitations or our understanding of what the limitations are, we can actually get something better and bigger.

We are now preparing a delegation to go to Venezuela to talk to people in the comunas to see how they develop their housing, how they develop their organizing around their housing and to support them in resistance against USA sanctions. We're creating our own housing, we're taking ownership of our land, and for us that's very important and critical. Having all these connections makes us aware that our struggle is not a local fight.

Ana: And how are these like tenant issues connected to the land rights? How do these two struggles come together and how do you practice land rights?

Kenia: We do have a lot of folks that are from different countries like Mexico, Central America and South America in the Union. I would say the land is something that we cannot fight for easily in the United States. In Mexico, for example, if you take over a plot of land and you stay there and you work that land, the land becomes yours, legally yours. You can just go to the government and say I've been here and nobody before me reclaimed this land. I've been working this land for X amount of years and I want this land. Some people take over plots of land collectively. After the Mexican Revolution, when they said the land is of those who work it that literally became part of their constitution. When we with my family migrated in 1989 to the United States, my aunt kept our house. After five years of her living in the house, fixing up the house, paying the taxes for the house, the house became hers. The people here in the United States think 'oh that's really fucked up, you lost your house and now your aunt owns it'. But she's been living there and she has more right to the house than we do. Right? I'm not going back to go back to Mexico and move into that house. That makes no sense, right? That is the type of logic that we have towards private property: 'That should still be your house. You should go back and fight for it'. Why would I want to fight for something that it's not mine?

Ana: To accumulate more.

Kenia: Yeah!

Ana: I have the feeling the system here in the US is making alternatives constantly impossible by expanding and holding the power to use violence with police. People have attempted to occupy houses, but the fight back has been very brutal and people are scared. I talked to people and they're like, whoa, that's kind of beyond what is possible here.

Kenia: There is nothing within the Constitution that allows people to have the ability to just reclaim land back, and I think that that's very different from a lot of countries in Latin America, but it is a constitutional right to protect your private property. So, it is all about the protection of private property that we're fighting, up against. Every time that we bring this thing up there's a lot of people that get very nervous and says, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa we can't push for land rights. Then every time I ask why, it's like because the left is not prepared to do a constitutional battle, but the right is. The right in the United States has the resources and have done the work. So, when there's a battle in fighting with the constitutionalist, they're more ready than we are. That's what I've been told. And for me it's like yes. That might be true. I mean, if you look at the right-wing militias they are more prepared with guns they're more prepared in their, I guess, survival trainings and they're more militant, but I think that there is a way in which we can start reclaiming our land and that will also help us understand what kind of relationship to the land we want to have.

Ana: Exactly! There is also a growing movement of reclaiming the land from the perspective of native people to these territories and demands from black communities for reparations. What do these complexities mean for our tenants' movements? How do we navigate this complexity from the perspective of tenants? There are also many original peoples that are displaced from South America that are coming here. How about their rights? Which land and whose rights are we talking about?

Kenia: That's a very interesting question because at beginning of the month I was actually at the summit for sacred sites that was hosted by the Apache stronghold. They're currently challenging their right to the land. They've been in a huge fight for the Oak Flats in Arizona against a copper company. This used to be federally protected land that McCain [former US senator] put in a bill, and gave it to this company. It didn't go through the entire process that it was supposed to go in order for them to transfer this land to this company, they did it in a sneaky way through a bill and that's the way that the copper company got a hold of these lands. So basically, this company will take out all the copper that it's underground and it will create a crater. And the mountains that now are standing will, literally, disappear. These lands are used by the Apache stronghold to hold sacred ceremonies. The way that they're doing it is that they're saying that basically that this company will infringing on their religious rights to their sacred lands and it's like comparing it to the Vatican, let's say. Like people saying, there's gold underneath the Vatican. Therefore we're just going to mine it. And who cares what happens to the Vatican. They are in this fight against the establishment and they are trying to determine what their land rights are. I think that that is the avenue in which we need to figure out what that means for us. If native folks were to regain their rights to the land, I think that there would be a different way in which we can start working out our relationship to the

land with them. We can have conversations about how we take ownership? Not the ownership that capitalisms or capitalist mentality has taught us, but how do we take ownership to take care of the land? How do we take ownership to protect the land? How do we take ownership to, to make sure that nobody within our lands is homeless; to make sure that nobody within our lands is starving.

Talking with Wistner has been very interesting and important. When Wistner talks about native peoples rights to their land and to their sacred sites he doesn't separate us as immigrants from his people or anybody who comes from this continent that is looking for a better life. He recognizes that there had been moments where a lot of these native communities have supported each other through the processes, I mean during the Mexican American war, a lot of these native folks from both sides of the border were always protecting each other and working with each other.

Ana: Despite all the hardships and complications, I have heard from the people in the Union saying that paying the rent actually makes home yours and not the landlords. People were saying things like: 'Those are our homes they don't belong to the landlords. He is not the one paying for it'. What does this say about this complicated relations and different scales that we have been talking about here?

Kenia: Yeah! That is part of the political and politicizing work that sometimes we have to do with tenants because that is not always the case. I mean, a lot of tenants do feel that this is not their home. And that this is the landlord's building. It takes time for them to understand that. Like you said, you are paying for this person to own property. You're paying for a service, right? And sometimes when we do our organizing we talk about this thing like well if you go into a restaurant and they serve you food that is burnt, will you eat it? And will you pay for it? And they're like, well, no obviously, I wouldn't. I would just be returning it and not paying for it. Well, why would you pay then for a service that is not up to standard like why would you pay for a house that has rats and roaches in it. Because that's a service you're paying for, you're actually paying your landlord to insure you have good home to live in. And what does the landlord do with that money? We had a situation in an apartment building, I believe it was 20 units and we all started calculating how much rent we were giving the landlord each month. I think it was like \$20,000 in rent. With \$20,000 a month you cannot fix one apartment. They could pay the mortgage and the taxes and then have money left over to fix up the apartments. But this is the accumulation of money that we're giving to these landlords.

There are inherently different ways of organizing housing out there. The shack dwellers in South Africa are taking over the land and saying we're building our homes there might not be the most fanciest homes, but these are our homes and we're fighting for it. We're forcing the government to give us what we need in order for us to have good homes. Access to water, access to electricity. You have the MST [in Brazil] that is taking over plots of land and sometimes even ranches of these like big celebrities or rich people that are not in use and producing and selling food, giving food to their communities and saying we're building a school here because that's what's needed in the region. And those are the

type of things that we need to start thinking about when we're talking about what our internationalist solidarity looks like.

For us, I think that we've been accustomed in the United States that our solidarity as a country or as people comes when we go to the protest at the embassies, I mean that is our extent of the solidarity we give as the United States. At some point in history there's been true solidarity. But now, I think it's been very watered down. Just because we went in front of the Israeli embassy to protest with the atrocities that they're doing to Palestine that we did our due diligence, like we protest there we shamed you because you're doing bad and now we're just going to go home and that's it. Or our solidarity lies in us doing a fundraising event and sending money to a certain community for them to have funding to do whatever work that they're doing. I think that that's an erroneous way of looking at what solidarity really look like. If you really want to be in solidarity with Cuba, Venezuela, Palestine, Yemen, or any other country that's under attack by the United States, your solidarity has to be grounded in organizing, mobilizing, and throwing down, destroying the structures that are creating this the ability for this country to destroy other movements. That is where our solidarity needs to lie.

Like our solidarity needs to lie in the understanding that we need to create something different and that steers this country away from war, that steers this country away from all these liberal, neoliberal policies and tendencies that they're pushing out against the rest of the world. We need to change what's happening here in the United States. In order for us to be able to support the change that is happening in other countries and I think that that's what true solidarity means to us, and that's what I think other movements are looking for us to do in the United States. We can send as much money as we want, but that's not going to take away the blockades that the country is pushing for, and we can protest as much as we want that doesn't mean that it's going to stop the bombs that are being deployed from this country or the weapons that are being sold in other countries to deploy the one thing that we can do is organize and make sure that we overthrow the governments that are currently exist and build governments that are for peace and that are here for the better of every single person, a government that values humanity, a government that values nature, a government that values our lives. And I think that that's the work that we are trying to do: 'We are in solidarity with you because we are also in struggle with you'. (Telephone rings) That was Leonardo I need to go pick him up.

Ana: Thank you, Kenia, for this amazing conversation! It was super powerful!

Kenia: It was my pleasure.

About this Conversation's participants

Union de Vecinos is a grassroots community-based organization that addresses issues related to environmental justice, the right to housing, and the right to healthy and stable neighborhoods in Boyle Heights and neighboring cities. Our principal work is community

organizing around issues identified by community members in Boyle Heights. Union de Vecinos is the East Side local of the Los Angeles Tenants Union.

Ana Vilenica is a feminist, no border and urban activist and organiser from Serbia currently living in Italy. She is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow with the ERC project 'Inhabiting Radical Housing' at the Polytechnic of Turin's Inter-university Department of Regional & Urban Studies and Planning (DIST) and a core member of Beyond Inhabitation Lab. Ana is a member of the Radical Housing Journal Editorial collective and the Feminist Autonomous Centre for research (FAC research).

Funding Details

This conversation was made possible thanks to the support of the *Inhabiting Radical Housing* ERC Starting Grant project, n. 851940.