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INSURGENT GROUND: LAND, HOUSING, PROPERTY

Edited by Ananya Roy, Terra Graziani, Annie Powers



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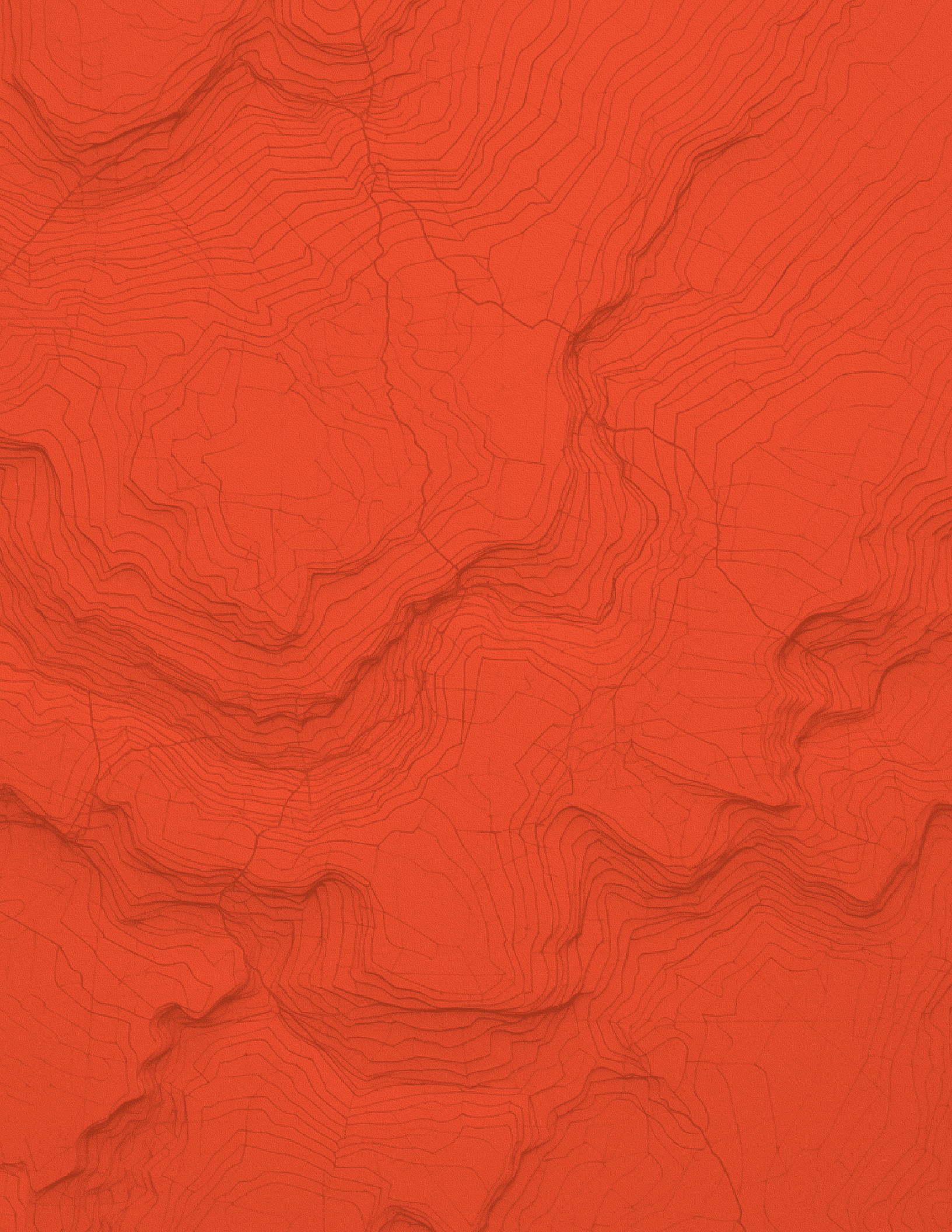
ORGANIZED 2016





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INSURGENT GROUND: LAND, HOUSING, PROPERTY

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Freedom
School
2024

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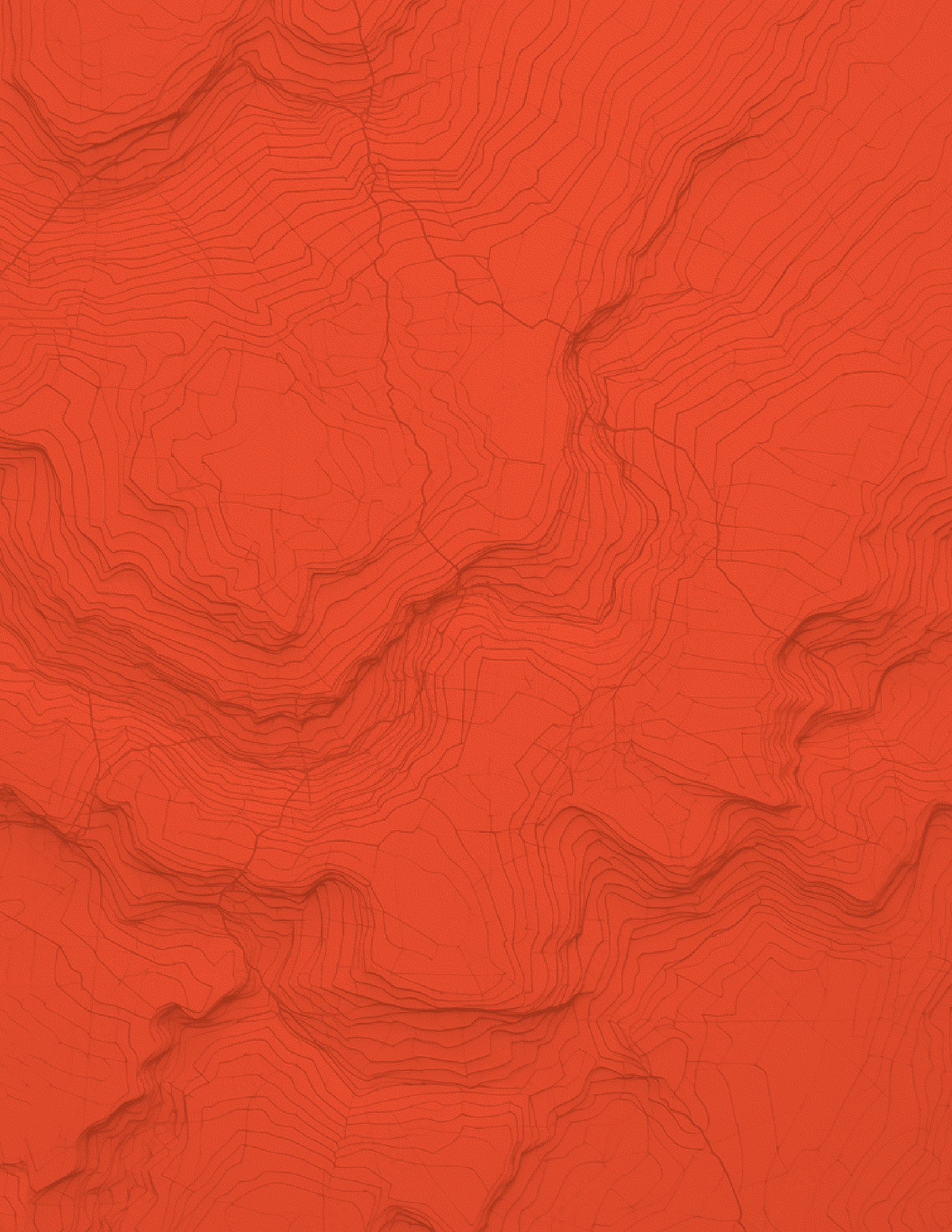

I. UNSETTLING


Comité de Unidad Campesina
CUC
Guatemala
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THE REVOLUTION IS NOT AN APPLE THAT FALLS WHEN
YOU HAVE TO MAKE IT FALL!
PICO GARDENS
EVICT
FREE
ZONE
CALIFORNIA RENTER POWER
2017 STATEWIDE ASSEMBLY
MERECES
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SUEÑAS
HCIDLA (LAHD) + 866-557-7368
DPH + (800) 700-9995
Shriver → central (Rm 115)
→ Long Beach (Rm 505)
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Insurgent Ground: Land, Housing, Property

Ananya Roy, Terra Graziani, Annie Powers

This endeavor of collective scholarship emerges from a Freedom School held at the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy in Summer 2024. Organized as part of the project, *Housing the Third Reconstruction*, which is supported by a grant from the Mellon Foundation, the convening brought together movement and university-based scholars actively engaged in insurgent research and critical theorization as a part of, or as accompaniment to, freedom movements. Intended as inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of emancipatory land and housing, Freedom School 2024 took up the following issues and questions:

- What is the present historical conjuncture of global racial capitalism and the attendant political economy and ideology of land and real-estate?
- How are movements undertaking land struggle, dismantling police-property relations, and enacting housing and spatial justice?
- How do we learn from "beautiful experiments" (Hartman 2019) of reconstruction, rematriation, reparation, and decolonization that are or have been underway? In the wake of mass protest movements that reveal possible futures while failing to materialize their aspirations, how can collective liberatory work learn from its recent and distant pasts in order to realize the world we imagine?
- What are the ontologies of radical relationality, including kinship, presence, solidarity, and community, that are being created to counter social death and state-organized abandonment?

In pursuing such inquiry, Freedom School 2024 was guided by the following principles:

- To take up and learn from the knowledge produced by freedom movements, not as case study, but as foundational epistemology.
- To commit to critical theorization and historical reflection, including clear-eyed auto-critique of struggle in which participants have directly engaged.
- To demonstrate accountability to communities and movements on the frontlines of displacement and dispossession.
- To understand and mobilize the power of research and scholarship while understanding knowledge-producing institutions, including the elite university, as sites of struggle.
- To learn and think from Los Angeles as a (post)colony, situating the U.S. as an empire-state within a world of landless and poor people's movements.

Photo credit (left): Anthony Orendorff

As evident in the scholarship presented here, Freedom School 2024 brought together insurgent scholars from different parts of the world in order to undertake collective inquiry. Their work was guided by conceptual and methodological frameworks shared at Freedom School 2024 by Robin D.G. Kelley, AnMarie R. Mendoza, Davarian L. Baldwin, Hamid Khan, Leonardo Vilchis, Damien Goodmon, K-Sue Park, Alex Ferrer, Tracy Rosenthal, Amna Akbar, Lisa "Tiny" Gray-Garcia, Carla Orendorff, Henry Michael Apodaca, the *After Echo Park Lake* Archive Collective, and the three editors of this volume. Such learning was grounded in the many freedom movements brought into the room by the roots and routes of global participants as well as in the movement spaces of Los Angeles, notably the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, Unión de Vecinos, the Los Angeles Tenants Union, Downtown Crenshaw Rising, the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project-Los Angeles, and the Skid Row History Museum & Archive. Taking place at a land-grab university, one that sits on the unceded territories of the Tongva people, Freedom School 2024 took seriously Charles Sepulveda's (2018, 56) insistence on "kuuyam" (the Tongva word for guests) as "a reimagining of human relationships to place outside of the structures of settler colonialism."

Mirroring the curriculum and activities of the Freedom School, this volume begins with several pieces meant to attune readers to the ongoing struggles of Los Angeles. AnMarie R. Mendoza and Andrés F. Ramirez orient us to settler-colonial and imperial histories of Los Angeles via a consideration of our relationships to water; the collective La Vecindad reflect on the Freedom School's session at Union de Vecinos, provoking us to think about connections between tenant struggles in Los Angeles and Latin America; Renato Abramowicz Santos, Luisa G. Melo, and Diane Wong weave together narratives of community archive as community defense in Los Angeles, Brasilia, and New York City; Lindsay Massara and Greg Baltz offer up a framework of transgression in the law as a terrain of struggle; Shanti Singh and Marina Moscoso Arabia build on the work of Damien Goodmon and Crenshaw Rising in investigating the role of pensions funds in racialized displacement; and Sterling Johnson and Ben Teresa critically reconsider tactics used by tenant and unhoused movements in the current moment.

Next, the volume includes three conversation-style pieces: Lisa "Tiny" Gray-Garcia and Michele Lancione discuss what Gray-Garcia calls "homefulness" and the role of knowledge production in achieving such ends; Jessi Quizar, Mpho Raboeane, and Kareem Rabie discuss the politics of land from South Africa to Palestine to Detroit; and Priya Kunjan and Line Algoed guide us in self-reflection about what it means to *do* "research justice."

Finally, the volume concludes with three essays aimed at reframing the way forward. First, Jennifer L. Tucker and David Kelly teamed up with lead scholars Davarian L. Baldwin and Hamid Khan to reckon with the university as a site of struggle and vision what an abolitionist university might look like. Then, Robin D. G. Kelly grounds this moment (and the Freedom School) in an analytic of Black Reconstruction. And finally, Brenda Contreras brings us back to Los Angeles via a broad, longstanding network of Indigenous organizing that centers land and our relationships to it.

The essays that follow are rich and complex. They each come out of a session at the Freedom School and continue the conversations had by the entire group, including lead scholars, participants, organizers, and community members. Thus, each piece is a product of co-writing on behalf of the collective thinking done at the Freedom School. They can be read as an archive of the Freedom School and as an offering to those who were not present. Specifically, the pieces in this volume are written for scholars committed to transformative research who are rooted in movement struggles and who actively engage in organizing within, against, and beyond the university. We invite you to read them, to be in debate with them, and to consider how your scholarship and movement work shifts the arguments they present. In particular, we wish to highlight the following tensions, each of which we hope is generative.

First, the overall project within which Freedom School 2024 took place is titled *Housing the Third Reconstruction*. It is inspired by Robin D.G. Kelley's provocation of the moment at hand as a "third reconstruction," one that is an uprising against the policed-propertied order of racial capitalism. As Kelley demonstrates in his essay for this volume, such a conceptualization also allows us to understand previous historical moments, notably the Black Reconstruction (Du Bois 1935) of the post-emancipation years and the civil rights movement spanning the 1950s to the 1970s as struggles to challenge racial regimes of property, to socialize land, and to assert housing as a social right. For Freedom School 2024, we honed in on the question of land – from the "surveillance and policing of looted land" (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2021), to the spatial militancy of movements such as Unión de Vecinos that claim territory through poor people's power, to radical Black organizations such as Downtown Crenshaw Rising that seek to build a commons amidst hyper-commodified neighborhoods. We therefore took up Black Reconstruction as the world-shifting and history-making capacity of landless people's movements in the United States. But as Robin D.G. Kelley noted in the opening session of Freedom School, reconstruction sits in uneasy

tension with rematriation, requiring us to rethink seemingly familiar analytical categories such as dispossession and enslavement. Drawing on Bruyneel (2021), Kelley reminded us of the perils of "settler memory," including those that infuse the political left and its stories of land. the Reconstruction is also possibly a U.S.-centric framework, one that does not lend itself to a global history of landlessness. And indeed, landlessness is itself a fraught category. On the one hand, we have sought to reinscribe various forms of precarity in the common register of landless people's movements – be it tenant unions or unhoused communities. On the other hand, we have had to take seriously postcolonial aspirations for propertized citizenship as a form of belonging, be it in post-apartheid South Africa, post-abandonment Detroit, or the occupied West Bank.

Second, in considering the emancipatory potential of land and housing struggles, we wrestle with the state. Our participants hail from dramatically different contexts of insurgency, in some cases, connected to movements that have come to occupy the state and, in other cases, connected to movements that seek to smash the state. Without imposing a monolithic history of racial capitalism, we found it useful to think of the state as a settler structure. And in such a framework, we took a closer look at two systems that reproduce settler logics: property and the law. In each case, we studied the potential for disruption. How do we come to know the seemingly unknowable systems of property ownership, including deliberately opaque title registries? How is such knowledge being mobilized in land and housing justice struggles? How are contemporary social movements reshaping and contesting law and conceptions of law and law reform? Is it possible to engage with law in ways that honor anti-capitalist, prison abolitionist, socialist politics, and/or commitments to racial, economic, and social justice? There are no singular answers to these complex questions but as the essays make evident, we must learn together so that we can unlearn our relationship to the state.

Third, in taking up questions of land and housing justice, Freedom School 2024 raised the promise and problem of research justice. Powerful universities in unequal cities have a long history of extractive modes of research. Often located on stolen land, they continue to perpetuate colonial-racial logics of displacement and dispossession. UCLA, where Freedom School 2024 was held, is no exception. Indeed, our convening took place in the wake of the university's violent criminalization of pro-Palestine speech and assembly, including of the solidarity encampment. As evident in this volume, we struggle, in different and shared ways, with our inhabitation of the university. On the one hand, we are acutely aware of how these elite institutions are actively involved in what Baldwin (2021) calls the "plundering of our cities." On the other, we also understand them as public institutions, those that can, and must, be transformed into spaces of fugitive scholarship and reparative urbanism. There is no blueprint for such transformation, there is only the practice of it. Freedom School 2024 was one such practice.

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Gabrieleno-Tongva Villages



ISLAND VILLAGES:
Catalina: Pimu'nga or Pimu
San Nicholas: Xaraashnga or Haraashnga
San Clemente: Kiinke Paar or Kiingkenga

This map is an ongoing work in progress as of 2007

All village locations are approximate and should not be referenced for government use.

Copied by Samantha Morales-Johnson

Water is Life, Water is Power

AnMarie R. Mendoza and Andrés F. Ramirez

Freedom School began with a generous welcome to Tovaangar, the ancestral land of the Tongva people, by Tongva scholar AnMarie Mendoza. The following session, *Water is Life, Water is Power*, historicized the settler-colonial and imperial underpinnings of urban water infrastructure and management in Los Angeles. Closely examining the Los Angeles Aqueduct and the Los Angeles River Master Plan (LARMP), Mendoza invited participants to reflect on Paiute and Tongva principles, from her own research and the documentary, *The Aqueduct Between Us* (2020). These teachings introduced an alternative understanding of water, not merely as a resource, but rather as a living entity. Guided by planning scholar Andres F. Ramírez, the subsequent discussion engaged with the LA River and its epistemology. Together, we asked how restoring our relationality and responsibility to local water might shift our thinking about land and justice.

That same week, Mendoza and Ramirez visited the Ballona Creek and sat by her side. The Ballona Creek is an 8.8-mile watershed in Los Angeles ends at Santa Monica Bay. The Army Corps of Engineers channelized this watershed in the 1930's.[1] They listened to the murmur of her waters–confined by concrete yet armed with a latent power capable of surging beyond control at any moment. This text follows the flow of their conversation, from turbulent colonial histories to a confluence of home waters, near and far. Peering through the lens of diverse media streams, their exchange dips below the surface to engage with submerged epistemes and worldviews that channel Indigenous voices and signal a path forward, toward a liberated future.

[1] www.culvercity.org/Explore/Ballona-Creek

Map copied by Samantha Morales Johnson (Left), San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians/Gabrieleno Tongva https://www.gabrieleno-nsn.us/home-1-1-1-2



Photo credit: Authors

AnMarie: So, this is what a lot of the LA River looks like, more or less. A lot of concrete. Some water coming down, not too much wildlife... But I do get really excited to see things sprouting from the concrete. I'm a big fan of water metaphors for the work I do, and the river reminds me that settler colonialism is an incomplete process, just like the infrastructure that holds the water. It's a process and a structure, but it's incomplete because of these parts of the river that will not be consumed by concrete, no matter how hard the Army Corps of Engineers has tried. It always rises up. It's too powerful. So I think of these structures, the concrete, the channels, as the settler-colonial that wants to erase Indigenous life, but it just won't go away. It will always exist.

Andrés: The river may be at times unrecognizable–the water has all but vanished from sight– but it persists and prevails, even after decades of settler planning, municipal colonialism (Stanger-Ross 2008) and dispossession by municipalization (Schmidt 2022). It isn't uncommon for settler histories of the urban to reduce the colonial encounter to an episode from the past (Wolfe 2006; Kauanui 2016). In fact, some settler cities conveniently sanitize their origin stories to ignore any ancestral claims of native people, their worldviews and their stakes in its future. But the continuous flow of water and its irreverence to heavy-handed infrastructure is a reminder that the river–and indeed the city–continues to be Indigenous in more ways than one.

AnMarie: Indigenous voices have long been excluded from the history of LA's waterworks. Settler narratives–from Mulholland to Garcetti–argue that water benefits the greater public, justifying the municipalization of water and large-scale infrastructures that are detrimental to land, water, and Indigenous populations from the Owens Valley to the LA basin (Mendoza 2019, 40).

In turning their back to the river, histories of Los Angeles have also reduced Indigenous people to myths of a bygone era and undermined our connection to land and water (Davis and Morrow 2018; Reisner 1993; Deverell 2004). Only recently have some started recognizing Tongva/ Gabrielino histories of displacement and their ongoing resistance in relation to water (Gumprecht 2001; Hernández 2020).

But there are also counter-hegemonic narratives about our water, and they are crucial to empower tribal communities in LA and Payahuunadü. Many of these counter-hegemonic projects are struggles for environmental justice; when tribes tackle air pollution, water scarcity, extinct or endangered species, they contest and attempt to reconfigure power relations (Mendoza 2019, 39–44).

Andrés: As a recent settler in Tovaangar, I feel somewhat estranged from the river and troubled by the obscene amount of water that disappears into the city. Sadly, city planners made the river inaccessible and transformed parts of it to resemble a freeway more than any body of water. Some even argue that the river was in fact turned into a freeway *for water* and that, as a result, its popular image regressed from a forgotten waterway to an urban problem. Even in the movies, the LA River was demoted from the role of protagonist to a supporting role, then to serial killer, and finally blacklisted entirely after it disappeared under concrete (Morrison 2022; Morrison and Lamonica 2001).



Map copied from GIS Geography
https://gisgeography.com/los-angeles-map-california/#RoadMap

AnMarie: Before the city was crisscrossed with freeways, there was and still exists a dynamic system of rivers and tributaries that sustained humans and non-humans alike. A pre-colonial map of Tongva villages living alongside these waterways refutes the idea of aqua nullius,[2] illustrating that prior to the settler city, Tongva peoples inhabited this land and took on the responsibility of caring for home waters to sustain lifeways. The freeway system has paved over the ability for most of the city's inhabitants to regard water as a living entity. Most people rely on Hollywood movies, like *Chinatown* (1974), to shape their understanding and relationship with water in LA.

Andrés: Many of us realize that we no longer live in harmony with the water and that LA faces a severe water shortage, but we rarely question the provenance of our water. Our relationship to water in LA is predicated on profound settler amnesia, but there seems to be a newfound interest in the river, underpinned by environmental concern with resource scarcity. Morrison writes that "after decades as a nonentity, the L.A. River is having a career revival, starring as itself in an urgent real-time comeback docudrama" (Morrison 2022).

AnMarie: To quote a powerful stanza written by Tongva poet Kelly Caballero, "*Beneath the glamour and fiction lies the sinister truth. Los Angeles, City of Angeles, is a city founded by murderers and thieves disguising themselves as such*," which I believe is relevant to the settler colonial moment we find ourselves in (Cavallero 2019). When we critically analyze the history of planning for the Los Angeles River, we see that the "sinister truth" behind promoting the river's so-called "revival" is directly tied to economic development under the guise of environmental concern or what some refer to as "urban greening." The Paayme Paxaayt began being concretized/channelized in the 1930s by the Army Corp of Engineers. This was a 20-year planning process that used 3.5 million barrels of cement to suffocate the river's natural habitat. The river was deemed a threat to surrounding communities and businesses after bouts of costly and deadly seasonal flooding. The newfound interest in reviving the LA River is aligned with the global push for urban rivers to be "cleaned," "greened," and "regenerated" for the benefit of bourgeois and middle-class residents, global metrics (like the Sustainable Development Goals), and the corporations which profit from the commodification of ecological desires and anxieties (Checker 2011, 2017; Curran and Hamilton 2017; Goodling 2021; Quastel 2009; Kimari and Parish 2020). The Los Angeles River Master Plan (LARMP), heralded as a once-in-a-generation chance to shape the future of the LA River, proposed a menu list of development opportunities. And to add even more context to the newfound interest in the river is the 2028 Olympics hosted in Los Angeles, where our river will be a focal point for tourist attractions. This attempt to green the river will no doubt create displacement for local communities if we do not cooperate, organize, and understand the river as a significant site of contestation.

[2] Much like terra nullius, aqua nullius serves as an ideological and legal fiction underpinning European settler colonial projects worldwide that asserts that water belonged to and was being used by no one before colonization. Wiradjuri Nyemba legal scholar Virginia Marshall popularized the term in her book *Overturning Aqua Nullius: Securing Aboriginal Water Rights* (2017).

Interestingly, beyond mainstream Hollywood films and planning histories, the L.A. River has played a significant role in counter-hegemonic Indigenous-led struggles. I co-created and directed the *Aqueduct Between Us* to reveal the sinister truths behind some of our water infrastructure's most mainstream narratives. I believe that Indigenous histories and lived experiences have always offered a radical retelling of what we think we know about cities. *The Aqueduct Between Us* was cultivated by my desire to get the story straight on behalf of waters, both local and stolen from other places.

Andrés: The film does precisely that, explaining that the LA River has long been, and continues to be, an urban geography defined by the systematic theft of water. Its historic relationship to the Owens Valley and its radical transformation over the years reflects an operative logic of extraction that is deeply embedded in the ideological priorities, material infrastructures, political imperatives, and military forces that underpin theft. As Kareem Rabie pointed out during the Freedom School, this framing is interesting and important, as it suggests a novel way to conceptualize urban space, not merely as land theft, but through the broader and often neglected dimension of water theft, which is essential to the making of any urban landscape.

After watching the documentary, many of us at Freedom School asked ourselves: in what ways are struggles for water similar to struggles for land or housing? Water and land share a recent history of social movements demanding rematriation. While Land Back claims have galvanized solidarity with Indigenous sovereignty struggles around the world, far fewer consider the alienation of Indigenous people from water. However, Indigenous water protectors and land stewards argue that there cannot be Land Back without Water Back. In the wake of Indigenous struggles that seek to protect land, as in the fight for Standing Rock, global awareness around water is rising. Rematriation describes a duty to protect Mother Earth; restoring Land, Water (and more) through Indigenous ways of knowing and being, as well as systems for governance and sovereignty (Kelsey Leonard et al. 2023, 378).

Yet, under racial capitalism, we are led to believe that land and water are similar commodities within competing property systems (Cole and Ostrom 2012; Blomley 2003; Singer 2000). But, as the *Aqueduct Between Us* illustrates, these fictitious and fungible commodities originate from Indigenous dispossession and theft (Polanyi 2001; Park 2016). Rivers are great examples of how water and land are simultaneously stolen. In another haunting film from my native land, *El río que se robaron* (The river that was stolen) (Guillén 2016), the Colombian government erects a dam on the Rancheria River to serve industrial crops and mining, blocking off the only source of drinking water for the Wayuu people. Beyond the violent act of appropriating land or water, what is truly stolen in this case are the lives of upwards of 7000 Indigenous people and their future existence.

AnMarie: The attempted commodification of water is not as straightforward as it is with land, and it doesn't begin to capture the nuance of water theft. Karen Bakker (2005) has argued that water is "uncooperative" to commodity logic. Commodities are objects that can be traded, bought, and sold, and whose prices are determined by a competitive market. Based on biophysical geography, water does not function that way; it is resistant to the competition and pricing that you see with housing. In a place like Payahuunadü (Owens Valley), relationships and claims to water existed between the Paiute and Shoshone peoples before colonization. The Paiute had a well-documented complex irrigation system that helped spread life in their Valley since time immemorial. As we learn from Paiute oral history, water sustains their physical, cultural, and spiritual life. Payahuunadü translates to "land of flowing waters" in the Nüümü language, but after the city of Los Angeles entered the picture, the water no longer flowed like it once did. When Los Angeles entered the Valley in the early 1900s, water management completely changed. It went from sustaining local and domestic uses to being commercialized for consumers hundreds of miles away.

To understand the reality of the water theft in Los Angeles perpetrated in Owens Valley, we must think of several different processes happening simultaneously. The first is an enduring accumulation process that some scholars call "water grabbing" (Mehta, Veldwisch, and Franco 2012), where powerful actors can control and relocate water for their benefit even though local communities depend on that water for their livelihoods. I prefer the language of accumulation because it highlights the imperial nature of LA's water theft. When we rely on the experiences and histories of the Paiute people, LA's occupation of the Valley is evident. Sage Romero (Pauite/Taos Pueblo) highlights this sentiment in part three of our documentary. "It's like an occupation, you see these LADWP trucks up and down our roads all day long parked along the side doing work, but the city of Los Angeles is a couple hundred miles away, but it's here. You'll come out in the middle of nowhere, and you'll see a big sign: 'PROPERTY of the city of Los Angeles, no camping'" (Mendoza 2020). Over the years, I have spoken to Sage and other Paiute community members about the day-to-day fight to maintain a connection to their homelands and waters because LADWP restricts access to various parts of the valley. I admire and am inspired by the resilience of the Paiute people and their commitment to protecting and stewarding their home waters despite the history of theft and dispossession.

Andrés: At the Freedom School, you asked us to reflect on who our home waters were, which draws precisely on that notion of water as a relative. Approaching water as kin is challenging for those of us shaped by a worldview that reduces water to a resource for consumption –something to be used, owned or managed. Even those of us who are familiar with Indigenous epistemologies, but are not Indigenous ourselves, struggle to grasp what it might feel like to have a familial relationship with the river. As Freedom School participant Jennifer asked, how should we engage with the river as a relative, beyond the intellectual concept?

AnMarie: Freedom School cultivated such a unique space for me as a water protector/scholar. I was in a room full of housing justice scholars and activists from around the world, and it was essential for me to have everyone reflect on their relationship with water and the place they call home. I have been thinking about this concept of home waters for a long time, drawing inspiration from two Indigenous scholars. I was first introduced to the concept of home waters by Raukawa/Ngāti Ranginui scholar Jacinta Ruru (2018), whose work contends with the Māori legal system and the recognition of the legal personhood of rivers in New Zealand. She talks about how Māori communities often pose questions amongst themselves. "'Ko wai au?' asks who I am but more literally translates as 'Who are my waters?' The answer will depend on the tribe and subtribe to which the person belongs" (2018, 216). This logic of belonging to water made sense to me and is relevant to Tongva communities with rich cultural ties to rivers and the Pacific Ocean. Our identity is linked and shaped by geographic space, and as Tongva people, we now share space with millions of people who are not indigenous to Los Angeles but think of LA as their home. In his essay about the domestication of the Santa Ana River, Tongva/ Acjachemen scholar Charles Sepulveda (2018) articulated this concept of *Kuuyam*, which helped me deepen my understanding of what home waters could mean for people who are not Indigenous. *Kuuyam* is the Tongva word for guest, which gets us away from the native/settler binary (2018, 54–56). Sepulveda argues that *Kuuyam* offers us a reimagining of human relationships to place outside the structure of settler colonialism. *Kuuyam* is a powerful invitation because it demands a relationship of effort and responsibility be formed with land and waters. I posed this question, "Who are your home waters?" with *Kuuyam* in mind, and I was happy that it provided us with some thought-provoking conversations.

The invitation to think about home waters is not to relieve feelings of settler guilt or to think of yourself as Indigenous; instead, it is an invitation to think about and build a relationship with water and local Indigenous communities. When Jennifer asks how we engage the river outside of the intellectual concept, the simple first step is to spend time with water sources around us. This is precisely why we came to Ballona Creek to have this conversation. I wanted you to be near the water to see where she is coming from. I have learned from my relationship with water that it is not stagnant or static but dynamic. It often resembles the relationship that you have with people you love. Relationships grow strong when we nurture them and consider them a lifetime process. A relationship between people and water is not built overnight, but it is not as complicated as one thinks either. We all need water to survive, so her health is tied to ours. There is an inherent relationship between all living organisms and water, and it is sacred. Indigenous theorists like Sepulveda and Ruru have helped me think outside the resource and rights-driven frameworks that have ultimately promoted the degradation of water. When we think of water as a family member, our values become more about responsibility and protection. Instead of thinking of what the water can do for you, we can think about what we can do for water.

Andrés: I initially struggled to answer who my home waters are because, for starters, I find the concept of home elusive and troublesome. As a lifelong migrant, I hesitate to call any of the places I've lived in *my home*. And as a gay man, I am uncomfortable with the heteronormative and gendered norms that define the home, as well as similar notions of homelands or hometowns. Materially and ontologically, the home is simply out of reach for many. This is the paradox that Michele Lancione describes as "the impossible possibility of the home" (2023). While the home certainly does evoke a relationship to cultural and environmental ties–as another participant Sterling pointed out–ascribing innate qualities to it brings up dangerous associations to biomarkers and genetic traits, all of which may lead to reductionism, biological determinism, and outright unethical treatment of certain people.

AnMarie: Your experiences are valid and highlight the tension between Western and Indigenous epistemologies. A nuanced conversation about the home that water offers us is more fluid; it is based on relationality and relationships rather than the confines of material possessions, to which you and Michele are alluding. My invitation to think of home waters through *Kuuyam* abolishes institutionalized hierarchical conceptions of human difference that separate people by race, origins, religion, gender, and sexuality; and to, instead, contend with a sense of emplacement, which requires that we avoid acting like colonizers and causing further harm to the environment (Sepulveda 2018, 54–55). I challenge you to work hard and shift to a relational understanding of home.

Andrés: Changing the way we view our reality (ontology) and how we think about that reality (epistemology) is not easy. But water offers many beautiful metaphors and invitations for us to recognize it as a site of epistemic difference, as well as an essential life

source. This reminds me of the work of Macarena Gómez-Barris (2017), who relies on "submerged perspectives" to explore extractive spaces across South America's resource-rich Indigenous territories. She draws from the work of Indigenous activists, intellectuals, and artists to access viewpoints that exist below the surface, in realms of differently organized realities beyond colonial and capitalist boundaries. She writes, for instance, about Mapuche filmmaker Francisco Huichaqueo, who dips his camera under water to document liquid dreamscapes that represent Chilean rivers running through Mapuche territories in *MENCER ñi Pewma!*, (2012). Huichaqueo argues that film is his weapon of choice to fight colonialism, as the camera can bring awareness and repair our broken spirituality (2022). Gomez Barris further employs a "fish-eye episteme" to engage with the work of Colombian artist Carolina Caycedo. Her film, *Land of Friends/ Tierra de los Amigos* (2014) reclaims the Indigenous name of the Magdalena River and submerges the camera underwater to raise awareness about environmental degradation and especially the commodification of water. The fish-eye episteme is an invitation to see like a fish and connect with the river as a sentient being, but it also represents the wide angle lens that distorts the image, blurring the edges and rounding the center. Figuratively and literally, submerged perspectives capture local epistemes, or liquid intelligence, which can trigger decolonial gestures–the smaller spaces and moments of decolonization

AnMarie: Joanne Barker states it best: Indigenous people's knowledge of water is attuned to its role in life and as life" (2019, 4). With that comes different modes of expressing that knowledge and relationship, whether through oral history, ceremony, song, or a fish-eye perspective. I want to be cautious of over-romanticizing Indigenous epistemologies, though. Our ways of knowing and building relationships to lands and waters are scientific; they rely on direct experiences and observations over generations.

Andrés: Freedom School asked us to reflect on what grounds us in our struggles for land and justice. Building on Paul Gilroy's phrase of "roots and routes" (1993), our home waters offer a generative and crucial perspective that situates us within the very forces that shape who we are and what we fight for. Thinking about our home waters as a relative implies a relational disposition that is epistemologically distinct from neoliberal hydrofictions (Deckard 2019) and hydro hegemony (Zeitoun and Warner 2006). But also, personifying our home waters shifts our attention away from object-subject view, towards a mutually constitutive and dialectical relationship we share–not just with water, but also with land and other custodial territories, as well as ancestors. In that respect, home waters invite us to interrogate our relationship to the settler colonial city. A relational approach to home waters also carries with it the possibility and responsibility of reciprocity, and a broader project of restorative justice, which is in line with reparations and reconstruction.



Video still credit: Francisco Huichaqueo, MENCER ñi Pewma!, 2012. Single-channel HD video, color, sound 32 minutes 33 seconds



Video still credit: Carolina Caycedo. Land of Friends/Tierra de los Amigos, 2014. Single-channel HD video, color, sound 38 minutes 10 seconds

Robin D.G. Kelley refers to the moment at hand as the third Reconstruction – the latest and most visionary revolutionary effort to expand social democracy and include everyone (Kelley 2020; Barber and Wilson-Hartgrove 2016). Let's not forget that previous Reconstructions failed to deliver on their promise, precisely because people could not unite those who remained divided across race and class. Bruyneel writes about the histories of the Reconstruction of the South and the conquest of the West to remind us that Black and Indigenous struggles for Reconstruction were–at least historically–interrelated, but they have also remained isolated from one another in our political memory (2021, 48). What I mean to say is that, by eliciting healing, harmony and relational accountability, home waters resonate not only with Indigenous resurgence and decolonization, but also with freedom dreams (the verb, not the noun) and abolitionist traditions (Kelley 2022).

When I consider home waters as a relative, I am reminded of the ways in which Indigenous epistemes are already reshaping global paradigms and policies. The recognition of rivers as living entities[3] signal a transformative trend in legal frameworks. I first learned of this from a river in Colombia, which is the focus of the film *¿Quién gobierna el río Atrato?* (Who runs the Atrato River?) (Gomez 2021). The documentary narrates how the Atrato River gained recognition as an entity with rights, challenging colonial legacies that long reduced the natural world to individuals' property. This legislation follows global precedents like the Whanganui River in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as the Ganga and Yamuna rivers in India–all of which represent a newfound awareness of Indigenous worldviews and an appreciation for the ways in which they hold relational accountability with the Earth.

Beyond rivers, the rights to nature have found expression in constitutional frameworks that redefine the relationship between nature and the state. Ecuador's groundbreaking constitutional amendment (2008), for example, enshrines the principles of *sumak kawsay* or *Buen Vivir* (good living); similarly, Bolivia's *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) Legal Framework (2010) recognizes that natural entities have inherent rights and protects them as living systems. These precedents are not mere instruments of environmental governance; they represent centuries of Indigenous activism that continue to defy capitalist extraction and commodification. Interestingly, the emergence of rights to nature has overwhelmingly taken place in Southern geographies, far from the US. These regions hold marginal status in academic discourse, yet remain central sites of global extraction precisely because of their biodiversity.

[3] The Universal Declaration of River Rights (UDRR) was first developed by the Earth Law Center in 2017. https://www.rightsofrivers.org

Table 1 of 1
Table 1. Rivers with rights in law, but no rights to water.

Waterway	Definition	Legal status of the river	Rights to water
Río Atrato (Choco, Colombia), 2016	The Atrato river, its basin and tributaries (particularly as the location of the homes of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities).[101]	The court recognised the Río Atrato as an 'entidad sujeto de derechos' [an entity that is the subject of rights], including rights to 'protection, conservation, maintenance and restoration'.[102]	No water rights. The court did not recognise a property right for the river to own itself (or its water).[103]
Martuwarra/Fitzroy River (Western Australia, Australia), 2016	The Fitzroy River and its catchment[104]	'The Fitzroy River is a living ancestral being and has a right to [105]	No water rights. This Declaration was made by Traditional Owners in accordance with First Law and does not specifically include rights to water; under the laws of Western Australia, the state retains legal responsibility for allocating water rights.
Birrarung/Yarra River (Victoria, Australia), 2017	Yarra River (bed, banks, and soil) and declared public land in its vicinity[106]	The river and the associated land are 'one living and integrated natural entity'.[107]	Water is managed under separate legislation and there is no direct effect on existing water allocation or management. Current water for the river is held by the Victorian Environmental Water Holder.
Whanganui River (Aotearoa New Zealand), 2017	'E rere kau mai i te Awa nui mai i te Kahui Maunga ki Tangaroa: the great River flows from the mountains to the sea: Te Awa Tupua is an indivisible and living whole from the mountains to the sea, incorporating the Whanganui River and all of its physical and metaphysical elements.'[108]	The river (Te Awa Tupua) is 'an indivisible and living whole' and 'a legal person and has all the rights, powers, duties, and liabilities of a legal person'.[109]	No rights to water. The legislation explicitly states that no existing rights to water are affected.[110]
Ganga and Yamuna rivers (Uttarakhand, India), 2017	'Rivers Ganga and Yamuna are breathing, living and sustaining the communities from mountains to sea … all their tributaries, streams, every natural water flowing with flow continuously or intermittently of these rivers'.[111]	The court held that the rivers are 'juristic/legal persons/living entities having the status of a legal person with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living person'.[112]	The court did not explicitly include rights to water, although future action by the guardians of the rivers to 'protect, conserve and preserve Rivers Ganga and Yamuna … and also to promote the health and well being of these rivers'[113] could affect these rights.
Turag and all other rivers (Bangladesh), 2019	Rivers, canals, creeks, seashore, river banks, haor (bowl-shaped depressions), baor (fresh water lagoons), naala (narrow canal), jheel (oxbow lake) and open water bodies.	The court held that rivers are legal persons and recognised in law as living entities.[114]	The court did not explicitly include rights to water, although the role of rivers in providing free-flowing surface water was acknowledged.[115]

Table from Erin O'Donnell's article, 2020, Rivers as living beings: rights in law, but no rights to water?

AnMarie: I remember being inspired in 2017 when rivers in Ecuador, New Zealand, Colombia, India, and Australia were granted legal personhood, opening new avenues of protection and ontological recognition for Indigenous worldviews. Around the same time, I was entering the planning profession as a water program director for a local native-led grassroots organization. I entered that line of work very hopeful that the wins for the rights of nature, in tandem with Standing Rock, which had brought Mni Wiconi's "water is life" to global consciousness (Estes 2024, 20), would be reflected in planning work. I learned through my experiences with the Los Angeles River Master Plan (LARMP) community engagement process that "water is life" is nothing more than a phrase. In Los Angeles, community engagement with local tribal communities is often a box-checking exercise that doesn't even begin to meaningfully contend with Indigenous histories, priorities, or water views. While there are planners who do a better job of acknowledging the legacy of colonialism, which creates a natural distrust with state and city agencies, neoliberal visions and timelines do not permit deep engagement with Native Nations, and we struggled even to have basic representation in the process.

The final version of the LARMP reflected the weak engagement process that tokenized Indigenous history and limited consultation for future projects in the realm of arts and culture. The eagerness of the county to "celebrate the importance of indigenous culture" without rectifying the harms of the past and present reveals a "script of moving forward" (Edmonds 2010; Porter, Hurst, and Grandinetti 2020) that would only benefit the status quo of economic bottom lines of which I spoke earlier. Some have called for the participation of Indigenous peoples in current settler planning schemes as contemporary forms of politics of liberal recognition (Coulthard 2014; Porter, Hurst, and Grandinetti 2020, 225), which I believe continues to inhibit our decision-making authority and doubles down on our dispossession.

Andrés: Indeed, I am sorry to admit that in many of these places where the rights to nature are recognized and even written into the constitution to protect spaces of cultural and ecological importance, environmental degradation continues to take place. I guess the underlying question is how we can avoid epistemic cooptation? How do we make sure Indigenous worldviews are not watered down, misappropriated, tokenized?

AnMarie: This question is the one that keeps me up at night and is a catalyst for why I am pursuing a PhD in urban planning. Tokenization is the reality for Indigenous communities in Los Angeles. There is no shortage of city and county projects and plans that want our stamp of approval and land acknowledgment without considering our values and demands for Land Back. The issue of avoiding cooptation is an

internal one that my community must navigate together and with other Indigenous communities. In Los Angeles, there are over 400,000 people who identify as Native American/Alaskan Native, making my homeland a hub of Indigenous peoples from all over. The Tongva community is a tiny fraction of that, so it's been challenging to have the visibility we need to be recognized as rightful decision-makers within planning spaces.

Andrés: There is so much to learn from this place and its home waters. Yet sometimes it feels that there is little awareness about Tovaangar and its flowing waters beyond the routine land acknowledgment. In *Settler Memory* (2021), Bruynell reminds us that the issue isn't a lack of knowledge, but rather that it is not recognized as foundational. As urban planning students, we know all too well that the histories and theories that fill our textbooks are often set to an imagined year zero of settler possession–a colonial frontier of time that renders any previous history largely invisible and inconsequential (Rose 1999).

Perhaps coloniality, in its many forms and flows, is far from over. While some scholars insist on revisiting and indeed rewriting our urban histories to be more truthful (Porter 2020), others advocate for a decolonization of storytelling in planning theory and practice (Ortiz 2023). I think *The Aqueduct Between Us* does precisely that: it revises Los Angeles's origin story, and that of its river. And in doing so, the film recasts urban planning history as a cultural artifact of colonialism.



Flyer art created by Artivist David Calvillo, Photo credit: Enrique Gonzalez

AnMarie: *The Aqueduct Between Us* came together after a few years of organizing alongside Paiute people, whom I credit as my first water teachers. I first learned of the Paiute water history in a class at UCLA during the Standing Rock protest. Sitting in my chair, I remember feeling so angry about why this history was kept from me; I did not know where our water came from or the harm it caused other places and people. I came to understand that this was not an oversight on the part of our education system but an intentional erasure of Indigenous history. Once I learned the good word from our Paiute relatives, I was on my path to protect water in and around LA. *The Aqueduct Between Us* was initially a social justice water symposium I organized on campus as an undergrad in 2017, where members from the Paiute community shared their perspectives and history of water with students in LA. That event taught me that this conversation and message needed to be a permanent feature of our education in Los Angeles and not just a one-time thing. Creating educational resources was an ask that kept coming up from the Paiute community. I decided to take on the task of creating those resources with my brother Isaiah, who is a very talented film editor. This project is a five-part radical oral history/ multimedia art campaign that aims to educate the residents of Los Angeles about the Indigenous communities that have been significantly impacted by their land and water use to create political change. Radical oral history is all about sharing stories to create a political change. My goal was never to collect oral histories to be put in some archive that only a privileged few could access but something that would be free and accessible to all; that is why we decided to platform it on YouTube.

Andrés: The voices of "persistent natives" in *The Aqueduct Between Us* remind me of refusal and remembrance, perspectives and practices that suggest a path forward–a better way, a possible future. Fundamentally, centering Indigenous voices should be about allowing Indigenous people to speak for themselves, based on their own worldviews and experiences. This is grounded in storywork traditions and methodologies (Kovach 2021; Archibald, Morgan, and De Santolo 2019; Smith 2021), where the power of stories lie not only in the insights they offer, but also in the social processes of making, sharing and remembering that can heal the heart, mind, body and spirit (Archibald, Morgan, and De Santolo 2019; Smith 2021, 8).

Centering Indigenous voices, in film or otherwise, promises to broaden our knowledge and to advance the cause of justice, but it remains a complex and challenging endeavor. As a non-Indigenous person, I cannot entirely remove myself from white/settler privilege; I worry about obscuring Indigenous voices or appropriating their knowledge as I attempt to speak alongside them. Táíwò describes "standpoint epistemology" as problematic because by "centering the most marginalized" is often more about handing authority and managing social categories, without really seeking to change them (2021). Elevating Indigenous perspectives runs the risk of slipping into performative gestures and empty acts of tokenism. There is a risk in romanticizing and thus undermining complexity, difference, and humanity. I guess what it really comes down to is power. If by centering Indigenous voices we are not also empowering them in a meaningful way, it is an empty gesture. As researchers, much of our power lies in how we respond to the questions we ask –not just in the intellectual authority of the answers themselves. In my own work, I've been interested in mobilizing research into a collective platform that serves Indigenous needs and interests, and not just my intellectual agenda. Many of us working with Indigenous communities are well aware of the dangers of reproducing colonial dynamics and extractive methodologies, which does not necessarily mean we effectively avoid them. Gaudry (2011) offers clear guidelines for insurgent research that he urges us to consider as we fight intellectual colonialism. Among them, his recommendation to "orient knowledge creation towards Indigenous people and their communities" (Gaudry 2011, 114) is particularly instructive when we think about centering Indigenous voices. Heeding his advice means ensuring that Indigenous people are the main audience of our research.

AnMarie: Indigenous waters, world views, and ways of life are under constant threat from the settler-state; for this reason, resistance as an enactment of values and kinship is what is needed from those who want to work with and for Indigenous communities. Intellectual work is critical, but for it to mean something, it must also be paired with direct action. Critically reflecting on Glen Coulthard's (2014) work on the *Five Theses on Indigenous Resurgence and Decolonization*, one can see a need to disrupt dominant society to address land and water degradation and exploitation. Our intellectual work must not only be concerned with the audience but also be responsive and responsible for addressing material threats Indigenous communities face.

Andrés: At Freedom School, we were asked to think about how relationality and responsibility towards water could shift our thinking about land and housing justice. In that vein, over the last few days, I've been wondering: if water is life, what is land?

One might think that land is nothing without water; as land is made habitable for humans and non-humans alike by the flow of water. This is an important and neglected argument that land and housing struggles should not overlook. But it also perpetuates a narrow and reductionist view of land and water as resources for consumption.

Instead of thinking about the difference between land and water, it may be more productive to reflect on ways in which they are similar, complementary, and integral to one another. On one hand, violence against land and water are intrinsically linked. The forces of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and militarization persistently attempt to subordinate and weaponize water and land against Indigenous peoples and others. On the other hand, struggles for resistance are also comparable; water protectors and land stewards often face similar challenges and engage in unified efforts to defend their environments. Despite this shared struggle, there is a lack of coordinated action between these groups, hindering their collective impact. This is precisely the problem–framing water and land as separate, when they are interconnected in the natural world and in our everyday lives.

Again, the river perfectly illustrates how land and water work in unison; they permeate each other, travel together, and are both essential for sustaining life.

AnMarie: "Who are your home waters?" is an avenue to help us think about land, water, and community together. As you mention, land and water are intrinsically linked, yet we are only taught to see the difference, and furthermore, we are disconnected from them both. Home waters are context-specific and invoke an invitation to begin a relationship with land and waters shaped by local Indigenous peoples. Building a relationship based on responsibility, respect, and reciprocity should lead to transformative and direct action to protect the place you call home. As organizers, activists, and scholars, we must be conscious of the political moments that unite our struggles. That moment in Los Angeles is the Olympics in 2028 when environmental and housing justice movements will undoubtedly converge. My experience with the LARMP illuminated that the LA River will be weaponized against communities of color to displace them if we don't come together. I want our conversation to invite all housing justice scholars and activists in Los Angeles to start building that relationship with the Tongva community around water-related issues.

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Boyle Heights
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LATU
HEIG
LATU
SILA

Struggles for Housing: Base Building in the Face of Territorial Eviction

La Vecindad Collective: Guadalupe Granero Realini, Edgardo Contreras Nossa, Bryan Quintanilla, Leonardo Vilchis, Elizabeth Blaney

Grassroots organization against territorial dispossession

The housing crisis is a well-documented historical and cyclical issue. Yet since the 1970s, the situation has worsened with the adoption of neoliberalism. We've moved farther away from treating housing as having a tangible use-value and toward treating it like a commodity whose primary function is extracting capital through rents. In the full swing of the 21st century, the situation worsens as nation-states have collectively prevented the implementation of statues that would mitigate this issue. And as luxury and boutique developments continue to pop-up in every corner of the world, the crisis deepens. More and more people are thrown into precarious living situations, experience eviction and displacement, and end up living in the streets.

Most recently, Latin America and the Caribbean have found themselves in a very dire situation as well, as the tentacles of international capital flow in to claim their piece of the real estate speculative market. Giant multinational-corporate groups have invested in this speculative market, as there are profits to be made at very little risk. The result of these equations is the ocean of empty buildings we see. The extensive luxury housing circling the peripheries of the city, while in contrast, sit the informal, densely-populated dwellings of people who live without roofs every night. This, of course, is the consequence of an extractivist model, which preys like a lurking griffon over what should otherwise be a basic human right: housing.

In Argentina, the social organization established to defend the rights of access to the city and to housing is a historical one, especially growing since the advent of economic neoliberalism during the military dictatorship in the '70s and later deepening in the '90s as a new attempt to break the social contract emerged. Society began to imagine the central city not only as a place for the bare necessities of shelter but one with a broader and more complex habitat, including health, education, recreation, culture, etc. The result of these decades of struggle was the mass production of social housing, generally far from urban centers and poorly made with low-quality materials, coupled with a new understanding of the state's subsidiary role in managing poverty.

In parallel to the attacks of capitalism on urban centers, through the extraction of real estate profits, social organizations have offered various responses to governments increasingly intertwined with real estate capital. The two most important of these movements involved employees recovering and restarting dismantled factories, and people occupying abandoned buildings to produce excellent quality new homes in central locations. This phenomenon happened through the formation of hundreds of cooperatives throughout the country, each

Mural painted by Melissa Reyes & members of Union de Vecinos – Photo credit (left): Anthony Orendorff

of which organized for and passed laws, still enforced today, to fight and defend the right to a decent habitat. These days, in 2024, a new neo-liberal impulse threatens the rights achieved by these organizations, but the struggle never stops.

In Colombia, social organizations have been persecuted and stigmatized due to the armed conflict that the country has been experiencing since the 1950s. Even so, however, resistance and organization have emerged in the main urban centers to fight for access to housing and to the city. The housing situation in cities has not been as dire as in rural areas. Generally speaking, wild real estate capitalism has not entered cities quite as strongly for multiple reasons: historic land policy legislation, massive housing construction for the middle and lower classes, land prices, and outside the central areas, lower-income housing. In the constitutional reform of 1991, multiple actors participated in the configuration of new land policies, reflected in urban and territorial development laws, which in some way have allowed more balanced territorial policies. A case apart are the communities in remote rural areas that have experienced a situation of armed conflict that has violently displaced them from their ancestral lands. Furthermore, any type of organization to demand rights has been silenced, especially with the disappearance of social and union leaders to areas far from the large urban centers of power, especially leaders of impoverished ethnic minorities.

In advanced capitalist countries, we see the same dire realities, which are most notable in the large metropolises. The exponentially growing number of folks living on the street, born of urban informality and urban poverty, as a result of legalized poverty wages in the capitalist structure. In Los Angeles, that situation grows worse and worse each day, as hundreds of people are forced to make a life on the street, forced there by rising rental prices, poor living conditions in their homes and/or hotel rooms, and the increasing number of encampments in our parks and in the streets. The housing crisis is – needless to say – even worse for poor and vulnerable immigrants, along with the racialized and segregated classes, who confront greater risk in their housing, abusive landlords, unattainable rent prices, and the ever-looming threat of eviction.



Photo credit: Anthony Orendorff



Photo credit: Anthony Orendorff

It is in this maelstrom of growing chaos in which the Los Angeles Tenants Union (LATU) was formed. Since 2015, LATU has been fundamental in the organizing of neighbors in the fight for the right to housing. LATU is formed through an agglomeration of tenant and neighborhood associations, organized to defend the basic human right to dignified living conditions.

Unión de Vecinos (UV), formed in 1996, is a co-founder of LATU and represents Boyle Heights and East LA. UV struggles against the gentrification that has historically threatened mass evictions in the neighborhood, while also directly organizing tenants – primarily poor immigrants – who are attacked and marginalized by their landlords.

Their organization of various committees and their development of LATU has allowed its tenants members to understand failures of the system, look for practical solutions with one another, and collectively confront their different problems and strategically create alliances in and outside of Los Angeles.

Popular organizing all over Latin America and the Caribbean has been fundamental in the struggle against exclusionary public policies that have purposefully neglected the right to housing and thus resulted in the marginalization of the most vulnerable segments of our society. Similarly, organizing has become the instrument across geographies to share methodologies, discuss strategies of resistance, and develop patterns to replicate and grow to include the largest number of affected peoples. These nets or linkages of regional articulation allow us to socialize our struggles, to elaborate on potential solutions, and to incorporate international voices, because the fight is the same, just on multiple fronts. The importance of a shared unity, of a shared dream, is that we can identify our collective hardships and realize that this boat floats not on solitude, but on the oars of our collective resistance. International, regional, and local coordination allows for spaces of political formation on different fronts: economic, political, and social.



Photo credit: Anthony Orendorff

Reviewing the trajectory of Unión de Vecinos and the Los Angeles Tenant Union at the present time is key for three reasons. First, because knowing the strategies of struggle they have developed over the years is a key asset to movements at a time when the advance of concentrated real estate capital insists fiercely on market solutions to the housing crisis. The experience of UV and LATU show diverse forms of contestation against this hegemonic narrative.

Second, because the grassroots organization they have developed is a source of inspiration in recovering the value of cooperation and collective struggle. The notion of *vecinx* as a starting point for social mobilization is a powerful tool not only on a symbolic level but also in the possibilities it opens up for connections from below, for the strength born from the territories that these communities already inhabit. This fundamentally opposes the financial logic of depersonalization and displacement. It re-anchors power in the community, in the people who share and inhabit the territories.

Finally, dialogue with UV and LATU is essential at a time when capitalist globalization is consolidating its economic hegemony as far-right governments advance worldwide. This increasingly explicit alliance of economic and political power calls more than ever to strengthen the networks of struggle around the world. The internationalist vocation of UV and LATU builds bridges with organized tenants in other cities. In Latin America, such alliances are key. On the one hand, because it is one of the most unequal and urbanized regions of the planet, housing problems constitute one of the great barriers to the guarantee of a dignified life. On the other hand, because these countries deal with great external economic dependence (either through debt or investment needs), governments expand the frontiers of real estate capital while neglecting the social commitment to the right to housing. The organized struggle of those who need decent housing is increasingly indispensable to stop the advance of the financialized logic colonizing cities.

Ideas in Action

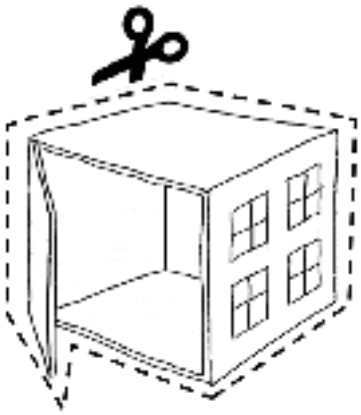
Infographic tool for dialogue

The history of popular power is written daily. When we adjust our aperture, we let in new stories. New protagonists appear individually, they then organize as neighbors, and these neighbors turn into communities and organized power. They recognize their common identity. And with this, the map broadens and linkages are formed between those who up until this point did not know of one another's existence. In other latitudes, congruent organizations form.

As this infographic begins to take shape and it transforms: it leaves a static image that can grow into a dynamic tool. We leave you with a question: through other circumstances, what could you imagine? What could you imagine, to create a dialogue between all those others who like you are organizing in this fight? Could this infographic be used in workshops or community gatherings to keep elaborating, thinking and developing this understanding together?

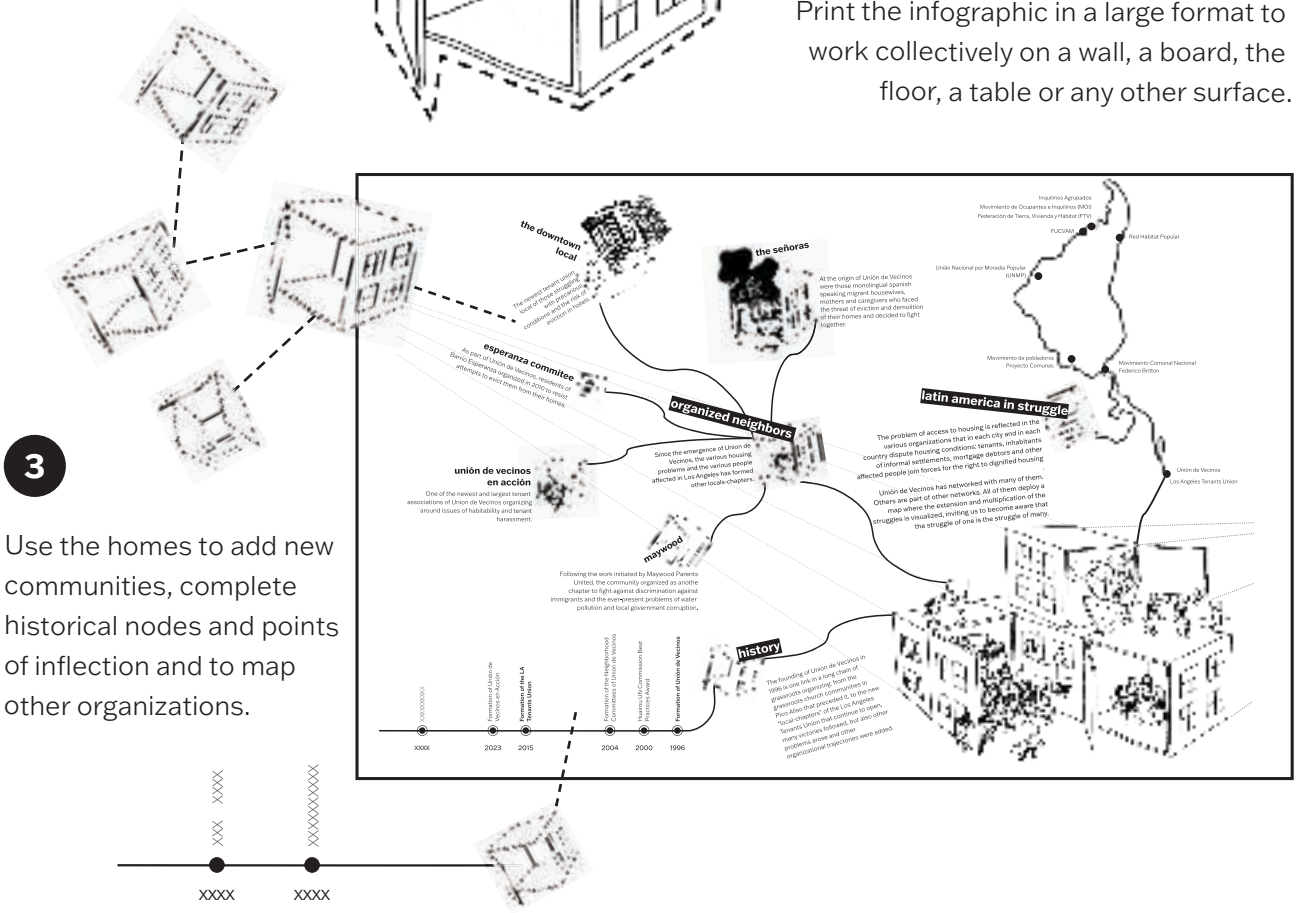
1

Print and cut out the homes to think of new horizons.



2

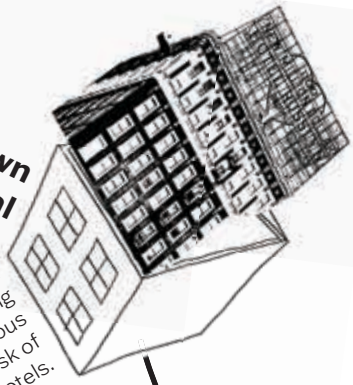
Print the infographic in a large format to work collectively on a wall, a board, the floor, a table or any other surface.



3

Use the homes to add new communities, complete historical nodes and points of inflection and to map other organizations.

the downtown local



The newest tenant union local of those struggling with precarious conditions and the risk of eviction in hotels.

the señoras



At the origin of Unión de Vecinos were those monolingual spanish speaking migrant housewives, mothers and caregivers who faced the threat of eviction and demolition of their homes and decided to fight together.

esperanza commitee

As part of Unión de Vecinos, residents of Barrio Esperanza organized in 2010 to resist attempts to evict them from their homes.



organized neighbors



Since the emergence of Union de Vecinos, the various housing problems and the various people affected in Los Angeles has formed other locals-chapters.

unión de vecinos en acción

One of the newest and largest tenant associations of Union de Vecinos organizing around issues of habitability and tenant harassment.



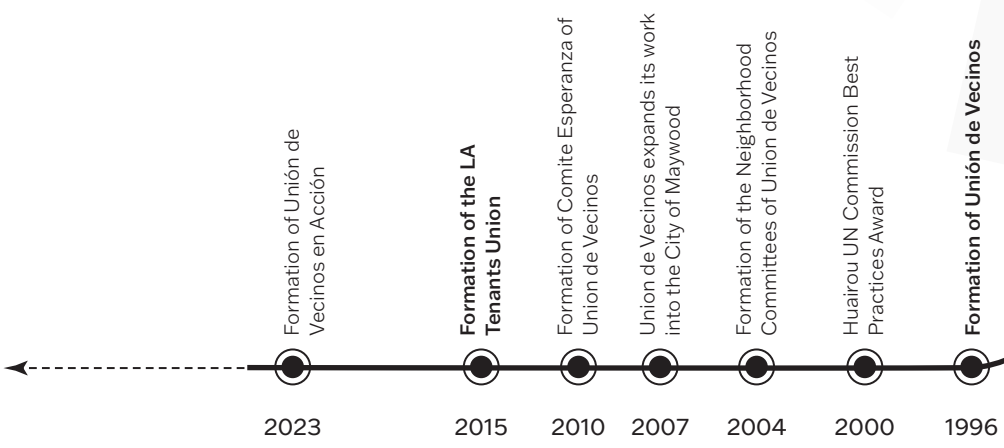
maywood



Following the work initiated by Maywood Parents United, the community organized as anothe chapter to fight against discrimination against immigrants and the ever-present problems of water pollution and local government corruption.

history





The founding of Union de Vecinos in 1996 is one link in a long chain of grassroots organizing: from the grassroots church communities in Pico Aliso that preceded it, to the new "local-chapters" of the Los Angeles Tenants Union that continue to open, many victories followed, but also other problems arose and other organizational trajectories were added.

Inquilinos Agrupados
Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos (MOI)
Federación de Tierra, Vivienda y Hábitat (FTV)

FUCVAM

Red Hábitat Popular

União Nacional por Moradia Popular (UNMP)

Movimiento de pobladorxs
Proyecto Comunas

Movimiento Comunal Nacional
Federico Britton

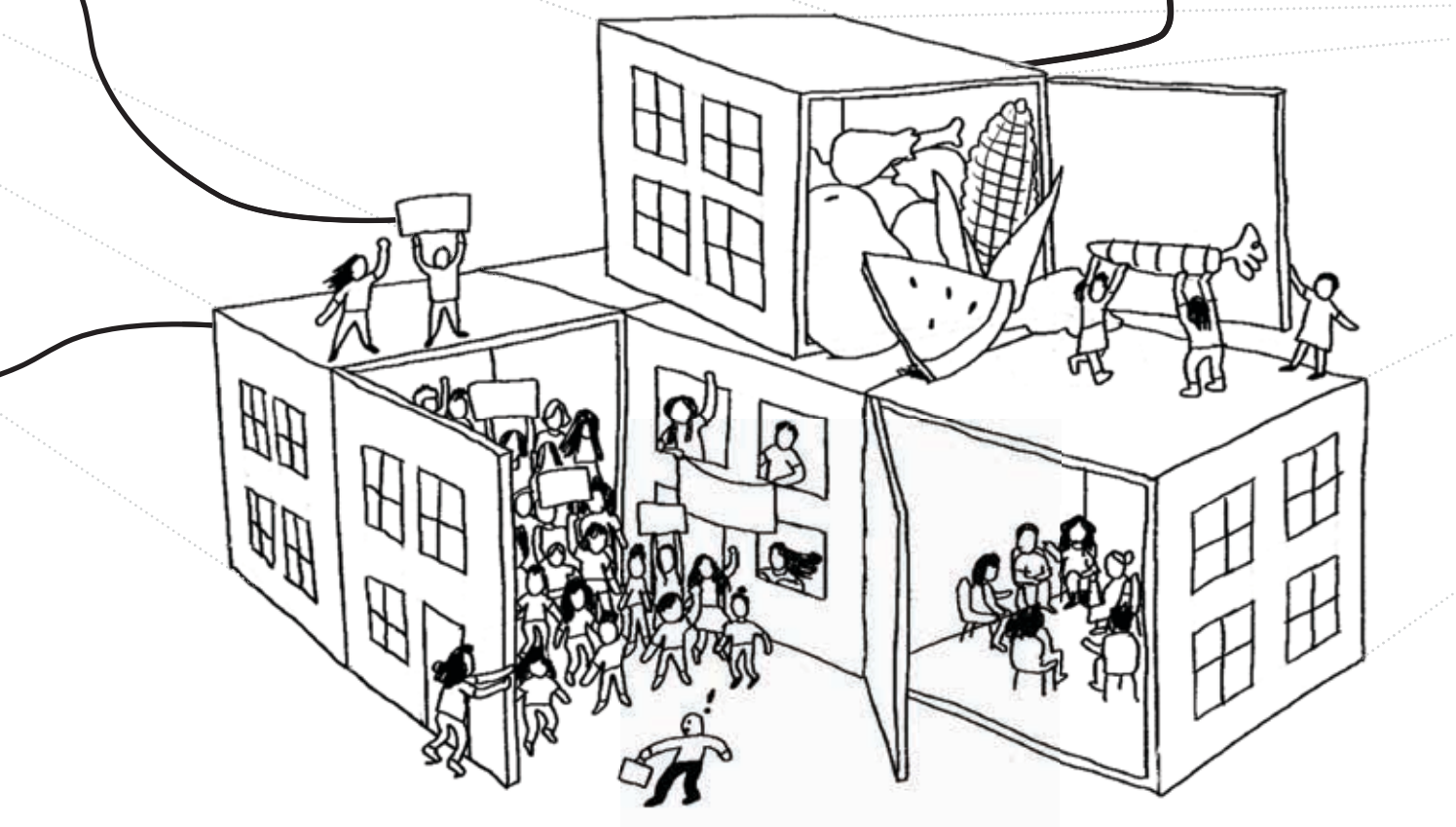
latin america in struggle

The problem of access to housing is reflected in the various organizations that in each city and in each country dispute housing conditions: tenants, inhabitants of informal settlements, mortgage debtors and other affected people join forces for the right to dignified housing.

Unión de Vecinos has networked with many of them. Others are part of other networks. All of them deploy a map where the extension and multiplication of the struggles is visualized, inviting us to become aware that the struggle of one is the struggle of many.

Unión de Vecinos

Los Angeles Tenants Union




Heights
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BOYLE
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LATU SILA
SINDICATO DE INQUILINOS

Luchas por la Vivienda: Construcción de Base Frente al Desplazamiento Territorial

La Vecindad Collective: Guadalupe Granero Realini, Edgardo Contreras Nossa, Bryan Quintanilla, Leonardo Vilchis, Elizabeth Blaney

La organización de base frente al despojo territorial

La crisis habitacional en el mundo es histórica y cíclica. Sin embargo, a partir de la década del '70 la situación se agudizó con el advenimiento del neoliberalismo económico. La vivienda dejó de tener valor de uso para convertirse en valor de cambio, para poder extraer rentas inmobiliarias. En pleno siglo XXI la situación está empeorando y los Estados no están haciendo lo suficiente para solucionarlo. El desarrollo inmobiliario de lujo aumenta en todo el planeta mientras la crisis se profundiza: asentamientos precarios, desalojos, habitantes de calle, desplazamientos.

En Latinoamérica y el Caribe, en las últimas décadas, la situación se ha vuelto muy crítica, especialmente con el ingreso de capitales provenientes de las finanzas internacionales al negocio inmobiliario. Las grandes corporaciones invierten en el mercado inmobiliario porque hay importantes ganancias especulativas con un bajo riesgo. El resultado es edificios deshabitados, casas de lujo en predios extensos en la periferia de las ciudades, asentamientos informales densificados y hacinados, miles de viviendas sin gente y millones de personas sin techo. Es la consecuencia de un modelo de extracción de riqueza a través de un derecho humano fundamental: la vivienda.

En Argentina, la organización social para constituir y defender los derechos de acceso a la ciudad y a la vivienda es histórica, especialmente a partir del advenimiento del neoliberalismo económico con la dictadura militar en la década del 70, posteriormente profundizada en la década del 90 como un nuevo intento de romper el contrato social. La sociedad dio respuesta automática a la necesidad de acceder a la ciudad central, no solo a la vivienda como una cuestión de techo, por el contrario entendiendo la ciudad como un hábitat más amplio y complejo: salud, educación, recreación, cultura, etc. El saldo de estas décadas fue la producción de vivienda social en serie, generalmente alejadas de los centros urbanos, con una concepción subsidiaria del Estado, como una forma de administrar la pobreza, con soluciones habitacionales de mala calidad espacial y con graves problemas constructivos.

En paralelo a los embates del capitalismo por extraer rentas inmobiliarias de los centros urbanos, las organizaciones sociales han dado diversas respuestas a los gobiernos alineados con las políticas extractivistas en las ciudades. Las más importantes fueron la recuperación de fábricas desmanteladas y puestas en funcionamiento nuevamente por los empleados; y la ocupación de edificios y fábricas abandonadas para producir viviendas nuevas de excelente calidad en lugares centrales. Este fenómeno sucedió a través de

Mural pintado por Melissa Reyes y miembros de Unión de Vecinos – Photo credit (left): Anthony Orendorff

la conformación de cientos de cooperativas a lo largo del país, que se organizaron e impulsaron leyes, vigentes hasta hoy, para luchar y defender el derecho a un hábitat digno. Por estos días, año 2024, un nuevo impulso neolibral amenaza los derechos logrados por la sociedad organizada, no obstante la lucha no cesa.

En Colombia, la organización social ha sido perseguida y estigmatizada debido al conflicto armado que vive el país desde la década del 50, no obstante, en los principales centros urbanos han surgido resistencias y organizaciones para acceder a la vivienda y a la ciudad. Si bien el neoliberalismo tuvo su mayor apogeo en la década del 90, la situación habitacional en las ciudades no ha sido tan crítica como en las áreas rurales. En términos generales, el capitalismo inmobiliario salvaje no ha entrado con tanta fuerza por múltiples razones: legislación de políticas de suelo históricas, construcción masiva de viviendas para las clases medias y bajas, precios del suelo y las viviendas accesibles, aunque no en áreas centrales.

En la reforma constitucional de 1991 múltiples actores participaron en la configuración de nuevas políticas de suelo que quedaron plasmadas en leyes de desarrollo urbano y territorial, que de alguna manera han permitido políticas territoriales más equilibradas. Caso aparte son las comunidades de áreas rurales alejadas que han vivido una situación de conflicto armado que los ha desplazado violentamente de sus tierras ancestrales. Además, porque cualquier tipo de organización para exigir derechos ha sido silenciada, especialmente con la desaparición de líderes sociales y sindicales en zonas alejadas de los grandes centros urbanos del poder, principalmente minorías étnicas empobrecidas.

La situación en los países del capitalismo avanzado también es grave, especialmente en las grandes metrópolis, con la multiplicación de los habitantes de calle, de la informalidad y de la pobreza urbana, como consecuencia de la legalización de salarios de miseria en la estructura capitalista. En Los Ángeles; la situación es muy crítica y se agudiza; a diario cientos de personas son forzadas a vivir en



Crédito de la foto: Anthony Orendorff



Crédito de la foto: Anthony Orendorff

la calle, hay aumentos excesivos de alquileres, condiciones habitacionales críticas en casas y hoteles, crecimiento exponencial de campamentos en los parques y en las calles. La crisis habitacional es aún peor para los inmigrantes pobres vulnerados y para las minorías segregadas: riesgo y hacinamiento habitacional, precios de alquileres abusivos, amenazas de desalojo constantes, etc.

En este contexto, el Sindicato de Inquilinos de Los Ángeles (SILA), surgido en el año 2015, ha sido fundamental en la organización de los vecinos y vecinas para la lucha y la defensa del derecho a la vivienda. El SILA está conformado por varias asociaciones de inquilinos organizadas para defender la necesidad de vivir en condiciones dignas y protegidas legalmente.

La Unión de Vecinos -conformada en el año 1996, co-fundadora del SILA y representante del sector este de Los Ángeles- surgió ante la urgencia de una ola de desalojos inminentes de muchas vecinas y vecinos; así como la defensa de inquilinos e inquilinas, principalmente inmigrantes pobres, que son violentados y segregados por los propietarios de los edificios de viviendas.

La organización de diferentes vecinos y vecinas y la asociación al sindicato, ha permitido reconocer la problemática a una escala mayor, buscar soluciones en conjunto, a asociarse para enfrentar las luchas y para conseguir alianzas estratégicas dentro y fuera de Los Ángeles.

La organización social a lo largo de América Latina y el Caribe ha sido fundamental en la lucha contra las políticas públicas excluyentes que han dejado afuera del derecho a la vivienda y a la ciudad a la mayoría de la población más vulnerada. También ha sido clave la articulación regional para compartir metodologías y estrategias de resistencia, así como modelos a replicar para incluir a la mayor cantidad de gente afectada. Las redes de articulación permiten socializar las problemáticas para discutir posibles soluciones y sumar voces internacionales, porque la lucha es una sola en múltiples frentes. La importancia de la unión es que compartimos las mismas dificultades y que no estamos tan solos en la resistencia. Finalmente, la coordinación permite espacios de formación y capacitación técnica y política, porque la lucha se da en diferentes arenas: económica, política y social.



Crédito de la foto: Anthony Orendorff

Revisar la trayectoria de Unión de Vecinos y del Sindicato de Inquilinos de los Angeles en el momento actual es clave por tres aspectos. En primer lugar, porque conocer las estrategias de lucha que han desarrollado a través de los años constituye un acervo clave en momentos en los cuales el avance de los capitales inmobiliarios concentrados plantea con particular fuerza que no hay otra salida para reducir el déficit habitacional que las soluciones de mercado. La experiencia de UdV y SILA muestran formas diversas de contestación y disputa a ese relato hegemónico.

En segundo lugar, porque la organización de base sobre la cual se han desarrollado es una fuente de inspiración para recuperar el valor de la cooperación y la lucha colectiva. La noción de vecinx como punto de partida para la movilización social es una herramienta potente no sólo en un plano simbólico sino en las posibilidades que abre para la conexiones desde abajo, para la fuerza que nace de los territorios habitados. Este es un punto de disputa fundamental contra la lógica financiera que se presenta despersonalizada y desarraigada: vuelve a anclar en poder en la comunidad, en la gente que comparte y habita los territorios.

Finalmente, dialogar con UdV y SILA se vuelve imprescindible en este momento en el cual la globalización capitalista afianza su hegemonía económica junto al avance de gobiernos de ultraderecha. La alianza del poder económico y el poder político cada vez más explícita y poderosa convoca más que nunca a reforzar las redes de lucha en todo el mundo. La vocación internacionalista de UdV y SILA abre puentes con los inquilinos organizados en otras ciudades. Para América Latina, estas alianzas son claves. Por un lado, porque siendo la región más desigual y más urbanizada del planeta, los problemas habitacionales constituyen uno de los frentes determinantes para garantizar una vida digna. Por el otro, porque en países con gran dependencia económica externa (sea vía deuda o por necesidad de inversiones), los gobiernos amplían las fronteras de acción del capital inmobiliario mientras desatienden el compromiso con el derecho a la vivienda. La lucha organizada de quienes necesitan vivienda digna es crecientemente indispensable para frenar el avance de la lógica financierizada de habitar las ciudades.

Ideas en acción

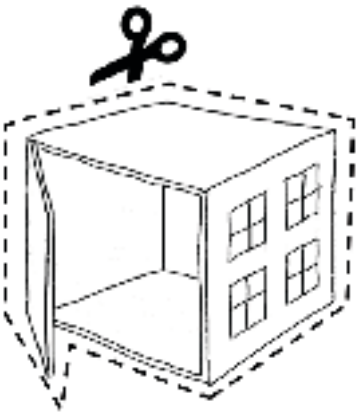
La infografía como una herramienta para el diálogo

La historia de la organización popular se escribe constantemente, mientras se abre y se multiplican nuevas historias. Aparecen nuevas personas, vecinos que se organizan, comunidades que se reconocen en una identidad común y un poder organizado. También se amplía el mapa: se generan lazos entre quienes hasta hace poco no se conocían, surgen organizaciones en otras ciudades.

La infografía se transforma: deja de ser una imagen estática para convertirse en una herramienta dinámica. Aquí dejamos sólo una propuesta, entre otros usos que podrían imaginarse, para el diálogo entre quienes están organizados en lucha. Una forma de utilizarla en talleres o encuentros comunitarios para seguir pensando juntxs.

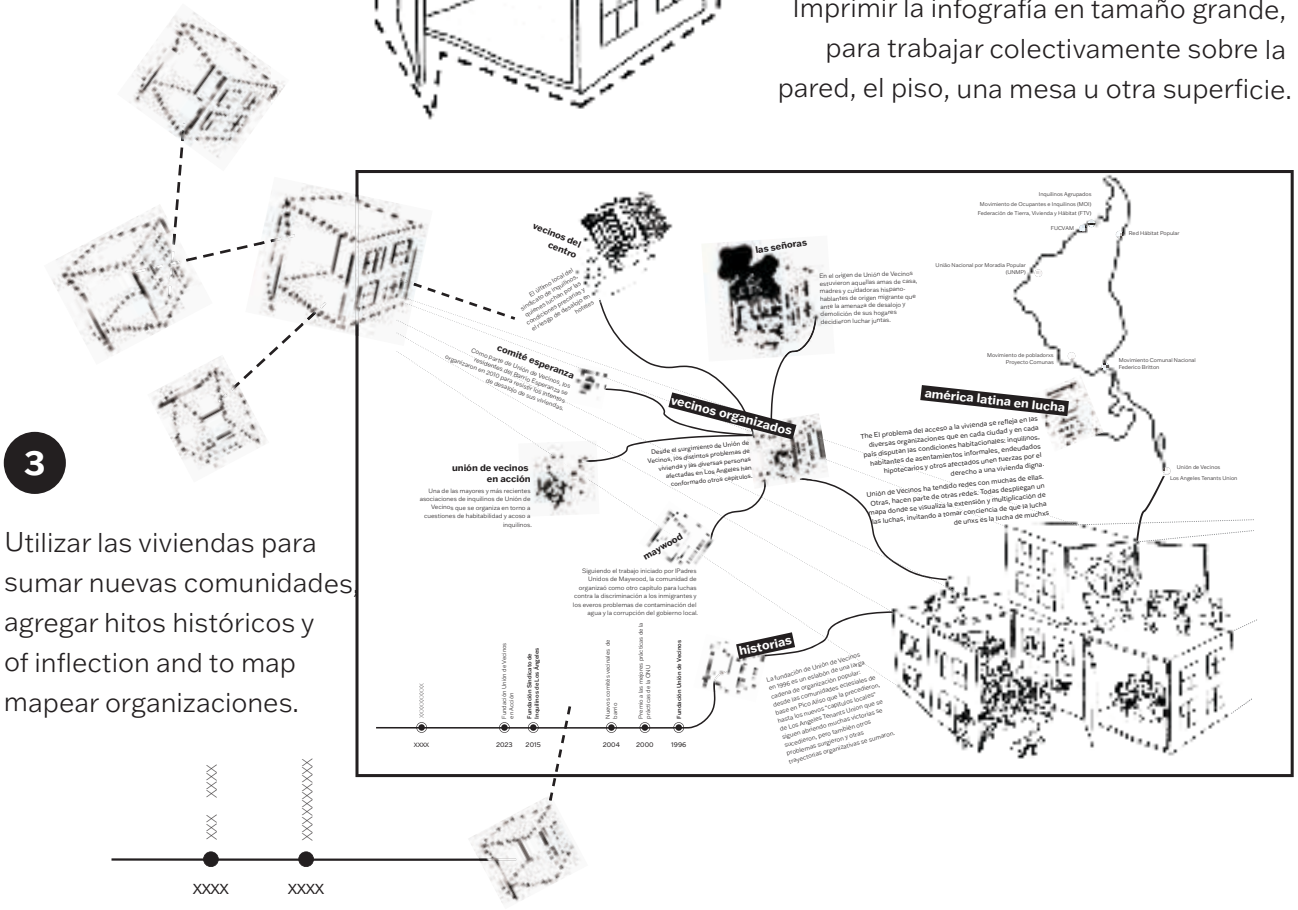
1

Imprimir y recortar viviendas para pensar nuevas aperturas.



2

Imprimir la infografía en tamaño grande, para trabajar colectivamente sobre la pared, el piso, una mesa u otra superficie.



3

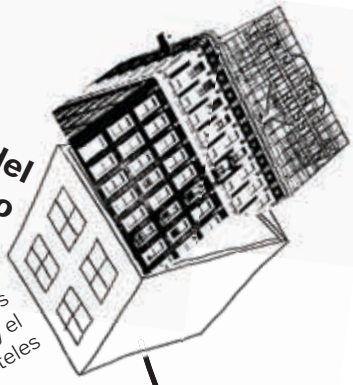
Utilizar las viviendas para sumar nuevas comunidades, agregar hitos históricos y of inflection and to map mapear organizaciones.

las señoras



En el origen de Unión de Vecinos estuvieron aquellas amas de casa, madres y cuidadoras hispano-hablantes de origen migrante que ante la amenaza de desalojo y demolición de sus hogares decidieron luchar juntas.

vecinos del centro



El último local del sindicato de inquilinos, quienes luchan por las condiciones precarias y el riesgo de desalojo en hoteles

comité esperanza

Como parte de Unión de Vecinos, los residentes del Barrio Esperanza se organizaron en 2010 para resistir los intentos de desalojo de sus viviendas.



vecinos organizados



Desde el surgimiento de Unión de Vecinos, los distintos problemas de vivienda y las diversas personas afectadas en Los Angeles han conformado otros capítulos.

unión de vecinos en acción

Una de las mayores y más recientes asociaciones de inquilinos de Unión de Vecinos que se organiza en torno a cuestiones de habitabilidad y acoso a inquilinos.



maywood

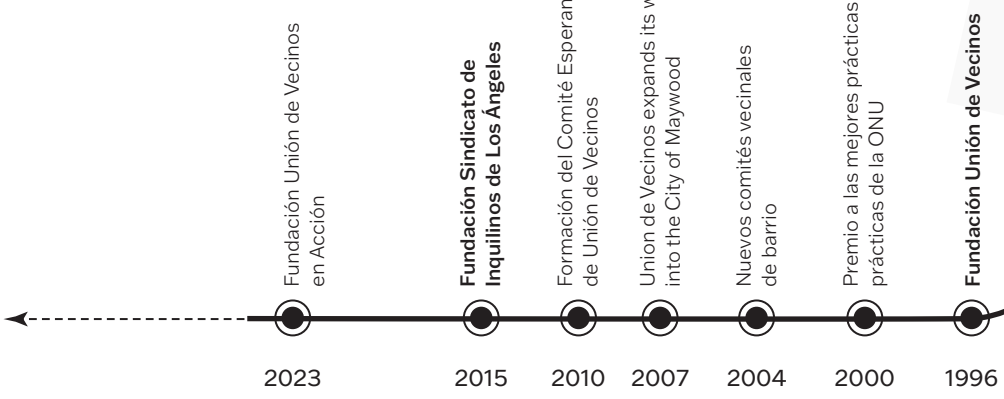


Siguiendo el trabajo iniciado por IPadres Unidos de Maywood, la comunidad de organizaó como otro capítulo para luchas contra la discriminación a los inmigrantes y los everos problemas de contaminación del agua y la corrupción del gobierno local.

historias



La fundación de Unión de Vecinos en 1996 es un eslabón de una larga cadena de organización popular: desde las comunidades eclesiales de base en Pico Aliso que la precedieron, hasta los nuevos “capítulos locales” de Los Angeles Tenants Union que se siguen abriendo muchas victorias se sucedieron, pero también otros problemas surgieron y otras trayectorias organizativas se sumaron.



Inquilinos Agrupados
Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos (MOI)
Federación de Tierra, Vivienda y Hábitat (FTV)

FUCVAM

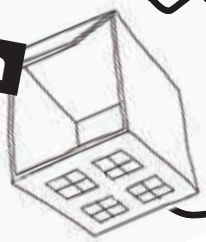
Red Hábitat Popular

União Nacional por Moradia Popular (UNMP)

Movimiento de pobladorxs
Proyecto Comunas

Movimiento Comunal Nacional
Federico Britton

américa latina en lucha

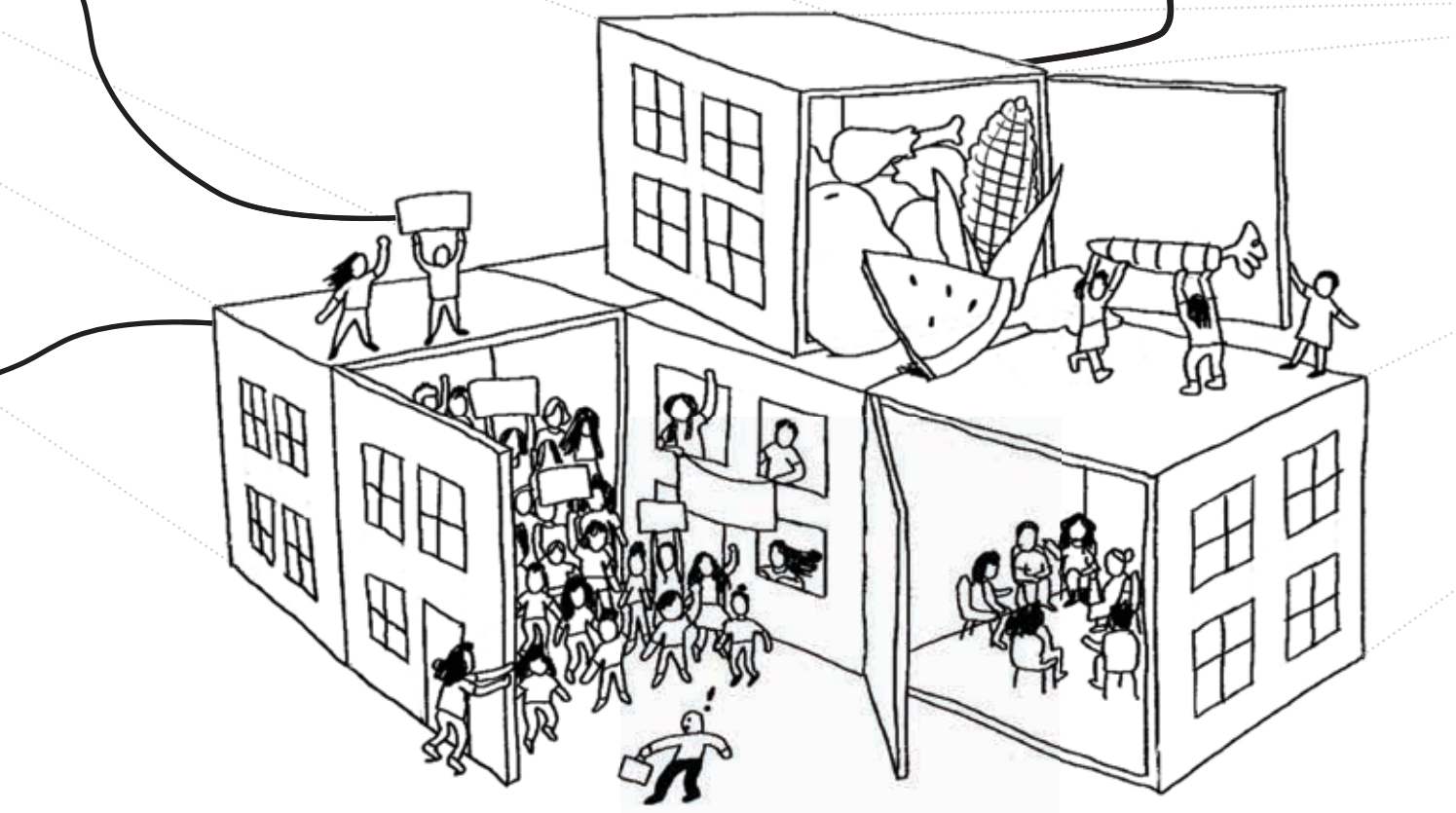


The El problema del acceso a la vivienda se refleja en las diversas organizaciones que en cada ciudad y en cada país disputan las condiciones habitacionales: inquilinos, habitantes de asentamientos informales, endeudados hipotecarios y otros afectados unen fuerzas por el derecho a una vivienda digna.

Unión de Vecinos ha tendido redes con muchas de ellas. Otras, hacen parte de otras redes. Todas despliegan un mapa donde se visualiza la extensión y multiplicación de las luchas, invitando a tomar conciencia de que la lucha de unxs es la lucha de muchxs

Unión de Vecinos

Los Angeles Tenants Union



"I am still here,
and I will still be here,
as long as there are people
around who see me."



Jessica "Queen" Mendez
June 18, 1988 - May 10, 2024

"I Am Still Here": Community Memory and Archiving Practices Against Displacement

Renato Abramowicz Santos, Luisa G. Melo, Diane Wong

In memory and honor of Jessica "Queen" Mendez, la Reina de Echo Park

Introduction

On one long and powerful day, thirty of us gathered inside the Skid Row History Museum & Archive. We were welcomed by Henry Michael Apodaca, a media archivist who facilitated a conversation about the museum and communal archival practices in relation to contemporary urban land struggles. Joined by members of the *After Echo Park Lake* Archive Collective, together we explored the meaning of possession and personhood in Los Angeles, and the ways in which racial capitalist regimes of property continue to criminalize people, communities, and everyday life. When so much about displacement is about loss and leaving, what does it mean to stay? Through poetry, stories, testimonies, and recollections, that day we were reminded of the power of community archives and memory work in building liberatory futures.

By reflecting on our time at the Freedom School, our collaborative piece attempts to provide some insight and reflection on the possibilities of creating place-based community archives as sites of resistance, in cities around the world, that can serve as protective places against dispossession–not just for materials forgotten but for the people who have been displaced from their homes. Protection from state-induced violence, from the imminent risk of forced removal, from the uprootedness from a state of perpetual precarity. It is in these struggles against erasure that refuge and memory become *tools* against the violent policies and projects that diminish the lives of people who are the heart and soul of the cities we love. The construction and articulation of both memory and refuge thus becomes an insurgent *strategy* for deepening community connectedness to combat violent processes of destruction and dispossession.

Queen's portrait based on Anthony Orendorff's photo – Illustration credit (left): Luisa G. Melo



Creating protective spaces – political and material conditions of refuge

Racial capitalist violence places people into forced and/or frequent movement, producing a state of permanent precarity and displaceability (Villela et al. 2019; *After Echo Park Lake* Research Collective 2022a; Yiftachel 2020). People respond to these acts of violence and threats in different ways. One of them is trying to create alternative housing arrangements to protect themselves and their communities, and with each attempt to do so, people re-envision and rebuild the urban and political landscape (Santos 2023). We see a multitude of housing arrangements or insurgent spaces being constructed in cities around the world as ways to subvert state violence – specifically, racialized, xenophobic, domestic, and gender-based violence, joined with the violence that comes from abandonment and neglect in public policy-making

Frequently, these alternative housing arrangements are precarious. Encampments often become targets of urban renewal, under the guise of "revitalization" projects led by politicians, private agents, or real estate developers, because they are not recognized as legitimate communities. In Latin, the core *-vita* means life, so revitalization means literally "bringing back life." But this is far from the reality of revitalization projects in the United States and around the globe, which more often than not drain the life out of communities by destroying existing ways of life. In June of 2024, the Supreme Court's *Grants Pass* ruling decreed that local governments nationwide could carry out even more aggressive measures on unsheltered people living in encampments. The decision gives the police greater power to enforce criminal penalties for survival acts like sleeping in public spaces, even if there is no available shelter.

Consequently, encampments and other similar spaces of refuge have become the front lines of resistance against displacement, gentrification, and other destructive projects that aim to erase the vitality of these communities. In this context, the affirmation of life and the recognition of modes of living that already exist in these communities becomes fundamental – and one of the main arenas of struggle for housing justice. While it is important to understand the conditions that stigmatize and prosecute unsheltered communities, it is just as crucial to document bottom-up strategies of refusal (Simpson 2007; 2016): a refusal of state structures, projects, and institutions that cause violence; a refusal of normativity; and a refusal to be moved.

There is also another important dimension around these insurgent protective spaces that can be better understood through this perspective: the strategies and tools to build life and preserve memory. In communities threatened by disappearance, where the struggle is to preserve life and the right to remain, memory work becomes crucial–it becomes a path to revindicate that what was lived was real, that our communities existed, and that we continue to exist.

Memory work as an embodied activist practice

The power of the archive extends beyond its potential to preserve a particular moment in time. It is also testimony that something or someone ever truly existed. Historical records are powerful, but in the wrong hands, archives have been used to perpetuate various forms of colonial violence and dispossession. Achille Mbembe (2002) discusses the inextricable link between archives and state violence: there is no state without its archives. States need to have control over the archives (usually protected inside government buildings) to validate their existence and political legitimacy. Over time, state archives have been dangerously used to control historical narratives and to strategically silence certain voices of the past and present.

Learning from the past via hegemonic narratives and the colonial archives confines our minds to a narrow way of seeing our communities and ourselves. Scholars committed to reconstructing history need to go beyond the violence of the colonial archives to fill the silences and gaps not registered on paper (Hartman 2008). Because archives are never neutral sites of knowledge production, we must pay attention to the materials that legitimize oppressive power structures (Trouillot 2015) but also learn how to create and build our own records. We start by recognizing the power within the gaps and the silences, and the possibility that subjugated communities have been recordkeeping and reconstructing history too, all along.

Freedom School session inside of Skid Row History Museum & Archive – Photo credit (left): Anthony Orendorff

Not only historians with training and academic credentials have the power to reconstruct history. Individual activists and organizations like the Skid Row History Museum & Archive, *After Echo Park Lake* Archive Collective, Casa da Memória Viva de Ceilândia, Chinatown Art Brigade, and many others, have created their own community archives that support emplacement. By producing, stewarding, preserving, and honoring the stories, names, and events that would otherwise be silenced in the national and official archives, they gain life and power by remaining a part of the community. Archives take on a different meaning in community.

Truth-telling through counter-narratives and collecting material evidence in everyday life that supports the emplacement of people is a practice that our communities have been doing for centuries. Recording, reciting, documenting, and learning from elders through oral histories can challenge official media narratives that too often portray our communities only in relation to violence. We offer an alternative interpretation of the archive as an embodied activist practice that deepens community connectedness and rootedness.

On archives and placekeeping: the spatial and symbolic aspects of the archive

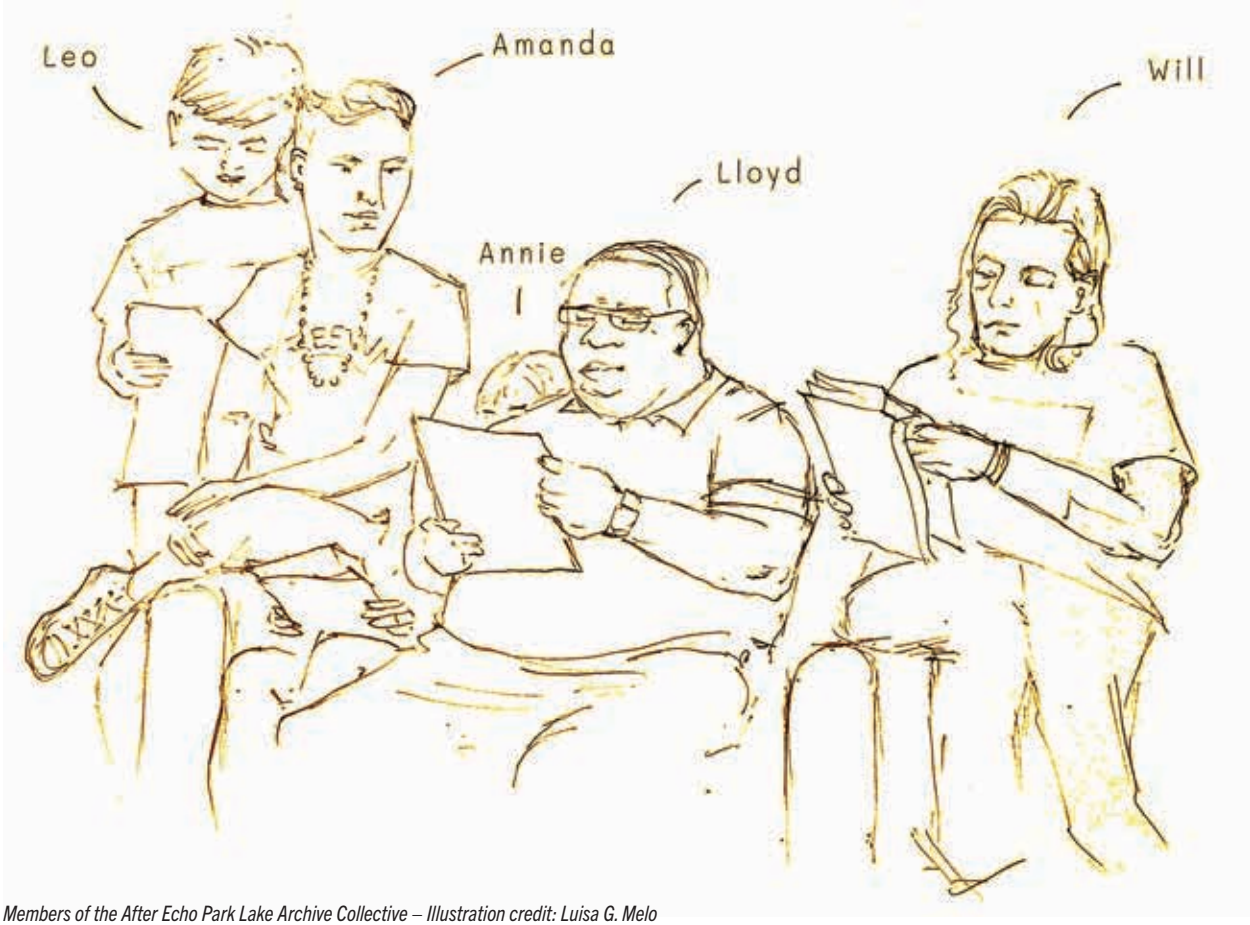
Demystifying untrue and incomplete stories about our communities is a liberatory practice that is rooted in radical truth-telling. We draw inspiration from Black and Indigenous feminist theorizing that foregrounds a politics of refusal–a refusal to accept the mis-seen and to consider the possibilities of what might have been otherwise. In "Venus in Two Acts," Saidiya Hartman (2008) wrestles with the simultaneous erasure and revictimization of Black girls through the colonial archives, questioning whether archives can even tell Black stories without subjugating them to violence even after death. Through what Hartman calls *critical fabulation*, she is able to combine archival research and speculative fiction to offer counter narratives of what might have been, what could still be, and what "might be a possible antidote to the violence that is part of the everyday."

Drawing on our collective learnings from the Freedom School convening and from our own community collaborations in Brazil and the United States, the following examples illustrate what it means to pursue liberatory memory work in spite of racial capitalist violence. These examples demonstrate what it means to move beyond what Unangax scholar Eve Tuck (2007) calls "damage-centered research" in academia, and to instead honor the ways in which subjugated communities have always found multiple, imaginative, and experimental ways of making sense of the world. Learning and recognizing our own history is essential to dismantling structures of oppression and creating change from below. Registering how we are fighting today will help the next generations remember who they are and what else is possible.

Los Angeles

In Los Angeles, we had a chance to learn from local organizations and housing justice activists committed to preserving archives of unhoused people. The Skid Row History Museum & Archive and the *After Echo Park Lake* Research Collective are two examples of organizations based in Los Angeles uplifting the collective memories of those systemically invisibilized.

The Skid Row History Museum & Archive is a refuge for the Skid Row community (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2021): the space promotes cultural activities and houses an extensive archive of Skid Row history. Through urban planning documents, articles, videos, ephemera, oral histories, and more, the place-based museum and archive endeavors to "tell the part of the story that you won't hear elsewhere: the story of the community as told by the community" (Walk the Talk 2024, May 25). In an effort to register the daily lives and history of people in Skid Row, the Museum launched a project called "Walk the Talk" in 2012, in which people from the community share their story in oral history interviews and have their portraits taken by a local artist. In 2024, the 7th edition of the portrait series told the stories of 84 people, accompanied by a brass band, performances, and community conversations. The people portrayed in the project are almost all current and former residents of Skid Row who are committed to improving the living conditions in the neighborhood and bringing the history of the community to life.



Members of the After Echo Park Lake Archive Collective – Illustration credit: Luisa G. Melo

The *After Echo Park Lake* Research Collective brings together university and movement-based scholars with unhoused community members to archive an organized encampment community that lived at Echo Park Lake from the Fall of 2019 until their violent displacement in March of 2021 (*After Echo Park Lake* Research Collective 2022b). Through research and written reports, their collaborative work attempts to challenge state-led processes of displacement and the criminalization of poverty in the gentrifying Echo Park neighborhood. The collective also serves as a living archive for the community that came together at Echo Park Lake, a collection of memories during the time of encampment, including a beloved green couch that brought the encampment together, as Lloyd Edward recounts in his piece at the end of this chapter. As members of the collective shared during our conversation, liberatory memory work creates a historical record of first-hand accounts, from the mundane to extraordinary.

Brasilia

Similar efforts were made in Brasilia, Brazil, where a history of land dispossession and orchestrated displacement created planned shantytowns, concentrating the poverty in the margin of the city. Organizations like the community archive House of Living Memory of Ceilândia –in Portuguese, Casa da Memória Viva de Ceilândia (CMVC) – present a counter-narrative of Brazil's new capital and the lives of people in those contexts. Brasilia's urban planning was used to spatially enforce the prevailing socio-racial order by designing "satellite cities" to house the predominantly Black workforce far outside of the city center (Lemos 2017, Holston 1989). Today, the most populous satellite city, Ceilândia, is a result of Brasilia's biggest project of favela removal. The name Ceilândia comes from its acronym CEI, which means "Invasion Eradication Campaign," a state-led project designed to remove more than 80,000 residents (15% of Brasilia's population at the time) from informal settlements close to the city center to a site outside of what was officially named "sanitary belt."



Local writer book launch at Casa da Memória Viva de Ceilândia – Photo credit: Casa da Memória Viva de Ceilândia

Casa da Memória Viva de Ceilândia started as a pedagogical project led by a history teacher in a local public school. Archive collection began in 1993 by students in the "Centro de Ensino Fundamental 25" under the supervision of Manoel Jevan. The project of collective memory is operated by the "Sociedade dos Pesquisadores e Pioneiros da Ceilândia" (SPP CEI), which is a group of residents of Ceilândia that became researchers by contributing to the archive – collecting oral histories, photographs, and documents about Ceilândia and its people. The SPP CEI members interview and record the testimonials of the community's elders; by gathering these stories, they work to preserve the memory of the people and their own narratives and stories. Jevan states that CMVC is a space to tell the history of the workers excluded from the official history.

It is especially important to keep these records of counter-narratives in a context where Brasilia's official urban history manipulates and stigmatizes the image of Ceilândia and its residents. Their effort is not just to save the physical archive already collected in these past three decades but to keep producing these archives based on the living memory of the people of Ceilândia. This project intends to see the geographical connection with other marginalized areas that might learn from the history of Ceilândia. Because the practices of oppression are used over and over again over time, understanding what happened and how residents have created systems of protection and refuge in the past can help the current struggles grow from the successes and mistakes of earlier efforts.

New York City

In the spring of 2023, members of the Chinatown Art Brigade came together to curate an exhibit called the "Degentrification Archives," which uplifts the stories of those most directly impacted by the gentrification of New York City's Chinatown. The Chinatown Art Brigade (CAB) is an intergenerational collective driven by the fundamental belief that cultural modes of production have the power to create transformative change around issues of displacement. CAB is mostly made up of Asian American and Asian diaspora identifying visual artists, media makers, writers, educators, archivists, and organizers with deep roots in Chinatown.

"Degentrification Archives" is a curated collection of CAB's cultural organizing work that spans seven years. The exhibition includes archival material, photographs, videos, placekeeping maps, wall projections, as well as banners, posters, and other ephemera used for direct actions. The exhibition centers the voices of those at the forefront of protecting Chinatown, one of the last affordable neighborhoods in Manhattan – home to working-class residents, immigrants, tenants, activists, youth, street vendors, and small businesses. The exhibition highlights spaces that have served the community for decades, like Silver Palace, which are rapidly being replaced by luxury hotels, condominiums, and galleries. As New York City becomes increasingly unaffordable for working-class families, the exhibit asks viewers to consider: who are the major players in this wholesale transformation of the city's poor, and working-class neighborhoods?

The show also highlights CAB's collaborations with local and national organizations including Chinatown Tenants Union, the W.O.W. Project, The Illuminator, Grassroots Asians Rising, Asian Americans United, Mi Casa No Es Su Casa (also known as Mi Casa Resiste), CID Coalition, Coast to Coast Network of Chinatowns Against Displacement (C2C) and many others. Additionally, the exhibition highlights the racial justice and community organizing work of CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities, CAB's partner organization. In one room, a timeline highlights CAAAV's nearly 35-year history along with photos, videos, and related ephemera.

When so much about gentrification is about loss, the exhibit is evidence that creative resistance can nurture community power and abundance. The places we love most in our cities are defined by the people who call it home — Chinatown will no longer be Chinatown if those who live, work, and play in the neighborhood are no longer there.



"Degentrification Archives," Exhibition at Pace University Art Gallery – Photo credit: Diane Wong

Patchwork of memories as shared resistance and pathways forward

The physical space and materialities of a refuge can be destroyed or disappear, but the lived and shared memories are never lost. We conceived this text and wanted to reproduce in these pages the spirit and atmosphere that witnessed during our afternoon at the Skid Row History Museum & Archive. We close this chapter with a patchwork of memories as shared resistance and remembrance—like the Skid Row History Museum & Archive or the *After Echo Park Lake* Archive Collective is, as the Echo Park Lake encampment once was. In the preceding pages, we share photos—some of them taken by our gifted comrade Anthony Orendorff, and others taken by ourselves—along with drawings, and sketches, and we end with two beautiful and powerful pieces from two comrade-members of the *After Echo Park Lake* Archive Collective, William Sens, Jr. and Lloyd Edward, and who read them to us.

It is in this spirit that we dedicate this chapter to Jessica "Queen" Mendez—a beloved comrade also known as the "Lady of the Lake" or "La Reina de Echo Park." Queen became a leader during the Echo Park Lake encampment that was formed during the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, formed in a public park close to Downtown LA. The encampment was evicted after a militarized and violent police raid in 2021. Queen's voice and body were always on the frontlines of the struggle, fighting and protecting her family and community until the very end. She was as fearless as she was loving, and she had wisdom and the gift of speech that came from other places, other times, other lives. You are always going to be remembered by those who had the chance and honor to meet you.

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Markings in the Grass – by William Sens, Jr.

Little scars that hold
impressions
  of a recently vanished
past
On a lawn rolled out long
ago
  to cover forest beds were
felled for cash
Recall that life once
flourished here
  In a time beyond these
wilted blades of grass
Before our band faced
dissolution
  When we laid this place
for us to crash
Any need was answered
kindly
  & it was done only for the
ask
We grew our power and
Blossomed upward

  In spite of the pesky
Covid masks
We made a choice to
“Reside and raise
solutions”
  To live life well while the
living lasts
  So don’t disregard the
markings left there in the
grass
Every blemish holds a
deeper story
Stories that sadly, were
dismantled and swept
away so fast
What was left were
lingering allegories
  Yellow markings
imprinted timelines
  Intersecting our present
experience with the
unseen hidden vast

William Sens, Jr. is an artist and a community organizer living in Los Angeles, California. He has spent six cumulative years living on the streets, volunteering as an activist for Unhoused Tenants Against Carceral Housing, Street Watch LA, Echo Park Rising, Food Not Bombs, and Earth First.

What is Your Couch? – by Lloyd Edward

I looked up the word community in Google the other day. Google defines the word community as "a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common." I had trouble with this definition. I felt it was too simplistic, lacking in depth and didn't reflect the true definition of the word. Community doesn't just mean a group of people in the same area. When I was in Echo Park Lake to me community meant a home, a fresh start, a place of no judgement.

I looked up the word home. Home is defined as "the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household." I had to disagree with this definition. Home to me wasn't just a place where one lives. When I was at Echo Park Lake, home meant a sense of belonging, being part of something, being wanted and accepted -- being part of a family.

Now family is defined as "a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption who live together." Again, Google failed miserably.

At Echo Park Lake my experience showed me that family wasn't just people who lived together. It was a bond, a connection. One that existed by our shared struggle, our dependency on one another to survive. That, instead was the definition of family.

I gotta say, I was amazed after looking up these definitions online. How did Google get it wrong? My experience at Echo Park Lake had just defied conventional wisdom. And it wasn't just a matter of perspective. I argue that the words community, home and family needed to be defined not just in plain language but also in the context of the human experience. There was a human element to be considered here.

I quickly got off the internet. And I remembered the famous words: "Never trust what you see on the internet."

There was a disconnect. And it was clear.

The LAPD and the city never understood the reason behind the defiance of the unhoused folks at Echo Park Lake. Our resilience, I believe, had always been a mystery to them.

Its because community, home, family, to us, carried a deeper meaning. They never saw it from our perspective. There was a disconnect and that disconnect is what led to the violence and police brutality you just witnessed in the footage behind me.

My name is Lloyd Edward and I used to be one of the unhoused who lived at Echo Park Lake from December of 2019 to mid summer 2020 and this is my story

I am residing in Kansas City and one day I decide I want to move to the West Coast. I board a one way ticket to LAX and with barely enough savings I quickly run out of funds and I immediately find myself homeless in the streets of Los Angeles. I left a good paying job at a good company for the pursuit of a music career in Hollywood and now I found myself without a place to call home.

For two years, I carried a suitcase full of clothing with my personal items up and down the streets of Los Angeles as I commuted between City Hall where I slept and Skid Row where I took a shower and had a meal. All the while, I was looking for permanent housing and had a caseworker working on my behalf.

Echo Park Lake became my home on Christmas Day of 2019 and for the first time in my life, I no longer felt alone in my struggle with depression, loneliness and anxiety. It was all because of the community at Echo Park Lake, and honestly without that community, I probably would have given up on life. But quickly our right to live had become the center of police harassment and with a broken system we had nowhere to go. So what to do?

I wake up one morning and in front of my tent about 20 feet from where I am, I see a couch: outside, in plain daylight. Now that struck me odd because how on earth could there be a couch in the middle of the park? At the time, I didn't understand why my fellow unhoused family had decided to bring a couch to our encampment. I disagreed with this

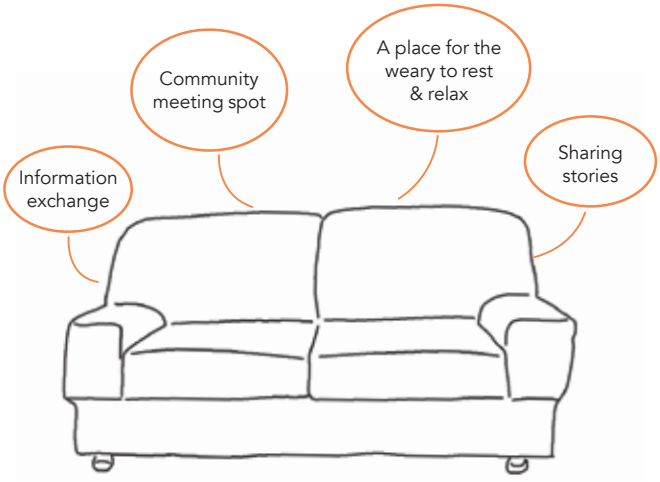

Illustration based on a graphic by Lloyd Edward

decision because I felt this would bring more unnecessary attention to us as we were already being targeted and harassed by the police.

The couch had been donated by a local resident of Echo Park and brought to our meeting area where we often were during the day and night. Quickly the couch became a subject of discussion at the encampment some people for some people against but ultimately the decision was made, the couch was staying.

Immediately, we were harassed by the LAPD and Park Rangers. We were told that the couch had to be removed as it was considered a bulky item. We were under constant threat of sweeps from the city. I foresaw these events taking place which explained my initial worry. I didn't want this to happen and I couldn't understand as to why some people in the encampment were still so adamant on keeping this couch. We had chairs, we could sit on grass. We had our tents.

But then I understood. It wasn't the couch, it was never about the couch. It was about something deeper.

It reminded of the movie Cast Away with the famous actor Tom Hanks. Almost everyone knows of this movie. Produced in the year 2000, Tom Hanks plays a character stranded on an island after his plane crashes in the South Pacific. After awhile being on the island, Tom Hanks's character Chuck finds a new friend. His name is Wilson and he's a volleyball. And in one of the most sad scenes of the movie, Chuck loses Wilson after the volleyball falls off the raft and Chuck is left to grieve his loss. This wasn't just an emotional attachment. This was someone he had lost and was willing to die for.

I remember being touched by this scene and thinking to myself is Wilson gonna be okay? I quickly woke up and realized first this is a movie and second Wilson is a volleyball! I'm sure he'll be fine. What I am trying to say is, the couch was our Wilson. What was considered a bulky item to the city was actually an extension of ourselves. The couch symbolized our fight to exist.

I am now living in a Section 8 housing after being homeless for about three years. I'm happy to inform to all of you I now have a couch of my own and it is indoors. I am fortunate to have what I consider a home. As I reflect back, I now realize a home is all we, the unhoused at Echo Park Lake, were in search for. We had no walls, we had no doors, we had no roof but we did have a couch. And for a small period of time, we felt normal.

In February of 2020, one of our fellow unhoused residents of Echo Park Lake, Davon Brown was brutally beaten with a club and arrested by LA Park Rangers over that very couch. Park rangers, police & sanitation came for a routine "clean up" that quickly escalated to violence. Davon Brown was arrested unlawfully but was later released the next day with all charges dropped. He came out of that situation a hero. He fought that day. He fought for that couch. He fought for his right to exist.

For someone from the outside looking in, one would ask why would a man risk being beaten over the head with a baton over an old couch? Its just an old couch. And why would an entire encampment be so passionate in this fight, and a fight that lasted ideally over a span of two years, as if our very lives depended on it? Why did the couch become the target of law enforcement and deemed a threat to the city? It was because of what it represented. It represented community, home, family and our fight for our right to live. The couch was our Wilson. It symbolized our right to be alive. So I'll leave with this question? What is your couch?

Lloyd Edward is the Work Therapy Coordinator for The Midnight Mission in Los Angeles. As a former unhoused resident and organizer for Street Watch LA, Lloyd assisted in organizing community events on behalf of the unhoused. He has also been involved in community outreach to encampment residents and assisted in providing the unhoused with legal aid information and essential resources. He serves as a Community Advisory Board member at the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy.


WE REFUSE
TO BE SWEPT
INTO DARK
CORNERS

Lives Housed Otherwise: Transgressing Liberal Property Logics

Lindsay Massara and Greg Baltz

We start from a place of transgression. As we see it, transgression, far from extraordinary or exceptional, describes a relationship to law that is all too ordinary and familiar. Transgression is a mode of existing at the margins that may also (passively or otherwise) refuse, subvert, or break law. To transgress may mean to refuse, ignore, or subvert rules and norms bound up together with enduring hierarchies of power alongside economic subordination and hegemonic formations of law. To transgress also may describe the polyvocal, pluralistic ways life is lived beyond liberal legality. A transgressive practice often looks like a bottom-up reimagining of dominant societal formations, an unsettling of marginalization that questions why some lives and ways of living are rendered more invisible and precarious than others. A transgressive politics pries open space and demands visibility, recognition, or acknowledgement of lives lived otherwise. Simultaneously it works to unsettle and challenge entrenched stereotypes casting transgressive life as inherently disruptive, criminal, or dangerous. A transgressive politics also centers solidarity, plurality, and lived experience over the state, police power, and the law.

What follows is an exploration of transgression. We map vignettes of transgressive life against liberal property logics in an effort to humanize the quotidian reality of legality in the United States. We begin by reviewing a theory of transgression, drawn from disciplines outside the context of housing and property. We then apply the theory to three transgressive groups: people living in public spaces, like streets and parks; people squatting in privately owned buildings; people fighting to stay in single room occupancy housing that owners seek to convert to luxury housing. Each act of transgression here is also an act of self- or collective-housing. In a country where the United States Supreme Court has held it permissible to criminalize sleeping on public property, where a failure to find and pay for a private space to sleep may be a constitutional basis for fines or jail time, the specter of state violence hovers over each decision or compulsion over where to live. (City of Grants Pass 2024, 2; Rosenthal and Vilchis 2024, 13). Simply, the law has annihilated space in which tenants might live. (Mitchell 1997, 305-306). Lastly, we distinguish transgression from precarity and coercion, relying upon examples such as renting housing out of compliance with health and safety codes.

The mode of transgression

Importantly, although we are deploying transgression, expressions of transgressive life, and a transgressive politics in a novel way here, we are relying upon a deep well of existing literature on transgression and transgressive theory. In particular, we are tapping into and building upon a broad critical vernacular of transgression used across a diversity of disciplines to describe relations of oppression,

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subordination, marginalization, power, agency, expression, and freedom. We are indebted to various works using transgression and transgressive theory from Critical Feminist Studies, Black Studies, Labor Studies, Indigenous Studies, Geography, Sociology, and LGBTQ+ Studies (see hooks 1994; Blackett 2019; Blomley 2023; Cresswell 1996; McAdams et. al 2004). Although topics range from education pedagogy to decent work for domestic workers to dressing in drag in public to speaking Indigenous language and practicing Indigenous rites, transgressive theory charts marginalized peoples' refusal of invisibility, rejection of dominant power arrangements, and acknowledgement of life lived otherwise alongside demands for norm shifting towards equity, autonomy, and freedom. As geographer Tim Cresswell has observed while studying the relation between space and ideology, "[T]ransgression is important because it breaks from 'normality' and causes a questioning of that which was previously considered 'natural,' 'assumed,' and 'taken for granted.' . . . In doing so [transgressions] temporarily reveal the historical and mutable nature of that which is usually considered 'the way things are.'" (Cresswell 1996, 26).

In this piece we draw from bell hooks' "Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom" (1994) and Adelle Blackett's "Everyday Transgressions: Domestic Worker's Transnational Challenge to International Labor Law" (2019). Both hooks and Blackett provide us foundational vernaculars of transgression and a transgressive politics. As we discovered, there are many productive connections that may be drawn from the work of hooks and Blackett, illuminating transgression and a transgressive politics within the space of housing and property.

For example, although hooks writes about the classroom, teaching, and education pedagogy, her description of the dynamics of power and authority speak to similar structures we identify in our vignettes on housing and property. hooks writes that, in particular, marginalized students "were always expected to conform. Nonconformity on [their] part was viewed with suspicion, as empty gestures of defiance aimed at masking inferiority or substandard work" (hooks 1994, 5). Rejecting those stereotypes of suspicion and inferiority, hooks' response to this demand to conform was to reimagine ways the classroom dynamic could be different, to develop a liberatory and emancipatory practice of learning and teaching (hooks 1994, 5-6). Yet, this was also fundamentally a challenge to hierarchies of control and authority in the classroom or, as hooks describes it, as an intervention or even disruption of the atmosphere. (hooks 1994, 7). Excitement is the catalyst for reimagining an engaged, emancipatory practice of learning and teaching. "To enter classroom settings in colleges and universities with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement was to transgress. Not only did it require movement beyond accepted boundaries, but excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices. Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction" (hooks 1994, 7).

How excitement, flexibility, and movement beyond boundaries constitute transgression is essential to hooks' understanding of how transgression incubates and nourishes freedom. Excitement is a catalyst for movement and spontaneity, which challenges rigid boundaries through collective efforts. Likewise, flexibility demands that students are treated as individuals with differing needs and experiences. Excitement and flexibility cultivate spaces where everyone's voice and presence is acknowledged. Ultimately, hooks is demonstrating another way to "know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, [hooks] celebrate[s] teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom" (hooks 1994, 12).

Although hooks was writing about education pedagogy in her book "Teaching to Transgress," she specifically reflected upon the importance of place and belonging in two later books and generally returned to themes of place, freedom, and transgression through-out her career (hooks 2000; hooks 2008). Given the importance and recurrence of themes of lived experience and positionality in hooks' work, we see a productive opening to explore hooks' model of transgression and a transgressive politics in our work on housing and property.

Alongside hooks, we consider Adelle Blackett's use of transgression to understand domestic workers and labor law in her book "Everyday Transgressions" (2019). For Blackett, the themes of invisibility, precarity, and asymmetrical power dynamics are central to understanding how domestic workers used small acts of resistance to shift norms towards decent work labor laws at the International Labor Organization (ILO). These small everyday acts of resistance looked like refusing to get down on their knees to scrub floors when less oppressive methods would accomplish the same task. By refusing subordinating and humiliating work, the workers transgressed dominant paradigms until labor norms and expectations changed (Blackett 2019, 7). "Domestic workers have been anything but passive

onlookers in their own lives and history: they have repeatedly engaged in individual acts of resistance to exercise control over their working time. . . These forms of resistance have been crucial in enabling domestic workers to carve out some limited autonomy in their highly personalized work relationships" (Blackett 2019, 6). As Blackett explains, "To transgress is to set out to uproot and transform the unjust law of the household workplace, formally and informally" (Blackett 2019, 8).

There are fruitful solidarities to be drawn between the law and the private space of the home, where domestic workers are employed (and may also live), and the law that regulates housing, tenancy, and property. Reflecting on the global legacy of servitude and the invisibility of household work and care work, Blackett writes that "[t]o understand this relationship and make it visible is already to transgress the law of the household workplace" (Blackett 2019, 12) The law has naturalized a process of disappearing workers who work in the home and perform domestic work. This process is part of a long history of relegating the home and care work to the private space and to private law while simultaneously naturalizing structures of class, gender, and race subordination. "We are often taught that to transgress law is wrong. But domestic workers embody a long tradition of resistance that refuses to confuse laws that exact servitude with social justice" (Blackett 2019, 12) For Blackett, these workers developed a transgressive politics that worked against invisibility and unjust law, that rooted out intersectional subordination in the workplace, and that championed a "multiple consciousness method that focused on seeing realities that outsiders with greater societal privilege might miss and making careful, strategic decisions about how to use that knowledge of multiple overlapping worlds of law" to work towards equity and justice in the workplace (Blackett 2019, 12).

For Blackett (and we would venture hooks would agree), informality is not a mark of criminality or disorder, and framing a person's lived experience is a deeply personal and political act (Blackett 2019, 173). At its heart, transgression is about "acknowledging and dislodging asymmetrical power" to make room for "an alternative, transgressive, or counterhegemonic transnational legal order" (Blackett 2019, 13). Much like hooks, Blackett's transgressive practice emphasizes plurality, solidarity, and community as the productive spaces where the work and energy of uprooting, challenging, and revealing structures of subordination and servitude are done. Transgression may reveal how assumptions and expectations of dehumanizing, racist, sexist, illegal, and unreasonable domestic work are bound up with law and often hidden or perpetuated by legal institutions or power dynamics protected by law (Blackett 2019, 14-16). Often from transgressive peripheral spaces, domestic workers began to tell "necessary, alternative stories so that alternative realities could be widely shared and cooked up" (Blackett 2019, 15).

Importantly, telling a transgressive story and mapping a transgressive politics require centering transgressive practice, resistance, and struggle while working hard to decenter the state (see Blackett 2019, 169). In doing so, the state and hegemonic formulations of power cease being the natural or de facto center of all stories, shifting the narrative and lens toward people previously occluded or rendered invisible in those stories. As Blackett writes, "Domestic workers' activism embodies rights in struggle. Part of what domestic workers have done by claiming inclusion is to transgress a framework that did not prioritize their concerns" (Blackett 2019, 172). Visibility, plurality, and acknowledgement of the diversity of lives, lived experience, and lived reality are essential loci of transgression and a transgressive politics for both hooks and Blackett, as well as for us.

Quotidian transgression in housing and property

Informed by the work of hooks and Blackett, we map vignettes of transgression, illuminating ways in which the absolute organizing force and violence of the law from above does not always unilaterally stamp out or quash the diversity of lives lived otherwise. The act of transgression is not just violative of the law. It also opposes certain norms and expectations devised and reinforced by capital and the state that fall unequally, depending on their subject. It also reveals how real estate interests and state actors aligned with those interests coopt that transgression for their own purposes. The politics of transgressive life amalgamated from these few vignettes may create productive space to continue to think about what a more nuanced law might look like when a diversity of lived experience is taken seriously. Moreover, transgressive politics might operate as a counterforce to expose how law reinscribes repressive politics through liberal legal tropes of property, criminality, wealth and class, corporeality, and exclusivity.

Before we dive in, a few helpful clarifications about chosen terms and definitions are in order. First, we borrow the Los Angeles Tenants Union's definition of tenant as anyone who does not control their own housing, who inhabits but does not own (Rosenthal and Vilchis,

12). Next, we understand property, and describe its underlying logics, as socially constructed and inherently relational. This definition of property moves beyond an understanding of property and property logics as doctrinal or boundary lines drawn on a map. As legal geographer Nicholas Blomley has reflected, "property regulates relations between people [and] [a]s such, property needs to be understood as a means by which certain forms of social power are allocated" (Blomley 2023, 8). Simply, "Those who are empowered by property rules have power over other people. Property, therefore, is fundamental to social power[.] Property relations, therefore, are power relations" (Blomley 2023, 8-9). With those definitions in mind, we map our few vignettes of transgression in housing and property below.

Transgression can violate norms and expectations even promoted by erstwhile allies. Academics aligned with the unhoused, including the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy, issued a report illustrating how hotels left vacant in the pandemic could be converted into housing for the unhoused. (Roy et al. 2020). At the same time that hotels were being opened up to unhoused tenants, where death rates were high, some preferred to stay in an encampment (Roy and Rosenstock 2021). On March 22, 2020, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued guidance advising municipalities to stop clearing encampments (CDC March 22, 2020). In the intervening period, a group of tenants built a community around Echo Park Lake. Expressing a transgressive politics of freedom tenancy, those tenants transgressed not only the law surrounding the use of public land, but the expectation that they should want or need to move into whatever housing the City of Los Angeles provided (Roy et al. 2021, 54-62). This was not an irrational choice, as many unhoused tenants had the experience of being forced to give up their survival gear, abandon their pets, or separate from a loved one, only to be back out on the street without any of those resources (Rosenthal 2024). Transgression also brings risk as it is often depicted as threatening, dangerous, or criminal by the state. On March 24 and 25, 2021, the Los Angeles Police launched an all-out assault on the remaining tenants in Echo Park, deploying the availability of shelter as a counter narrative that justified the decision to use violent force (Roy et al. 2021, 2).

Unhoused tenants and the communities they inhabit transgress liberal private property norms by squatting in abandoned, publicly- or privately-owned homes. Moms4Housing In Oakland, California (Hahn 2020), the Reclaimers with CalTrans Housing (Tso 2023), and Philadelphia Housing Authority (Rinde 2020) have all lived iterations of transgressive politics in recent years. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, squatting in vacant properties was a common tactic used during the U.S. foreclosure crisis of 2010 (Schneider 2015). Drawing on experience from the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign in South Africa and Take Back the Land in Miami, the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign's organizers would consult with neighboring community members before moving families into banked-own, vacant homes (Losier 2018, 63). Homeowners living on the same block as these "squatters" preferred having neighbors they knew over having a vacant, neglected building next door (Austen 2013). Toussaint Losier, an organizer with the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign, described how following these direct actions, Deutsche Bank, the owner of one property, was eventually able to remove a family the Campaign had placed in housing. Since these occupations garnered local and national media attention, real estate interests have jumped on the narrative of squatting as dangerous and criminal to introduce civil and criminal laws further punishing these direct actions (Hoang 2024). Harnessing this backlash, these private interests have passed laws that chip away at the rights of all tenants, including those who are not squatters.

Transgression does not only exist within spatial realities. The act of self-housing can be transgressive because of who seeks to live and how. In the mid-century, amidst urban renewal, reformers saw single-room occupancy rooms (SROs) as a blight and sought to have them zoned out of existence (Sullivan and Burke 2013, 119). In Boston, the tenant organizing group City Life/Vida Urbana has supported the disproportionately elder Black women who lived in SRO housing called the Lady's Guild, then owned by the Daughters of Mary of the Immaculate Conception (Kuznitzl 2019). The order of nuns who managed the property emphasized the role of this single room occupancy housing as "short-term" despite at least one resident having lived there for 15 years (Kuznitzl 2019). These tenants engaged in transgression by refusing to leave after receiving eviction notices, by crossing state lines to protest the order of nuns in Connecticut who owned their homes, but also by demanding their right to stay in what was seen as this vanishing, decidedly not temporary style of housing. Rather than face a backlash, single-room living has been rebranded with a different name: "co-living." The conservative American Enterprise Institute Housing Center has published in favor of deregulation and a return to zoning that permits single room housing (Pinto 2024). While the Lady's Guild tenants faced eviction from their SROs, developers in Boston explored the creation of "co-living" spaces, single room occupancy with shared kitchens and bathrooms that would appeal to a subset of young professionals (Stefanescu 2024; Svitovski 2020). What is transgressive in one context is deemed new and innovative in another, having as much to do with the class, age, and race of those participating as the act itself. Law recasts transgressive life in order to pull those lives and social orderings back into the ambit of the state.

"Transgression is a horizon in practice, less about end points and more about the ongoing. It is a mode of being that defies liberal property norms that order the spaces where tenants can and cannot live."

In each of the foregoing examples, tenants live transgression in ways that expand their freedom, as hooks' conceptualizes it. However, we do not wish to conflate transgression as a mode of being with all acts of self-housing that violate the law. Precarity, that is, living at risk of having one's home taken from them at any time, is not inherently transgressive. A prime example is tenants living in unsafe housing. The United States at once has insufficient housing available to tenants and housing codes that forbid the use of certain spaces as housing due to conditions dangerous to health and safety. Tenants who move into these apartments–whether they are basements and attics without sufficient egresses in the case of a fire or flood, or they are generally in conditions that render them uninhabitable–are not living in a transgressive mode. They are living in a state of precarity (Ayano 2021). Their very housing is unlawful and yet, were the state to enforce those laws, while an owner might receive a fine, it's the tenants who are removed from their homes. Tenants remain housed but cannot individually call code enforcement for fear of provoking vacate orders. Rather than expose the reality of the oppression and exploitation of the poor, the state enforces laws that minimally punish propertied people while further entrenching the precarity of poverty by removing tenants from their homes.

This reality was tragically illustrated in 2021 when flooding from Hurricane Ida killed at least 11 tenants living in basement apartments in Queens, NY (Griffin 2021). Continuing to live in violation of the law, the New York City chose to not fine the owners providing the unlawful housing (Griffin 2021). Elected officials recognized the law was out of line with reality, and yet changing the law to permit the structures to stand as they were was not considered viable. Pre-dating these deaths, a coalition of tenants and advocates calling itself the Basement Apartments Safe for Everyone (BASE) Campaign organized to initiate a state-funded pilot that would enable homeowners to make the structural changes needed to legalize an apartment, often involving digging out the floor and creating additional exits (Afridi and Morris 2021). In 2024, after the floods and with the support of legislative allies, they secured funding for the pilot program offering owners low-cost loans and support to legalize basements (BASE 2024). If owners were to adopt this program and make these basements code compliant, the tenants would cease to live in one state of precarity. However, the choice of whether to make the housing code compliant is left completely out of the tenants' hands. This program marks a move that folds that precarity back into a legal logic under liberal property laws. It is not transgression. Though these precarious housing arrangements are not transgressive in and of themselves, we understand them to exist on a continuum of exploitation yet distinguishable from the transgressive politics of freedom tenacity in Echo Park. Tenants renting a basement or attic, atomized from one another, are undoubtedly persevering in the face of untenable conditions. Likewise, incorporation into the legal property order enables those tenants to be more individually secure in their housing.

Transgression is a horizon in practice, less about end points and more about the ongoing. It is a mode of being that defies liberal property norms that order the spaces where tenants can and cannot live. Transgression inherently implies risk. The state responds to transgression with its monopoly on violence. Transgression simultaneously serves as fodder for backlash by real estate and its state allies. Transgression is also contingent on who engages in it, and where different spatial logics apply depending on who is housing themselves. We write not to romanticize transgression, but to lift up the quotidian struggles against liberal property logics and to take seriously lives housed otherwise.

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LIBERTY
COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
COMMUNITY
(OWNED)
CENTER
DOWNTOWN CRENSHAW
FOR US, BY US
4276

Pension Funds, Tenants and Housing Insecurity in Global Financialized Real Estate

Shanti Singh and Marina Moscoso Arabía

"1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property."

Article 17, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

"We will not be able to understand each other, and to tell them (bankers) you speak to me in money and I speak to you in people."

Carlos, Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (2014)
(translated by authors)

Since the 2008 financial crisis, private equity giants and large institutional investors have increasingly looked to housing as a profitable investment opportunity, especially in communities hit hard by mass foreclosures or historically subject to decades of redlining and general underinvestment. Meanwhile, tenants increasingly find that not only are they subject to massive overnight rent hikes, junk fees, and serial evictions, but that they cannot enforce their basic rights – either because their large corporate landlord has instituted layers of bureaucratic unaccountability, or because they cannot find out who their landlord, the "beneficial owner" of their housing, even *is* (Institute for Policy Studies 2021). This presents challenges on two fronts, by limiting the enforceability of traditional tenant protection laws, *and* by limiting the ability of tenant associations to win protection and concessions through localized forms of organizing, especially at the building or neighborhood level. Private equity's housing investment binge is largely fueled by a surprising source – public and private pension funds.

Pension funds have stepped up their investment in private equity, making them not just proxy landlords but even proxy investors in rent-seeking real estate technology products (S&P Global 2024). RealPage, the algorithmic rent-setting software company facing investigation from the United States Department of Justice and dozens of state and local lawsuits for inflating rent prices and engaging in collusion, is owned by the private equity firm Thoma Bravo, in which no fewer than nineteen major pension funds are invested (Americans

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for Financial Reform 2024). As tenants organize in their homes and neighborhoods and confront the basic yet increasingly complex question of "who is my landlord," they are learning that through their pensions, they themselves are investing in their own displacement.

There is a considerable body of research on pension systems around the world; however, there is little research on the role of financialized pension funds in the built urban environment (Pillay 2024). This is a surprising absence given the central role of financialized housing in the global economy since well before the 2008 crisis. Urban planner Sam Stein calls this the "real estate state": the escalating value of real estate assets, quickly changing hands, has become such a core engine of economic growth that real estate capital holds an almost monopolistic level of power over the state in determining the future of urban development (Stein 2019, 37). Economic geographer Brett Christophers refers to an "asset manager society" in which institutional investors – including pension funds – invest the pooled resources of thousands or millions of individuals, like pensioners, in private equity and other asset management funds in such a large quantity that social wealth in general is affected. The asset managers, in turn, invest in housing, infrastructure, and other aspects of survival at such a scale that they can materially capture the necessities of life, such as housing, and leave individuals with little choice but to pay more (Christophers 2023). This has not only enabled the participation of pension funds as promoters of private real estate developments, but has intensified the correlation between pension funds and the inhabitation problem suffered by tenants globally, especially as the world's urban labor force has more than doubled since 1980 and suffers increasing insecurity of shelter (Davis 2006). Following Raquel Rolnik's observation (2019) that levels of tenure security and insecurity do not map neatly onto specific legal or formal arrangements, we define "tenant" broadly as anyone who is insecure in their housing, from the unhoused to renters, mobile home park residents, workers, pensioners, or mortgaged "bank tenants" who nominally own their homes but are extremely vulnerable to predatory foreclosure.

In order to understand the relationship between pension funds and tenant insecurity, we must first understand the process of financialization of pension funds in the United States. In the 1940s, the US pension system underwent a gradual reform aimed at liberalizing and diversifying its capitalization model, moving from a model based on a productive economy and low-cost finance to one based on a maximum return in financial markets (Vanatta 2024). According to Vanatta, the key to this reform was a shift from "fiscal mutualism" – in which pension funds acted on a responsibility to invest positively in their workers' communities – to the "prudent man rule." To achieve this, two fundamental changes were required. On the one hand, the management of pension funds was transferred from the hands of public officials to professional asset managers (ie., trust bankers, investment bankers, and portfolio advisors). On the other hand, the legal provisions that required public assets to be invested in the development of public infrastructure such as roads and school buildings were lifted so that the guiding principle became maximum return on investment. As Vanatta explains, "this transformation occurred within a larger conflict between employers and unions over control of pension investment policies […] to the detriment of socially motivated investments preferred by unions." The transformation also occurred by convincing a sector of workers of the benefits of obtaining higher returns, and arguing against public policies that prevented so-called fair competition with the private sector.

This paved the way to the current situation in which, as financiers from the Corporate Finance Institute put it, pension fund investments have "evolved" along with markets, and there is an emerging trend to invest money into high-yield bonds, hedge funds, and real estate (Corporate Finance Institute 2024). The particular payout demands that pension funds face can drive them to invest specifically in riskier and more aggressive private-equity vehicles that raise rents on housing complexes dramatically (Americans for Financial Reform 2024). A *Los Angeles Times* investigation found that rents were raised on private equity-owned and pension-invested housing often well above the aggregate rent level of the surrounding neighborhood (*Los Angeles Times* 2024). Correspondingly, as one delves deeper into this process, the word "pension" not only evokes middle-class seniors who were part of the formal labor market, regularly contributed money with the expectation of receiving reasonable payout amounts after retirement, but also of a global system that syphons exorbitant amounts of money into the hands of a few. Whether administered by a government entity for state employees or by private, for-profit companies for private-sector employees, pension funds are pools of money from workers that in the US alone include $6 trillion in assets as of the fourth quarter of 2023, according to the Federal Reserve (Myklebust, Tolou and Lerner 2024). (see image right)

The trend to invest state-based pension funds in various real estate sectors (ie., retail, office, residential, industrial) is now omnipresent in global financial markets. Ivashina and Lerner (2018) estimate that between 2008 and 2017, pension funds in developed markets increased the share of so-called "alternative investments," like real estate, in their assets under management (AUM) by 63% on average, while pension funds in emerging markets increased their share from 0.97% of AUM in 2008 to 6.6% in 2017. Pension investments in real estate favor wealthy individuals, white-owned asset management companies, and white-owned real estate, as shown by Pillay's (2024)

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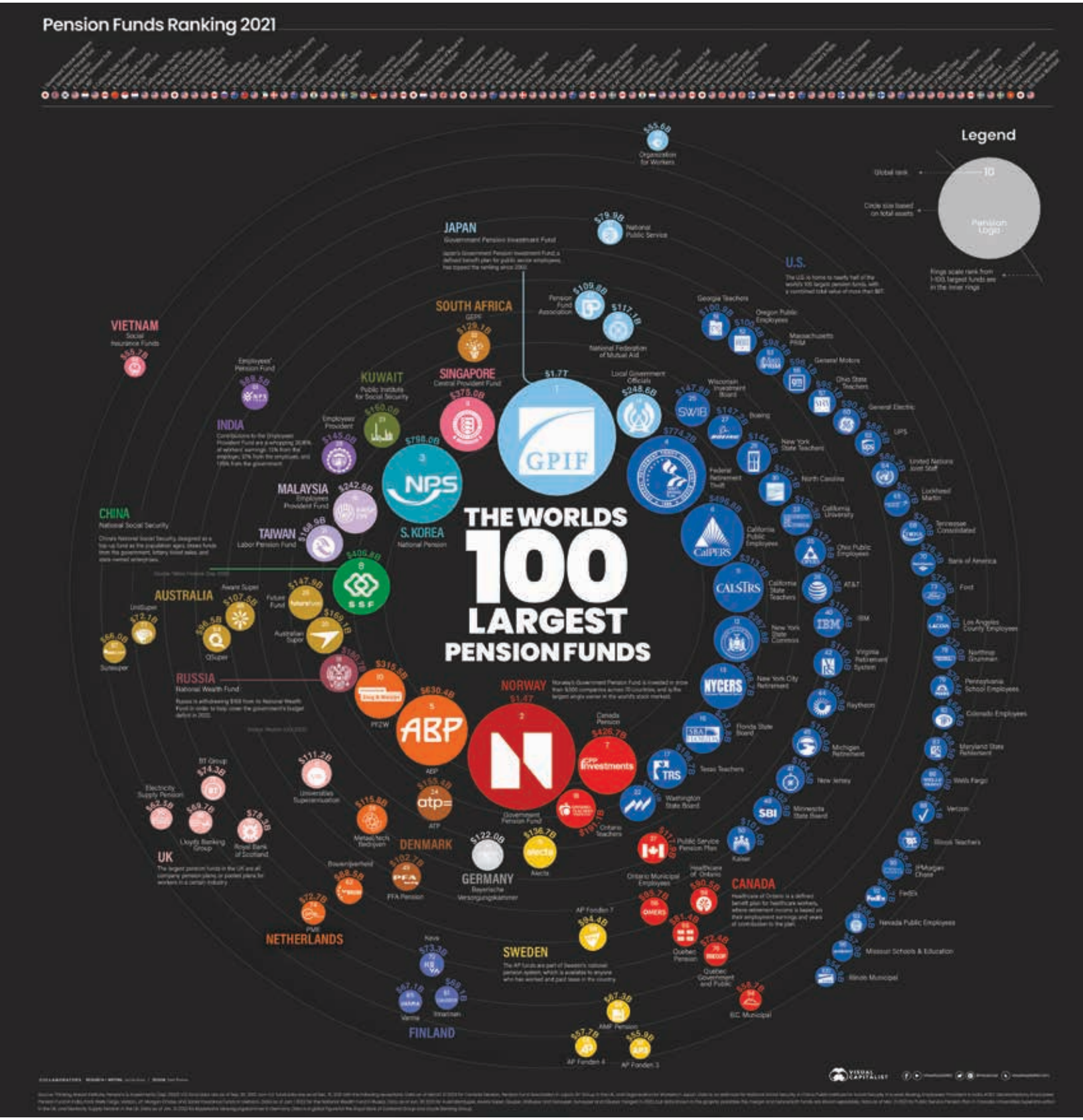
Pension Funds Ranking 2021
THE WORLDS 100 LARGEST PENSION FUNDS
Legend
Global rank
Circle size based on total assets
Rings scale rank from 1-100, largest funds are in the inner rings
JAPAN
GPIF
$1.77
NORWAY
$1.47
CHINA
NPS
$788.0B
U.S.
CalPERS
$496.8B
CalSTRS
$313.2B
NYCERS
$213.8B
TRS
$198.7B
SBA Texas
$213.8B
CPP Investments
$426.7B
ABP
$630.4B
PFZW
$315.3B
SSF
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research on the Government Employees Pension Funds (GEPF) in South Africa. Pensioners comprise 10-15% of the active US workforce (14.9 million Americans, with an additional 12 million retired pensioners). While this number is somewhat low as a percentage of the overall population in the US, unionized workers' demands for retirement security may drive additional needs for pension funds to realize returns (Mittal 2022).

The racialized accumulation of capital is facilitated by the financialization of pension funds and financialized housing systems. In the US, the private equity funds and "alternative asset managers" in which pension funds invest are particularly adept at targeting communities with low property values, which are disproportionately inhabited by Black, low-income, and other structurally marginalized tenants (Seymour and Shelton 2023). Emerging research in Los Angeles shows that rent paid by tenants in historically segregated and disproportionately lower-income, Black, and Latine communities such as South Central Los Angeles – a community to which we will later return – flows to enrich wealthier, whiter communities in the city where these tenants' landlords often reside (Ferrer 2022). This becomes even more problematic when pension funds are shareholders in companies that are part of the business portfolio of real estate asset managers whose "duty" is to maximize profits, and therefore do not hesitate to evict from their homes or displace from their communities racialized, low-income, working-class, or migrant families. That was the case for hundreds of tenants who were evicted by demolition from the Heron Gate community in Ottawa, Canada, by the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund (Manek 2020). The Heron Gate mass eviction was a case of "pension capitalism" whose objective, according to one of those affected, was to make room for middle-class families at the expense of lower-income families, the overwhelming majority of whom were Somali and Arab immigrants or their descendants (Rockwell 2022).

There are elements of inherent instability in pension-fueled private equity's reliance on escalating housing costs, as their profits manifest themselves as economic rents, as opposed to income from the production of trade or commodities (Christophers 2023, Durand 2024). Indeed, private equity firms are increasingly buying and selling assets from and to one another at increasingly inflated valuations, which even some pension fund investors have likened to a "pyramid scheme" (Wiggins 2022). Pensions are not the only (nominally) publicly accountable institutions betting on the perpetuation of what economic geographer Brett Christophers has coined an "asset manager society" (Christophers 2023). The University of California system has invested billions in the Blackstone Real Estate Investment Trust (BREIT), including a post-pandemic $4B investment in 2023 that would be partly realized through rent increases on BREIT's portfolio of *student* housing (Gara 2023). In many ways, pension funds' investment in predatory housing strategies is cannibalizing its own goals to deliver security to its members.

The predominantly Black and Latine community of South Central Los Angeles is one of many communities facing displacement from pension-fueled investment vehicles. Their residents are fighting back as the Downtown Crenshaw Rising (DCR) coalition, through the development of the Liberty Ecosystem, a constellation of organizations working to develop a "solidarity economy" of tenant-led investment. During the Freedom School, we visited DCR to learn about their work in the Crenshaw neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Liberty Ecosystem / Downtown Crenshaw Rising, South Central Los Angeles

Crenshaw Boulevard runs north to south through the historically Black neighborhoods of Leimert Park and Hyde Park in South Central Los Angeles. These communities were considered proudly middle-class when the Great Migration brought Black workers to the West Coast in the 1940s and 1950s, and have endured decades of so-called "urban renewal," deindustrialization, and disinvestment in the decades since. With a Latine community growing steadily since the 1980s, both Black and Latine communities in South Central now face an onslaught of exclusionary forms of investment that are predicated on driving out existing residents to realize returns, often driven by the very pension funds that cover their residents.

Formed in 2007, the Fix Expo campaign and the Crenshaw Subway Coalition began coalescing community leaders to advocate for equitable transit implementation, including underground rail and a station in Leimert Park that were absent from the City of Los Angeles' ambitious transit expansion plans. The development of the Crenshaw/LAX Line, also known as the K line, is intended to finally connect Los Angeles International Airport to the city's existing transit network; as a result, speculators have descended on the area in anticipation of the profitable development opportunities from rising land, office, and housing values. The Crenshaw Subway Coalition's organizing

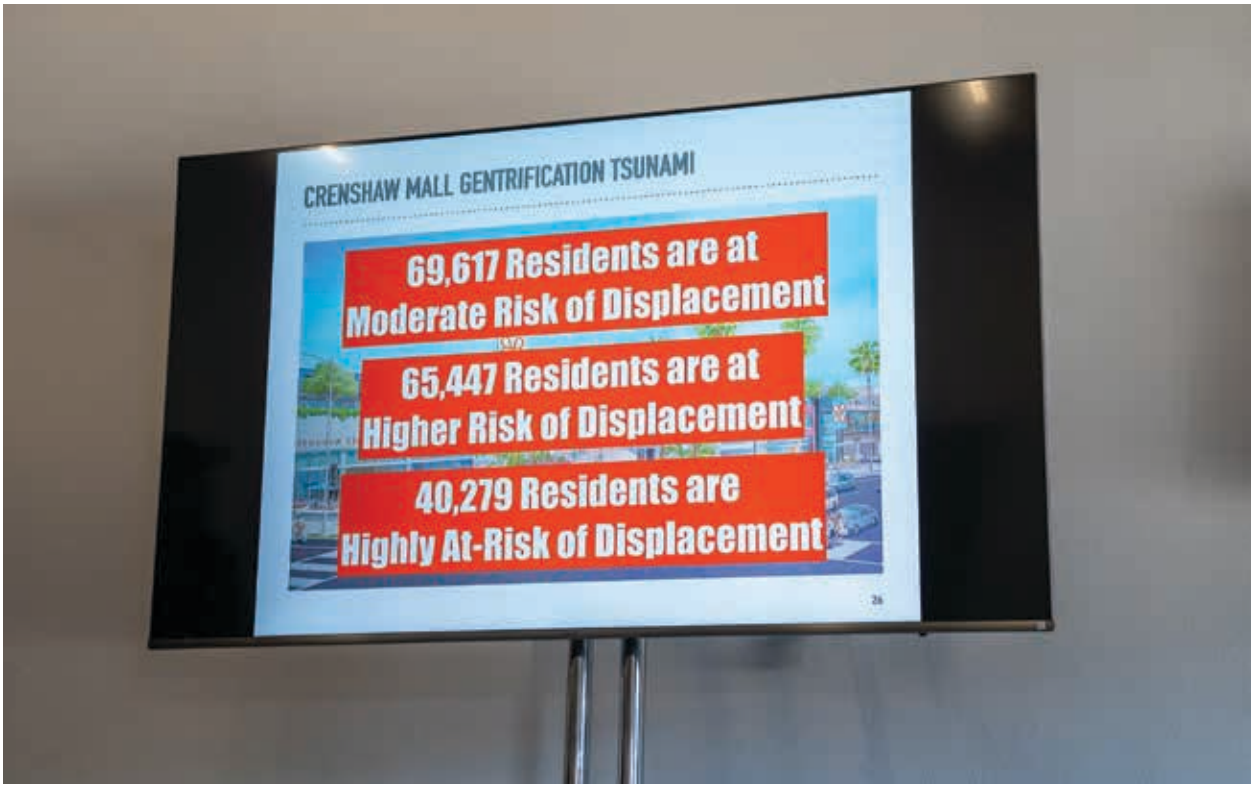

Photo credit: Anthony Orendorff

eventually led to the development of the Liberty Ecosystem and Downtown Crenshaw Rising (DCR) to combat speculation and redirect investment power back into the hands of Black residents who continue to be priced out of their homes.

Through its transit advocacy, the Crenshaw Subway Coalition had already created its own alternative "community engagement" processes, which it has brought to bear on several initiatives. One of these is the Hyde Park Organizational Partnership for Empowerment (HOPE) and another is the Liberty Community Land Trust (CLT), both of which are solely driven and funded by residents. The Liberty CLT seeks to buy vacant land, single-family and multifamily housing, and commercial space alike in order to preserve or redevelop them on behalf of the existing community in line with their demands (Liberty Ecosystem 2024).

As part of the 2024 Freedom School, the authors of this piece spoke to DCR organizers to learn directly about the coalition's history, organizing tactics, and ongoing political challenges. DCR organizers relayed to the authors that they were initially surprised by the level of solidarity they found from homeowners in the community who also feared displacement. The DCR campaign of homeowners, renters, and vulnerable small business owners is a tenant coalition, in that all three groups are aligned in their *collective tenure insecurity*.

The Downtown Crenshaw Rising organizers recently waged an ambitious multi-year campaign to buy the Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Plaza, a longtime mall which has been targeted multiple times as an opportunity for predatory redevelopment. DCR began using research tools like PitchBook to track pension investments in the Crenshaw Mall. They realized in the course of their research that private equity firms are often overleveraged and only need to put up a small fraction of purchase values to win their bids. In contrast, DCR envisions the Liberty CLT as a vehicle to outbid private equity that can even scale to attract direct pension investments themselves (Abello 2021).



Photo credit: Anthony Orendorff

Community organizing by the DCR campaign was able to defeat some prior redevelopment proposals and buy time for the coalition's rival bid, which would include union-built affordable green housing, community resource and employment centers, and worker-owned cooperatives. Despite the Downtown Crenshaw Rising coalition offering a bid with more money upfront, the mall was instead sold to a consortium led by the Harridge Development Group, which includes Len Blavatnik, billionaire owner of Warner Music Group, as well as the University of California and pension funds based in California, Texas, New York, Michigan, and New Jersey. This consortium plans to redevelop the mall into a high-end grocery and retail complex with primarily luxury apartments unaffordable to most local residents (Bautista 2024).

Crenshaw organizers shared with the authors that they had developed sophisticated research and political education practices, including using investor tools to research ownership, borrowing planners' health impact assessment models to calculate displacement risks, analyzing the financing structures of similar investment deals, and tracking state-level policy changes that can facilitate their projects, including building social housing on single-family-zoned properties. Most housing justice organizations and formations struggle to develop this level of capacity due to a lack of resources and the urgent demands of responding to immediate crises. Even so, the ongoing battle over the Crenshaw Mall speaks to the enormous difficulties even well-organized coalitions face in winning community-driven "divest/invest" campaigns to develop a local solidarity-economy ecosystem.

One DCR leader – Jan Williams, a bus driver and union leader in United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) – shared with the authors and Freedom School participants how she was stunned to learn that CalPERS and CalSTRS, the two major pension funds for California public sector workers, were invested in the Harridge redevelopment proposal for the Crenshaw Mall. She began testifying at pension board meetings about gentrification, speculation, and displacement in South Central Los Angeles. Williams is but one example of union workers beginning to confront pension funds' predatory real estate investments, and it will take significant collective mobilization and a panoply of emerging strategies to win major divestment/reinvestment fights.

The way forward: approaches to growing and unifying worker and tenant power

"On the one hand, we have the opportunistic and haphazard management of 'assets,' vital for sustaining human life, geared toward short-term returns; on the other, we have the massively anti-redistributive effects of this enterprise. From capital's perspective, this creates a potential contradiction, since poor infrastructure, degraded services and higher costs could damage productivity and weigh on effective demand. They might also expose the industry to political backlash and regulatory changes..." – Cédric Durand

Pension funds and public institutions are involving themselves in a dangerous gambit by investing in land and housing speculation to plug up fiscal holes, thus escalating the housing crisis and undercutting the stability of the very workers to whom they owe fiduciary responsibility. To the vital question of how to counter a pension system that makes ordinary people invest in the eviction and displacement of ordinary people, one possible answer is to return to a model similar to that of "fiscal mutualism," where pension funds invested in local government debt in order to finance schools, housing, and other critical infrastructure. Some enduring urban social housing cooperatives from the early to mid-20th century in the United States, including St. Francis Square in San Francisco and Electchester in Flushing, NY, were even funded *directly* by union pension funds (Americans for Financial Reform 2024).

In Brazil, mostly privately-run pension funds doubled as key vehicles of public policy implementation for successive federal governments since military rule in the 1970s. Beginning in the 1990s, labor union federations led by the Bank Clerk's Union organized to pass federal legislation that gave unionized workers greater participation in and oversight power over pension fund management. Yet pension funds became major vehicles of urban real estate development, including at the luxury end of the market (Rolnik 2019). The example of Brazilian pension funds speaks both to the power that worker-driven pension investments can have and their potential capture by private interests through byzantine public-private development partnerships.

One political proposal that seeks to achieve fiscal mutualism goes beyond simply shedding light on the correlation between the financialization model of pension funds and housing insecurity. The *bargaining for the common good approach* is based on raising awareness among workers that pension funds belong to them and that they should therefore demand that they operate differently (Myklebust, Tolou, and Lerner 2024). This approach includes six "ingredients":

1. Educating and organizing union members;
2. Making the investments of workers' capital a central issue in collective bargaining;
3. Making pension-related bargaining demands bold enough to engage workers' interest and imagination;
4. Focusing on racial justice;
5. Identifying and exposing corporate actors;
6. Connecting to broader fights and movements.

While pension funds have begun to adopt investment standards in line with fair labor practices including workers' right to organize, worker safety, and anti-discrimination, pension activism in housing investment is a newer frontier. It is uniquely difficult to monitor the predatory behavior of real estate actors, due to a lack of corporate transparency laws and the formation of development consortia with multiple investors for each redevelopment project or ownership vehicle. Because pension investments occur in cycles, immediate divestment is difficult to achieve even when there is considerable political pressure, which emphasizes the importance of long-term strategic planning and more active coordination with a resurgent 21st century tenant organizing movement.

In some cases, workers are limited or even prohibited from advocating for changes in their pensions' investment strategies. When the Canadian government created PSP Investments in 1999 to manage public sector pensions, it explicitly mandated that PSP maximize returns, in order to legally prevent union members from engaging in activism around predatory or ethically objectionable investments. As a result, some tenant organizers in Canada have appealed directly to pensioners' associations to join in public pressure campaigns in support of the tenants' demands against evictions and rent hikes (Rockwell 2022).

Some immediately actionable approaches to building tenant power against predatory pension investments include but certainly are not limited to:

1. *Growing tenant organizing at the level of the property owner or management company to target pension investment.*

Tenants across the United States have organized across a range of geographies and targets, and an increasingly popular model is forming tenant unions across a particularly large landlord or property manager with multiple properties across a community or city in order to coordinate organizing strategies and grow tenants' bargaining power (Appel, Ferrer, and Graziani 2024). In San Francisco, the Veritas Tenants Association organized tenants across the holdings of Veritas Investments, the city's largest multifamily rental housing landlord, including mounting successful debt strikes and advocacy for the city or local community land trusts to acquire their housing (Knight 2024). As the tenant movement has grown, so has the confidence of organizers in confronting bigger investment giants with larger housing portfolios. Adding an analytical layer of pension investment to organizing campaigns against large corporate actors could inspire new campaigns and tactics.

Challenges: There is a general lack of public transparency around property ownership in general, to say nothing of the fact that property ownership structures themselves are growing more complex (Institute for Policy Studies 2021). Tenant-led organizing formations often lack the access and capacity to use the real estate research tools available to real estate industry professionals and investors.

2. *Sectoral mobilization of tenants alongside union education.*

Most tenants who are public-sector workers reliant on pensions are certainly not aware that their pension funds may be invested in their own exploitation and displacement. Labor unions are training their members in pension activism as part of a "bargaining for the common good" approach and pushing pension funds to adopt investment standards to protect the workers of private equity-invested companies. In New York City, the New York City Employees' Retirement System (NYCERS) has adopted Responsible Property Management Standards, while CalSTRS has recently created a policy to avoid investments that displace low-income tenants in California (Americans for Financial Reform 2024). As organized labor pushes for investment standards, tenant unions and tenant-led housing justice organizations help research and educate tenants with pensions about predatory investments in their housing and communities. Labor unions representing pensioned workers could mirror this effort by providing know-your-rights and tenant organizing resources to their members to push back against predatory rent increases and evictions.

Challenges: Organized public-sector labor faces declining unionization rates and attacks on their bargaining power from a hostile federal political system, while tenants in the United States broadly lack any legally codified right to organize or protections against retaliation, although tenant right-to-organize policies, modelled after labor organizing, are gaining traction in some areas (Baltz and Rahman 2023).

3. *Enacting policies like strong rent controls that curb the speculative potential of housing.*

With pension funds investing in increasingly risky and aggressive real estate schemes that depend on enacting steep rent hikes, it is essential to build cross-sector political coalitions with the strength to win policies to discourage speculative activity before it happens. UNITE HERE Local 11 in Los Angeles, for example, has launched the Better Neighbors LA coalition to push for short-term rental regulation and taxes to invest in tenant protections and social housing (Tucker 2023). Tenant-led campaigns for rent control and other policies would greatly benefit from more institutional labor support.

Challenges: Rent control is outlawed at the state level in many US states and often limited or undermined in jurisdictions where it has been or can be enacted. Rent-controlled rental housing and housing types usually exempted from rent controls such as mobile home parks and Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) housing remain lucrative targets for corporate landlords and private equity (Urban Habitat 2024). Other policy proposals such as residential vacancy and speculation taxes are subject to extensive litigation from landlord and real estate lobbies, and are sometimes overturned in courts on property-rights grounds.

It is essential for the tenants of pension funds themselves to organize, within and across tenure types and owners. Labor unions, especially those representing low-wage workers, people of color, seniors/retirees, and other disproportionately housing-insecure workers, are increasingly taking up housing justice issues in their political work. Tackling pension funds' predatory investments will require coordination between the labor and tenant movements, sharing strategies and resources wherever possible



Illustration credit: Marina Moscoso

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EVICTION FREE ZONE



From Solving the Housing Crisis to Abolishing Rent

Sterling Johnson and Ben Teresa

Introduction

"Rent is the crisis," Tracy Rosenthal and Leonardo Vilchis write in *Abolish Rent*. More than the real burdens of an unaffordable payment, rent is a relationship based in the exploitation of tenants – one that enforces "a tribute that we pay at the peril of our need and at the barrel of a gun" (Rosenthal & Vilchis 2024, 7). In reframing rent from a neutral payment to a set of despotic relations that must be replaced, Rosenthal and Vilchis usefully redefine what it means to be a tenant: anyone who does not control their own housing. Tenants paying rent to those who control housing aren't paying for the provision of shelter; rather, housing is the investments made by landlords, which tenants finance with their rent payment.

Property owners do not spend their time and money on "providing" housing: according to the US Census Rental Housing Finance Survey (US Census 2021), the median amount of time that landlords spend managing rental properties is four hours per month, and only about 8% of landlords report spending the time equivalent to a full-time job. At first glance, these figures seem to corroborate the idea that rent is "unearned," representing a wealth transfer from tenants to owners for which owners expend little of their own time and labor.

Yet this observation raises an important question: how is it possible for owners to capture tenants' payments with seemingly little effort? How is it that rental payments seem to naturally flow like water from tenant to owner? At the same time as it appears that collecting rent requires little effort by landlords, these figures belie the extensive "work" that goes into creating a system that enables property owners, with little individual effort, to extract tenants' incomes. In this essay, we focus on these questions to analyze the bases of power that enable rent collection, how those bases depend on the creation of a "reserve army of the unhoused," and how tenants as well as the unhoused collectively refuse their exploitation.

Graphic credit (left): Terra Graziani

The work of rent: producing and refusing exploitability

How is rent made collectible? The production of the exploitable tenant is the linchpin of this enterprise. First, of course, is the principal societal cleavage between property owners and non-owners, which leaves the vast majority without land and shelter and thus reliant on the landlord class to meet their needs. The implication of foundational dispossessive accumulation (Nichols 2018; Harvey 1982) underpinning housing is that landlords, individually and collectively, can set the terms tenants must accept for access to shelter. A multi-scalar and -dimensional matrix of control systematically creates the conditions of exploitability.

Creating exploitability means developing monopoly control across geographic scales and dimensions of social life. First, for housing markets to serve as a venue for extracting rent, the state, the real estate industry, and landlords must produce market geographies tractable to investment, such as branding neighborhoods and creating new markets. Additionally, creating housing as an asset is an ongoing project, including processes of financialization that produce a flow of income streams. Finally, at the level of tenure relations, landlords continually rewrite the basic terms of tenancy by changing leases to suit their needs as property owners.

This project of exploitation and monopoly control extends beyond housing. The exploitation of people as tenants is bolstered by their exploitation as workers in the labor market. As labor markets have restructured around fewer, lower-paying service jobs, an expanding carceral state response to the social effects of unemployment and austerity has become a "significant (urban) labor market institution" (Peck and Theodore 2008, 251). The criminalization of homelessness, including the production of eviction records, reduces housing options. More than merely curtailing choice, however, these institutions also produce an unhoused population that is analogous in its role to the "reserve army of the unemployed." That is, unemployed people are a tool for disciplining a workforce into accepting even brutal terms of employment – and an unhoused population similarly bolsters the landlord's power over tenants.

"An expansive framework of tenancy allows us to understand and connect variegated sites of struggle."

The remainder of this article examines in more detail the work in making rent collectible, and then moves to focus on the unhoused more specifically. For people without incomes, or for those who may receive some income but not in exchange for their labor, income is instead based on their inability to work and sometimes the performance of disability. Thus what exploitation and extraction will look like can be quite different; it could be participation in development fundraising or in a commercial campaign, for example. While tenants and the unhoused have different relationships within relations of rent, they are both enmeshed in the system of exploitation that underpins rent collection. In the final section, we reflect on what a refusal to be exploited would mean for those who have been pushed out of tenancy altogether.

The "reserve army of the unhoused"

Failing to pay rent opens people up to the violent possibility of eviction. Although the United States has normalized eviction, it is anything but. An eviction is a violent removal of a person and their property from the space they inhabit. Thus evictions are a disciplining force. The looming threat of eviction means pay rent – or else. Landlords understand that if someone cannot afford rent, then that person will become homeless. That is a horrific option for many and the reason that people most often pay their rent before buying necessities like food. In such a system, "if we're caught without a home, we can be subjected to police harassment, brutality, tickets, or jail" (Rosenthal

& Vilchis 2024). With the recent Supreme Court decision, *Johnson v. Grants Pass*, which effectively criminalizes homelessness, failure to pay rent makes a person even *more* vulnerable to the violence already meted out by the police on the streets. And "as rents rise, so do the ranks of unhoused tenants" (Rosenthal & Vilchis 2024). Hence the "reserve army of the unhoused" is always available to replace the currently housed person. Just as the reserve army of the unemployed gives employers leverage to dictate the terms of employment because so many need a job, so too does the production of an unhoused population bolster landlords' power to set the terms of access to shelter.

Further, rent payment and looming eviction produces yet more forms of violence for women and parents. Austere economic conditions can increase acts of violence and make life more precarious in many ways. For example, evictions have recently been linked to increased intimate partner violence and HIV transmission (Groves et al. 2022). Rental debt makes a tenant vulnerable: a landlord or maintenance person could attempt to extract other types of coerced labor, including sexual labor, in exchange for rent. For people with disabilities and seniors, eviction can be an even greater risk to mere survival. For women with children, the threat of eviction is yoked to the threat of family separation: the state can seize a mother's children on the basis of poverty.

The money demanded from the landlord is merely one part of exploitation. Even with zero rent for a space itself, life involves a variety of expenses: utilities (gas, electric and water), food, transportation. The ability to keep cool in the summer and stay warm in the winter is essential for a dignified existence. The rent is not simply a number on a spreadsheet, it is connected to the everyday worlds of people. Rent is embodied by the threat of no water, no heat, no air conditioning – and ultimately, state violence at the end of a trail of material deprivation. Thus to abolish rent is to liberate people from this domination and exploitation.

We argue that abolishing rent is part of an unfinished abolitionist project, or what Robin D.G. Kelley calls the Third Reconstruction. We know that "Black people are 13 percent of the US population but 37 percent of those who sleep outdoors" (Rosenthal & Vilchis 2024). And as we have already argued, rent acts extra-economically and forces people into exploitative labor conditions. But there is more: the reserve army of the poor disciplines women, femmes, and other marginalized people into harmful relations that require their submission in order to maintain their housing. Further, society demands such tenants be grateful for the opportunity to not just be exploited, but to be actively harmed and abused. A framework of tenant rights, while important, is not sufficient to prevent or repair this harm. To be liberated, we must abolish rent.

How tenants and the unhoused each mount a refusal to be exploited

A key part of the exploitative nature of rent is that it is made collectible by extra-economic violence. And this structure of rent is also relevant to those pushed out of tenancy. People experiencing poverty or homelessness are often considered "free from rent," living off of the government dole. These narratives hearken back to the early days of the almshouse, developed around concepts of "the deserving" and "the undeserving" poor (Schweik 2009). Rent, then, is a part of an American understanding of worthiness. In the public's imagination, something must be extracted from disabled and unhoused people in exchange for the supposedly "free" services they receive.

We center the refusal of such extraction and exploitation by tenants and those who have been systematically unhoused. Before the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sterling Johnson, one of the authors, participated in a series of covert housing takeovers. Capitalizing on the political momentum of the George Floyd Rebellion, these activists, as Philadelphia Housing Action (PHA), organized a significant encampment, Camp James Talib-Dean, advocating for housing and healthcare. They called on the Philadelphia Housing Authority and the City of Philadelphia to transfer vacant properties into a community land trust, which the encampment proposed to manage and operate collectively. The PHA occupation and demands highlighted the interconnectedness of housing issues and state violence. Researchers Herbert and Ricketts (2024, 10-11) describe this approach as advocating for community control over social welfare. The encampment and housing takeovers placed the homeless industrial complex under scrutiny. Indeed it became an experiment in "freedom making" outside of the homeless regulation system and non-profit industrial complex. The encampment residents understood that offers of "help" always came with carceral or punitive strings attached (Johnson 2022). Yet to refuse the "help" was to be called dangerous and reckless (Johnson 2022). The encampment came under heavy surveillance and was ultimately forcibly removed.

We find it important that Rosenthal and Vilchis provide a framework uniting the experiences of all precariously housed people – whether renters, homeless people, or others. They write: "Tenants, unlike housing, have race, gender, family, and biography. And tenants can have power. A tenant can be incarcerated, living in a car, on a couch, or in a tent outside" (Rosenthal & Vilchis 2024, 13). Such a framework helps to draw together all people without agency in their housing. This includes those persons in federal and state prisons and those inside of state psychiatric hospitals. Tenants include those inside of long-term disability facilities as well.

An expansive framework of tenancy allows us to understand and connect variegated sites of struggle. Rosenthal and Vilchis (2024) explain that after the forcible eviction of the Echo Park Lake encampment in Los Angeles, unhoused residents formed Unhoused Tenants Against Carceral Housing (UTACH), a homeless tenant union within the temporary housing system. They successfully advocated for the roll-back of curfews, establishing access to NARCAN, and contesting and even stopping mass evictions. Similar dynamics emerged in Philadelphia.

In April, Sterling Johnson, as a part of Philadelphia Housing Action, advocated that federal funds be used to support people experiencing homelessness in what some would call COVID-19 Prevention Hotels (Johnson & Cunningham 2020). The city would only open one hotel – and then, only after Johnson and other advocates threatened to sue the city after an encampment eviction sweep at the International Airport Terminal (Lubrano 2020). The city ultimately opened a second COVID-19 Prevention Hotel in response to the large protest encampment, Camp JTD. Crucially, Sterling completed the applications himself to ensure that the encampment leaders remained in control of the process and could be advocates for any residents that were potentially evicted. Residents reported similar experiences of carcerality to UTACH's experiences in California's Project Roomkey. In Philadelphia, residents had a 9 o'clock curfew and visible security on each floor, and partners were prohibited from sharing accommodations.

Even as organizers successfully advocated for COVID-19 Prevention Hotels, by December 2020, these accommodations were soon moved to a location miles away from Philadelphia's central business district (Whelan 2020). The concerns of one resident and activist were printed in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*:

> "I've asked [my caseworker] several times where I'm going to be staying, where I am going to go," said Stacie Miller, 55, who has a number of serious lung conditions. She cried when she received notice the hotel was closing, saying, "I don't know where I'm going tomorrow" (Whelan 2020).

It became distressing for people to be approved for a hotel room, but then forced to choose between a roof far away or remaining in contact with vital social networks of survival. The consequences of leaving a community behind could be deadly. A sixty-year-old man died of an accidental overdose at a Covid-19 Prevention site (Harris-Bond 2020). Prior to his death, Johnson reported that the man had found work and was otherwise doing well at the hotel (Harris-Bond, 2020). Thus the COVID-19 Prevention Hotel did not simply act as a space of sanctuary from the COVID-19 virus; it became a space of isolation, surveillance, and discipline for the homeless people living in it. This was far from a liberated space for low-income or disabled people.

Rent is a non-negotiable extraction, one which implies domination and submission. We must abolish rent to transform such exploitation to something else. Is it possible that Camp James Talib-Dean in Philadelphia was a vision of such "other" space? How do we imagine unhoused people as having a "right to strike" by refusing to comply with the rules and regulations of the non-profit system.

To this end, we suggest a re-imagining of organized encampment protests and rent strikes. As people who are incarcerated have "hunger strikes," so unhoused residents may strike by refusing to stay hidden, but also by refusing to be made into a commodity by the health and social service system. They may withhold their names, social security numbers, and birthdays to avoid being made billable. This is an important front in and against the expanding war on tenants, whether precariously housed or thoroughly unhoused.

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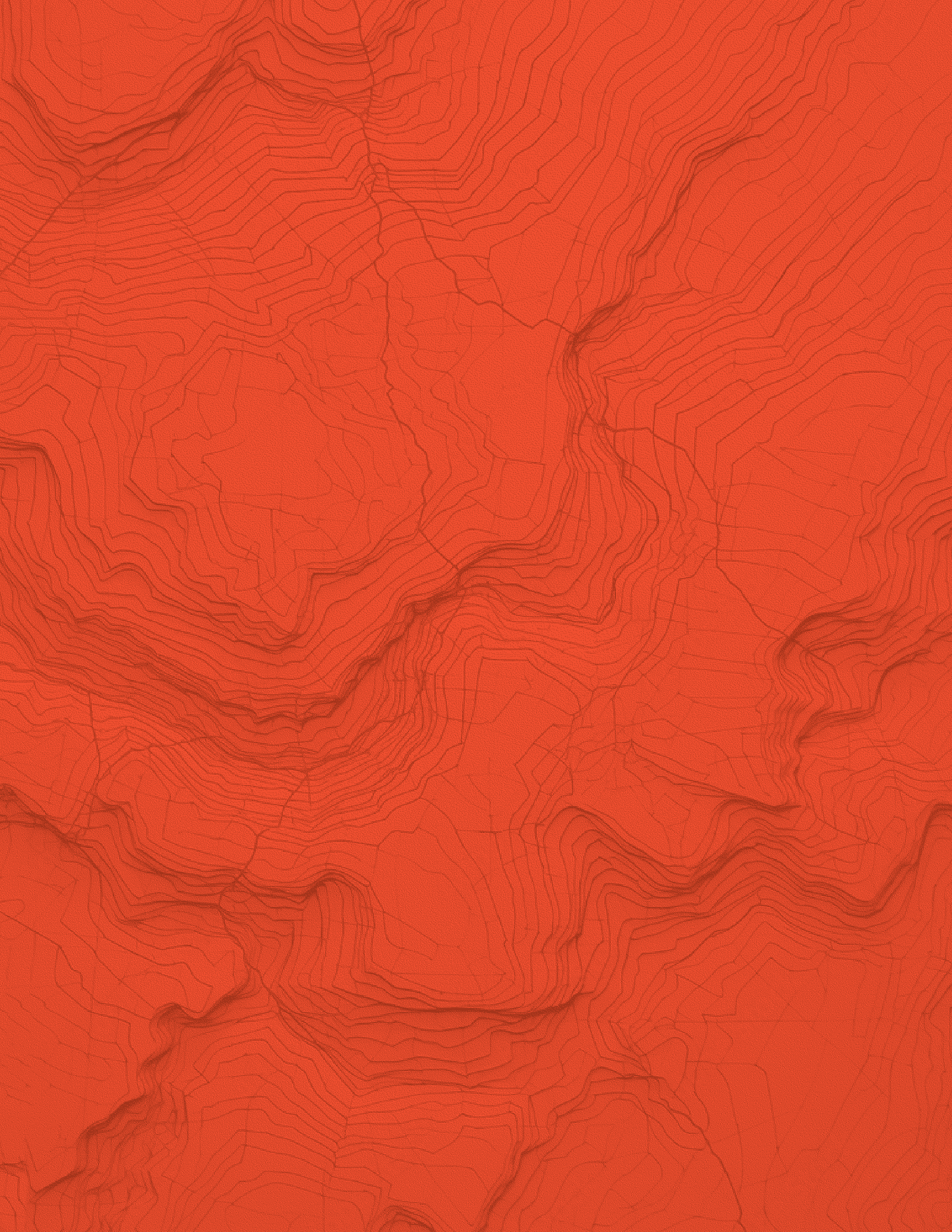


II. TRANSGRESSING


JAMAAL
·COOP COMMUNITY
JACKSOM (MISS.)
KAREEM
·STUDENTS SUPPORT
Michele -
Beyond Inhab
TERRA
HOME

WeSearch, Reparations and RiSearch

Lisa "Tiny" Gray-Garcia and a conversation with Michele Lancione

The car whizzed by, slightly slowing down at me and my mama's tent. We were posted up with a tiny *comeUnity wayyy in the back of a Walmart parking lot on the fringes of LA county.

The thing was the drive-by didn't make any sense. No one ever came back here, so who were these people? Me and my mama caught sight of a business-suited woman peering out of the back tinted windows. They seemed to be writing something down.

"Oh, they were part of the homeless count," one of the elder members of the comeUnity, Charlie, shook his head when we told him what happened. "Yea, they find us so they can 'count' us and then they let the city know and then the sweepers come next. What's the point of the damn count? Counted or not, we still homeless, just now the city gets millions of dollars for homeless funding, whatever that is." With that, Charlie turned away and started stuffing all of his carefully organized belongings into a hefty bag.

All of us had dealt with violent sweeps where all of our belongings were thrown in the trash and our tightly-knit communities were dismantled. So we looked long and hard for a place to hide. We thought this was it.

It's a truth I would not overstand until I was older, but what I knew then is within minutes a trash truck showed up with two *poLicemen and me and mama and the whole comeUnity was violently dismantled, people were arrested including my mama, and all of our friends were gone.

I am always tiggering, surviving, remembering, and trying to forget the many traumatic experiences I had when me and my mama were houseless on the streets of the settler towns known as LA, SF, and Oakland, and then later as a single mother myself in the *gentriFUKed Mission district of so-called San Francisco (occupied Yelamu).

In the last few years I have begun to *overstand that this was also one of the first "traumatic experiences" I had with research. As I was preparing for my presentation at the Freedom School brought together by Ananya Roy at the UCLA Luskin Institute for Inequality and Democracy, I was reflecting on the multiple ways research itself is extractive, exploitative, and sometimes even violent.

Photo credit (left): Anthony Orendorff

You might be asking: how is a form or a survey "violent"?

*Akkkademia and formal institutions of learning have always been complicated for me – complicated and traumatic. I had to drop out of formal institutions of learning in the 6th grade and enroll full-time in the skool of hard knocks. In other words, I couldn't go to school as a houseless child or me and my mama risked being separated by CPS (Child Separation Services). I began to "learn" through survival the basic struggle of staying alive. Me and my mama somos vendadores (we were vendors) in a street-based economy. We barely made enough to pay for food, much less rent. My mother was disabled and we were houseless for most of my childhood and into young adulthood. I had to study how to navigate complicated systems that actively enact multiple scarcity models to keep poor people poor and require complicated infiltration tactics to master them.

I had to teach myself law to survive the multiple courts and eviction processes we were forced to deal with. I had to learn how to access resources and I had to learn most of all how to stay alive, which for poor folks in the US and everywhere is a fulltime job.

I noticed that the agents of these systems were oftentimes, as my mama would say, people who had never missed a meal, meaning that they had never suffered and had no basis for understanding poverty scholarship, but were the people charged with criminalizing, adjudicating, and "helping" poor people, often to the poor clients' peril.

Later, after the creation of POOR Magazine and our theory of Poverty Scholarship, I began to articulate a critique of knowledge production itself and the fact that entire degree programs were built about us, without us poor and houseless *povertyskolaz, but then we were used for extraction, research, study and exploitation.

Fellowships with financial incentives and grants were built based on counting, studying, investigating, and inquiring about our lives, cultures, and experiences and yet rarely if ever do these counts, studies, and surveys include reciprocity or respect for the knowledge we have from the trauma we have survived. And they never include reparations from or solutions by the researchers themselves.

This is where *WeSearch comes in. WeSearch is poor and houseless people-led research rooted in the theory of Poverty Scholarship. WeSearch is an act of resistance to the extractive aspects of traditional research and gives agency and authorship to the "specimens": the counted, the surveyed, the questioned. Its principle aspects are messy and *CONfusing. It includes decision-making, conversating, and reparating of/with/by and for the participants of the investigation.

WeSearch is co-leadership of poor people co-investigating with fellow poor people to get some clarity or number or result that will actually benefit the people involved directly. In addition to the multiple form and acts of WeSearch, it might also mean we are helping people not lose belongings in a violent sweep of a houseless comeUnity, or helping assist someone with an emergency move before an eviction, or doing jailhouse lawyering to stop an eviction, or helping to find resources to stop a sweep, or get someone's medical services back, or launch their EBT, or drive them to their job or their doctor's appointments or the welfare office, or write them a letter of reference so they can get services or housing.

WeSearch for Homefulness

It also means utilizing, launching, or lifting up our WeSearch findings to "prove" results and that our recommended outcomes or solutions like *Homefulness, Nicklesville, and Wood Street Commons, are viable, legitimate and effective homeless peoples solutions to homelessness. This is a huge reason for WeSearch, because these comeUnity-born, poverty scholarship-informed solutions don't suffer the violence of silencing and fetishizing because they aren't launched, visioned, or conceived by so-called experts, consultants or *politricksters.

This use of WeSearch solves the centuries-old problem of poor people not being seen as legitimate agents of our own change, incapable of self-determination, liberation and problem-solving. Covered in labels such as "service resistant," difficult, lazy, broken.



Photo credit: Amanda Darouie

Research Reparations and the solutions of RiSearch

The other radical aspect of WeSearch is the loving request, the calling-in, of transparency from any housed or privileged WeSearchers, or what I have termed *RiSearchers. If housed, class-privileged comeUnity is interested in co-investigating with poor people, it means the class and cultural divides of the middle class/owning class people involved are articulated and they are asked to participate in a preliminary RiSearch investigation determining their access to hoarded resources or occupied land, and subsequently once engaged in solidarity WeSearch support, are openly asked to support the povertyskola WeSearchers with food, rent, groceries, and/or radical redistribution so we can *Mamafest solutions like Homefulness, which require the radically redistributed resources that the housed/privileged RiSearcher may have access to. And these aspects are granted as part of the cross-class, transparent and radical WeSearch project.

Quantifying poor people data

As povertyskola WeSearchers, we still quantify and crunch, we still come up with "findings," but the process and the product are rooted in love, respect, humility, and ultimately Poverty Scholarship. Here is the most recent example of a WeSearch project triggered due to the violent "clearing orders" demanded by the *politrickster known as Gavin Newsom following the Grants Pass v. Johnson ruling.

The powerful week-long "Freedom School," which happened deep in the halls of the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy, helped me clarify some of this silent violence and articulate the need for ResearchRage – a cathartic reaction to the extractive process of akkkademik research and its many intentional silences. It also helped me overstand the emergent need for the newest form of Research I visioned, RiSearch: i.e., a study of rich people and their resources and where they hide them and how they obfuscate and distract us from their continued violence of acquisition, occupying, settling and hoarding, so that they never have to reparate or radically redistribute. I also came up with a whole institute dedicated to this work: IsWHat (Institute for the Study of Wealth-Hoarding, Accumulation, and Truth).

We are in a time of so much brutal violence against houseless people's lives, bodies, and existence. A time where politricksters are openly calling for our "disappearance" from so-called public (read: settler-occupied) streets and the active and intensified abuse of our bodies if we are seen. We as poor and houseless peoples are all struggling with the violence of exposure while housed people benefit from the privilege of privacy and ultimately, we have nowhere to go…

*tinyWords like WeSearch, RiSearch, MamaFest, PoLice, GentriFUkation, Politricks come from Lisa "Tiny" Gray-Garcia, *The Sidewalk Motel: Poems and PoShunary from a Poverty Skola* (POOR Press).

Inspired by Lisa "Tiny" Gray-Garcia's essay and broader scope of poverty scholarship, Michele Lancione posed a series of questions. Here are those questions and Tiny's responses and reflections.

Can you tell us what do you mean with homefulness and how is this approach different from the dominant policy paradigms to "solve" the homelessness "problem"?

First of all I always answer this question with "I am Your Homeless Problem," and structurally the question itself supports the dominant othering and fetishizing of houseless peoples' bodies and lives as though we are a thing or a "tribe" – we are a multi-verse like housed people, with family, children, disabilities, skills, talents, hopes, dreams, traumas, and struggles. More of us on the street struggle with addiction and mental health in large part because we are on the street or at the end of the KrapitaLOST trail of tears. But to that point we also suffer what I call the violence of exposure and are not protected by what I call "the privilege of privacy." In other words, there are millions of people suffering mental health crises and substance abuse addictions who are inside, people just don't "see them" because they have access to a roof – whereas our lives are lived outside, lives and struggles and traumas are lived, judged, assessed and criminalized in the so-called public (occupied streets).

As far as Homefulness – it is a homeless/indigenous peoples solution to homelessness and has nothing to do with the colonial solutions to a problem they created – aka homelessness or poverty.

Homefulness is not just a "roof" or merely housing, because that's not what poor and houseless, traumatized, incarcerated, border-terrorized, colonized peoples need. We need what all humans need, love and comeUnity. We have been destroyed by the KrapitaLOST lie of independence, of isolation, racism, classism, depression, incarceration, and ableism. Homefulness is not housing it is healing, it is a truly abolitionist space for poor people, who are NEVER safe to live, thrive, heal, and decolonize. It is also actual housing – we are currently housing 21 houseless elders, youth, families, and babies in permanent, rent-free forever homes. Homefulness is also a land liberation movement on occupied land, with permission, spiritual guidance, and protocol from First Nations relatives on Turtle Island upon whose lands we are sitting, standing, walking, and being swept on like we are trash. Homefulness is working with First Nations relatives to spiritually and legally UnSELL mama earth and heal her and ourselves in the process from this violent colonial occupation.

Homefulness is poverty scholarship-informed, Poverty scholarship is poor people theory rooted in the lived experience of our life. That means we as poor and houseless peoples know the solutions that will work for us as we have lived through these multitudes of violence.

Politricksters create non-usable and harmful profit-making projects that are NOT solutions – so-called solutions like INside Safe (should be re-named Inside NOT Safe), where we are forcibly placed in isolation, aka jail-like motel rooms, detention center-like "tiny homes" or so-called cabins made of dangerous materials, because the goal isn't to permanently house but just to disappear us from the public eye. Hence the "clearing orders" from Newsom and Sheng Tao and so many other so-called mayors across Turtle Island.

What kind of home are you fighting for?

We are fighting for self-determiNATION, we are praying for home that doesn't mean more harmful extraction from Mama Earth's precious resources, we are fighting for our ancestor povertyskolaz and our next seven generations to come – we are fighting, praying, walking, marching, poetry-creating, dreaming, visioning, talk-story telling so that poor and houseless peoples are not swept like we are trash, we are fighting so that housed folks realize our thrival is their thrival and recognize that our struggles and resistance are enmeshed – that we don't need a savoir or a helping hand, we need what I teach called comeUnity reparations so wealth hoarding and land occupying aren't considered the norm and the models of success, and rather that home for everyone is love.

From your point of view, what is the role of the University in liberatory struggles, considering its history of colonizing all liberatory efforts? Can teaching provide paths to homefulness?

Absolutely, it is why I teach in Universities, and street corners. It is why we published the theory of poverty scholarship – it is why we poor and houseless folks launched Peopleskool's Decolonization DegentriFUKation seminar – it is not "homeless people" who are the "problem," it is the colonial myth that there isn't enough for all of us – it is the lie of so-called private property and the violence of eviction – housed people with trust funds and resources go to University and participate in sharing only as it is comfortable – Radical Sharing must be taught as an antidote to the violence of scarcity and hoarding – Homefulness is medicine for housed and houseless people and for poor and so-called rich people – Homefulenss is only made possible by the radical sharing of housed and privileged people in solidarity with poor and houseless people – Homefulness is a vision of healing against the larger systemic problem of wealth-hoarding and the disease of scarcity.

The role of University is to invite this povertyskola to teach and share, but also to recognize that lived knowledge is a valid form of knowledge, just like humility and care and eldership – not for more extractive study and survey and counting but for our own agency and our own medicine. ComeUnity reparations is emergency medicine as we live in a time where our bodies are at risk of death and we are actively bring disappeared to nowhere.



The Liberatory Politics of Land: From Los Angeles to Palestine

Jessi Quizar, Mpho Raboeane, Kareem Rabie

At Freedom School 2024, we oriented our conversation around the politics of land justice and sought to think across and between three different contexts: Detroit, South Africa, and the West Bank. Each are settler colonial contexts, bound through the common histories of land grabs, exploitation, and accumulation. And although the structural conditions, national imaginaries, and political economies differ, in all three there are the present conditions of precarity and violence.

In this essay, we share our distinctive perspectives but organize them around three issues: the production and experience of scarcity, the aspiration for home, and the conjunctural argument that "nothing has changed although everything has changed." We are inspired by the struggles of the dispossessed who continue to occupy contested spaces, refusing disposability and breaking past borders of segregation to insist on clams to the abundance of land. Indeed, in South Africa, Detroit, and Palestine, the dispossessed are undoing the settler's house to build a home for all humanity.

Jessi: My work is about Detroit, and about the ambitions that people have about land in the city—the fantasies of capital to appropriate devalued land and the struggle of longtime, mostly Black residents to remain in the city, and make/maintain homespaces based on a logic of care. I study the ways that settler logics are reiterated in and undergird land grabs in the city.

Mpho: I am part of an organization called Ndifuna Ukwazi and we are in the business of undoing. NU is an activist organization and law center that promotes spatial and social justice through providing community organizing, research and legal support, and representation to poor and working class people, communities, and social movements. We work to advance urban land justice in Cape Town through the protection and expansion of equitable access to land and affordable housing while also supporting tenants' rights and security of tenure in both private and public housing. Along with our movement partners we grapple with undoing social injustice in the hopes of finding ways to undo the settler-created house and build the African home Sobukwe once dreamt of.

Kareem: I am an anthropologist and geographer who works on issues of privatization, real estate development, and the intertwined market and state production processes in the West Bank. Here I am trying to think and re-present my research in the West Bank on state building and stabilization, in this new context of Israel and the US's genocidal violence on Palestinians in Gaza. My work, written in a different historical moment, nevertheless, I think, speaks to Israel's wider spatial strategy.

Photo credit (left): Joey Scott

Scarcity

Jessi: Detroit is a city that is known for vacancy, images of houses crumbling dramatically or blocks of open land. By a settler capitalist logic, vacancy—that is, not enough demand—means devaluation. The place is worth less. Detroit, by this logic, especially the residential parts of the city that have endured cycles of racist abandonment and divestment, is not worth much.

In 2013, a real estate investor named John Hantz, made a bid to the city to purchase 1500 lots in one square mile on the East Side of Detroit, for $350 a parcel. This amounted to $520,000 to own a quarter of the land in a neighborhood that is larger than downtown. On this land he planted trees, but the trees were a side point. His main point was to raise property values. A 2010 Fortune article painted an especially vivid picture: "One day Hantz had a revelation. 'We need scarcity,' he thought to himself as he drove past block after unoccupied block. 'We can't create opportunities, but we can create scarcity.'"

The thing that most stood in the way of Hantz's dream to make land in Detroit profitable was that there was so much of it—it was devalued in a capitalist sense. And because of this, exclusive property rights to it were not widely enforced either by the state or by the owners. The challenge then, for a John Hantz, was one of redefinition as well as possession. The land needed to be redefined from claimable through a logic of care for the land to claimable only through a system of capitalist property. And, of course, the reason to do this, was possession.

Hantz's solution then, was to create land scarcity—because, as he told the documentary *Land Grab*, "for something to be valuable it must be scarce."

These premises about land value (as capital) and property (as the only system for legitimate land claims) only makes sense if one is actually deeply disconnected from land, and therefore from the ways that one can be rooted in land, claim land, be in relation to land.

Mpho: "Awaking on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth…"- Sol Plaatjie (1916)

In a land-abundant economy where capital is minimal, the most important source of economic wealth and political power is control over labor. This was well understood by Cecil John Rhodes in the 1800s when he introduced legislation designed to set a pattern of African land ownership throughout the Cape African reserves, outlawing communal tenure and imposing taxes that destroyed self-sufficient communities in order to create cheap labor pools for aspirant capital. In furthering the colonial project of extraction and extermination, apartheid relegated Black people to relocation camps and labor reserves, sorting Black bodies in terms of their utility as labor and banishing any "superfluous appendages" to so-called "bantustans": fictitious homelands to be regarded as independent states on the 13% of land available for Black ownership, per the1913 Land Act. Underdeveloped and riddled with poverty, the homelands were where people were sent to die.

We cannot forget that forced removal and legislated land theft are the basis of apartheid spatial geography today: a geography premised on keeping the majority out. Out of opportunity, out of dignity, out of a right to life. The vastness of Africa, Southern Africa, and her riches, when juxtaposed against the endemic poverty of the majority Black population, the inequality, and the lack of growth and opportunity, very much by design, starkly characterizes the line between two worlds. As a result the socially excluded and racially dehumanized remain banished to the "other side" of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos terms the "abyssal line." The abyssal line divides historically colonized worlds into beings and non-beings. Non-beings suffer unremitting dehumanization and social invisibility.

We are in the midst of a profound land and housing crisis. There is more visible homelessness today than at any other point in the history of our democracy. There are also far more informal settlements, which have grown in number to over 4000 today. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of South Africans live with no real tenure security. In the City of Cape Town alone, over 360,000 people wait on an obscure waiting list for state subsidized housing with 76% of the population unable to afford a home. City stock is being sold off while there has been no affordable housing built in the inner city of Cape Town since 1994. In the urban areas, the apartheid-era relocation

camps have become overcrowded, dense concentration camps, where the spatial form specifically for confinement and surveillance encourages little to no community growth, safety, or development. The Black memory of home and inheritance is a forty meter squared structure of low-grade clay brick, corrugated or asbestos roofing, and four windows. The expanses of the suburbs and farmlands are unattainable, exclusively available to those of means (and who more often than not, have built their wealth through legislated theft and racial segregation). The scale of landlessness and homelessness in South Africa remains significantly unchanged. 72% of arable farmland is held privately by whites, although they are a mere 7% of the population. About 60% of South Africans are without secure tenure, and while the state is still the largest landholder, particularly valuable state land is auctioned off to the highest bidder. Opportunities for social housing projects in gentrified areas of Cape Town held the promise of return for many descendants of forcefully removed families, but vested interests in the inflated property market have funded political intervention to scupper spatial transformation. Apartheid-era Group Areas boundary lines are redrawn and reinforced, with Black settlements furthest from the city center and mixed populations creating a buffer zone across the arid, gang-infested Cape Flats. The manufactured scarcity of land for housing in well-located areas across South Africa is thus not merely a question of physical space but a symptom of enduring structural inequalities. Addressing this scarcity requires confronting the legacy of dispossession, reimagining land ownership models, and prioritizing the social function of land and equitable access to it as a fundamental human right.

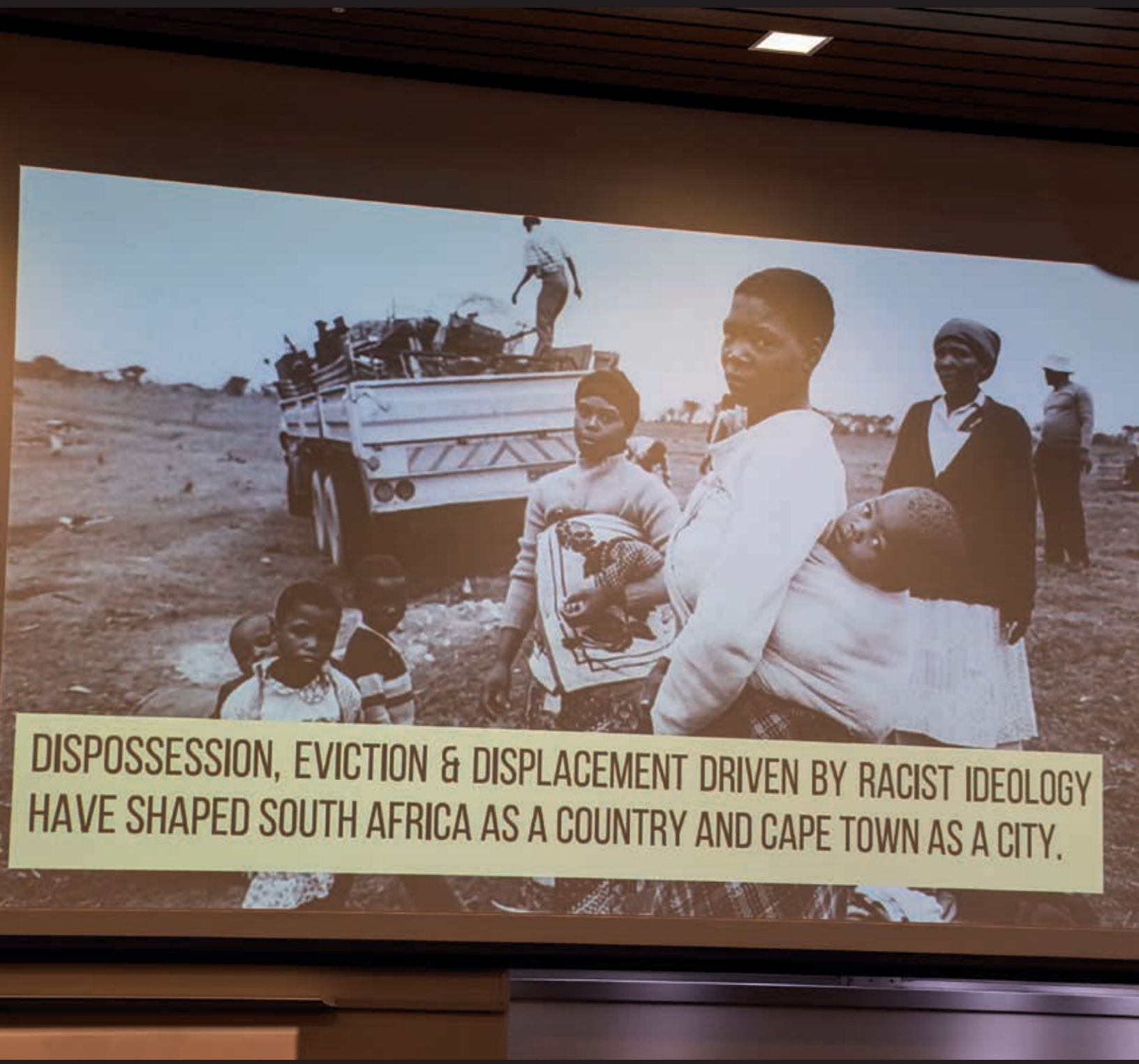
Kareem: Just as in Mpho and Jessi's contexts, the Palestinian case has been characterized by many forms of the production of scarcity. In Palestine, most of them are quite obvious, and related to Israel's long work to consolidate Palestinian populations, land, and possibility with such numerous and varied techniques as urban planning, the peace process, deprivation, walls, air strikes, and genocidal state violence. I studied a moment when, faced with the consequences of decades of Israeli spatial strategy, settler colonial and otherwise, the stratification in the West Bank and around Ramallah has created it as the object for some kind of stabilization process; I studied a new town development project that is supposedly going to house 40,000 "middle class" Palestinians at a cost of probably $1 billion, mostly from the sovereign wealth fund of Qatar. Through that process, through the build-up of certain kinds of housing and potential in certain kinds of places, instability is distributed elsewhere and downward. An important question here is how to think about what is general about capital and housing versus what is particular about the state forms we are in and talking through. In all cases, we can see the role of the state in housing, most notably facilitating the work of landlords and accumulation. This includes mobilizing state violence in that support, through policing, evictions, and so on. In other words, the scarcity of land and housing is actively produced through state violence, and abundance is redistributed along certain lines such as race, class, capacity. In South Africa, Detroit, and Palestine, it seems clear that the act of settler colonization has been incorporated into the form of state. And in all cases, settler colonial geographies and imperatives are fundamental to securing the land, on a productive or national basis for capital accumulation and circulation.

Ambition / Aspiration

Jessi: One of the things I love about Detroit is that there are many possible competing land relationships at any given moment, that, given the chance, might surface and take hold.

Detroit has also long been a land framed by ambitions—for wealth, yes, but for many of the workers who came to the city seeking financial security, it was a question of survival. It is also a place which contains Black people's searches for home and safety, refuge from the violence of a Jim Crow South, security from systems of land debt and sharecropping, political freedom, community-making, and culture-building. The ambitions (which are conceived complicatedly in the context of a settler city) of Black Detroiters, who are the vast majority of those who live in the city, are frequently in opposition to the settler and capitalist logics of land, property, and what it means to belong to a place.

In Detroit's current context – a tremendous amount of semi-unclaimed land with relatively little attention from the regulatory gaze of capital – other-than-property systems of relating to land have had space and opportunity to emerge. Remaining residents, most of them Black and working class, developed strategies to deal with, claim, and creatively use the land that surrounded them. Instead of basing these strategies on the logic of capital, with its bureaucratic designations and logic of exclusion, other-than-property systems are often based on a logic of care. That is, there are clear, well-developed grassroots systems in the city for claiming land based on how one cares for it, what kinds of caring and relational work is done on it, and the well-being of the people that live on it. These include caring relationships to place like mowing and watching over, cultivating gardens and farms, or creating places for play, places for parties, and


DISPOSSESSION, EVICTION & DISPLACEMENT DRIVEN BY RACIST IDEOLOGY
HAVE SHAPED SOUTH AFRICA AS A COUNTRY AND CAPE TOWN AS A CITY.

places for art. These are bottom-up ambitions, at the lived human level—as most people's ambitions are. They are ambitions for well-being, for safety, for building meaningful lives and relationships, for joy—even as predatory investment asserts its form of ambition as the only one possible.

Mpho: I suspect we are not talking about urban land reform and redistribution sufficiently because of the explosive potential such transformation has. It would effectively upend our economy as we know it. For us to be free, capital as we know it must die.

In seeking spatial justice, we must rectify the deep severances from our land. This starts with remembering and re-membering. In this moment, not only are we fighting to realize positive rights, such as land reform and redistribution, but also guarding against the erosion of constitutional entitlements and protections for the descendants of the dispossessed. We need equitable access to land – not as an empty constitutional imperative but as a means for our nation to heal. Our collective memory is informed by structural violence and lack – but for us to shake off endemic poverty as a Black South African's birthright, we must resolutely facilitate equitable access to the abundance of the country, her land.

"Without healing our divided cities, without deracializing the terms of access to land, without a national effort with strong participation on the ground to overcome the enormous inequalities created by apartheid, a new nation can never emerge"

– Albie Sachs, (1992).

Kareem: In the historical moment in Palestine that I was doing research, I was seeing people beginning to express aspiration for home, aspiration for land, in new ways, as developers and their allies in the Palestinian Authority government and Israel began offering opportunities to access housing through mortgages and debt. So the banks and the state and the developers were giving them the context for stability, within what I think of as wider stabilization measures. Jessi has emphasized the context and study of settler colonialism. For me, much of Zionist imperative is predicated on erasure, both physical and in terms of making it impossible to live as an indigenous person. Patrick Wolfe was taken up in a lot of ham-handed ways in Palestine studies, but it's worth keeping clear that he was responding to an argument within genocide studies and proposed "eliminationist logic" as a way to understand the complex agglomeration of forces operating at the level of the Israeli state and polity. That logic brings with it new contexts and possibilities to disaggregate Palestinians from their land and lifeworlds; either through murder, disablement, destruction; or by attaching them elsewhere. His most-cited piece was really explicitly about the relationship between settler colonialism and genocide and genocidal violence. And he was making a claim that genocidal violence is always there as a possibility. There are moments of it, it comes in and out, and we've seen it in all sorts of colonies and settler-colonial situations.

But settler colonialism also relies on other techniques: that could mean assimilation, it could be reservations, it could be policing, it could be all sorts of things. And settler colonialism is absorbed into the structure of the state. Today, we see it as genocide. But the outcome of the erasure, and the territorial imperatives, are consistent over time. It's that piece, the part that comes alongside the genocide piece, that becomes an opening for people in power to make change. In the case that I studied, it was developers and bureaucrats. During our Freedom School panel, Priya Kunjan put it this way: "what happens when the forms or structures of aspiration have been totally captured by capital"? That easy slippage between capital and aspiration, growth and exploitation, homelife and genocide is the core problem here. This is something Neil Smith wrote about ages ago: there is, despite everything, a universalism embedded in the empire of capital. So it's no mystery that at the time I was doing research, in the place that I could go, that stabilization through state-scale governance was evident.

Photo credit (left): Anthony Orendorff

Nothing has changed although everything has changed

Jessi: Colonization, like property itself, rather than a thing is an ongoing process, reiterated through constant doing. Investors like Hantz rely on the ongoingness of colonial logics to make sensible the kind of land grabs that they attempt today. How else would it make sense to claim land for the purpose of creating scarcity? This kind of ambition requires a colonial logic of land as abstracted from relationship, and that one of the primary purposes of claiming land is to deny others access or relationship to it.

More generally, land in Detroit is often described by investors as a blank slate, a terra nullius onto which ambitious people (read: new settlers) may paint their dreams. It's an old image, one that has gone through a number of iterations. French traders looking to build an empire on beaver pelts caught through a system of Native debt. A burgeoning United States bent on westward expansion. Ford. And now, investors like sub-prime lending mogul Dan Gilbert and real estate investor John Hantz, who extoll Detroit as a land of opportunity for a new investor class.

Mpho: In South Africa, as elsewhere in the colonized world, the unjust wars of colonization solidified and eventually ensured that the right of conquest was constitutionalized. Borrowing from legal academic Tshepo Madlingozi, only an "authentic constitution" would terminate this putative right of conquest. 1994 bore some promise of change as the heart of the land question became the reversal of dispossession and large-scale redistribution of land to the transform the economy and the reduce of urban and rural poverty. This is the promise of Section 25 of the constitution. Unfortunately these questions of reversal and transformation have not developed substantially beyond rhetoric and political machinations. This is because our government has been complicit in protecting and furthering the settler colonial project. What we see is that white South Africans are reconstituting and reconfiguring the abyssal line, together with the Black ruling class. These neo-colonial rulers are invested in apartheid geographies: keeping the poor away from themselves and the most valuable land.

In a highly unequal society, where a white household's average income is three times higher than that of a Black household, access to housing finance remains unequal and racialized. Second, historical practices of redlining characterize the South African housing market.

Huchzermeyer et. al. (2019) state that South African urban land reform is burdened by high levels of wealth inequality, with "at least half" of South Africa's wealth estimated to be owned by "one percent of South Africans," and 90% to 95% owned by the wealthiest 10%. This is compounded by the fact that such wealth is partly vested in urban real estate, which ties the fate of urban land directly to the functioning of an important part of the economy. In the meantime, the government owns hundreds of thousands of hectares of vacant an underutilized land, and buildings sitting idle, that could be used to meaningfully address our crises. Given the scale and intensity of the issues we face, it is high time that the government provides land directly to people who need it. Therefore we see the act of occupation as redistribution by the people where the state continues to fail.

Kareem: I think what's scary about the current moment is that overt systematic violence and murder part are visible, explicit goals again. And for Israel, the US, Europe, etc., the violence is really quite tolerable. The system has changed, has a distribution, has an intensity, but at the scale of state violence, the ideology and the outcomes are constant. So I think it is appropriate to say that in this case, ownership and aspiration are techniques of fascist state ideology and the outcomes, or the supposed outcomes or desired outcomes, with respect to the Palestinian people, remain the constant. So, there are elite Palestinians who are able to benefit within that context, to accommodate and/or to get rich and/or to reframe nationalism. And they're doing it not by confrontation but by presenting an alternative, one that is individual and based on class aspiration. In this present moment, are we witnessing a shift, as Darryl Li put it to me recently in conversation, "from apartheid to elimination"? Maybe. There are many open questions right now, and nothing seems as important as working to stop Israel and the US from carrying out genocide on Palestinians in Gaza. But the point remains that at the most general geographic and, I don't know, ideological scale, Mpho's formulation and Jessi's explication are helpful here: "nothing has changed although everything has changed." I was thinking about this in light of Israel's brazen attack on Lebanon through its telecommunications network and consumer products. We are consistently shocked but unsurprised. Israel has killed at least 40,000, probably as high as ten times that number if we account for infrastructural destruction, health conditions, and the numbers of people who are missing. The contours of the current horror and deprivation can be seen in the historical maps and plans whether it's in Palestine, bantustans, or red lines. Housing in all of these cases is both a target and an object of aspiration, a central attribute of land struggle, and it appears different ways given the different relative balances of shared characteristics—capital state/nexus, militarized violence, and capacity to fight.

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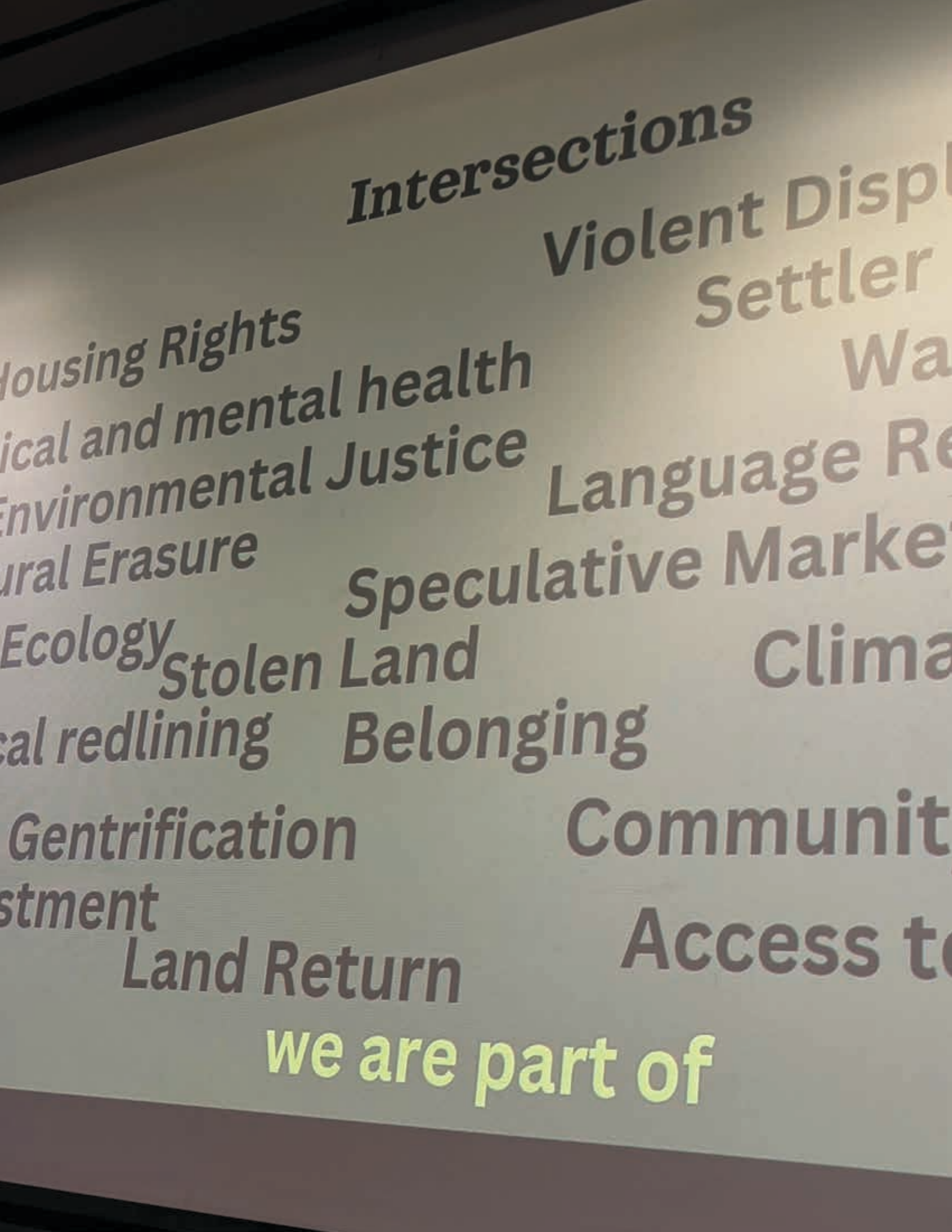
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Towards Research Justice

Priya Kunjan and Line Algoed

Traversing the fraught terrain of social research

In this moment of accelerating global crises, what does it mean to be a researcher? What are the principles and practices of research justice that reject colonial-racial logics of dispossession and knowledge extractivism? These were central questions posed during the Freedom School, prompting auto-critical reflections on the responsibilities of researchers today. The questions were framed in relation to the ongoing work of the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy and its insurgent research collectives, which strive to accompany movements and communities on the frontlines of dispossession and displacement in Los Angeles and beyond. This essay explores these opening questions, drawing from the experiences of two scholars: one based in the settler-colonial city of Melbourne on the unceded territory of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung Peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation, and the other in Brussels, the European capital whose legacy of brutal colonial rule in Central Africa—heavily supported by academic institutions—persists today. Through our situated perspectives, we explore how researchers based in institutions that perpetuate colonial-racial logics of displacement and dispossession can engage in practices that prioritize accountability, reciprocity, and international solidarity. We are especially attentive to the contradictions in this practice and how it is both difficult and necessary to maintain a principled commitment to research justice. Rather than putting forward a blueprint for action, we emphasize the importance of ongoing reflexive and movement-engaged practice.

Priya Kunjan is a postdoctoral researcher at a public university and a community radio broadcaster living and working as a settler in Melbourne. Their current work interrogates land and housing in/justice in the greater Melbourne area, where they bring to bear prior academic and non-academic attempts to grapple with Australian settler colonialism on the housing question. This research is a collaborative project with fellow settler scholars Professor Libby Porter and Dr. David Kelly that focuses critical attention on the modalities through which Melbourne's declared housing crisis are lived, and on the conditions driving precarious dwelling in this place. In their work, apprehending the longue durée of settler colonialism has meant maintaining a critical attention to the creation of land as settler property through theft, and how this theft-as-property undergirds myriad forms of contemporary dwelling insecurity (Nichols 2020). This has always been more than a mere intellectual exercise, though for Priya the process of figuring out how best to practice solidarity with both First Nations Peoples struggling against ongoing colonialism and non-Indigenous precariously housed community

Photo credit (left): Terra Graziani

members while working full time as a middle-class academic has been challenging. Through the course of their contract, Priya has built relationships with tenant organizers across public and private rental tenures, as well as with public housing residents and community sector workers agitating for change. However, they have found it increasingly difficult to balance the vastly different temporal (scale and duration) demands of conventional academic research and material practices of solidarity with people in crisis. Often, it feels like they are failing on both counts.

Line Algoed's doctoral research, initiated in September 2017 and concluded in September 2024, focuses on two Caribbean communities profoundly impacted by the catastrophic 2017 hurricane season. These communities—one urban, the other rural—operate under distinct communal land tenure systems, both of which play a crucial role in their response to these not-so-natural disasters (Cruz Martinez et al. 2018). The first community comprises thousands of residents in the Caño Martín Peña neighborhoods of Puerto Rico, a densely populated, self-built urban area that established the Caño Martín Peña Community Land Trust (Caño CLT) in the early 2000s. Line worked closely with the Martín Peña communities prior to starting her doctoral research. The second is the small, rural island of Barbuda, whose communal tenure system has persisted for centuries. Both communities situate their experiences of the devastating hurricanes within broader colonial histories of land as private property. In the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, they continue to defend their collective land rights as critical for their survival, particularly in the face of climate change. Due to the urgency of the circumstances and Line's previous involvement with these communities, her research took the form of collaborative, engaged scholarship, grounded in decolonial feminist action research. Her approach to research justice described in this essay is also set out in her doctoral thesis (Algoed 2024).

Line and Priya met in July 2024 at the University of California, Los Angeles, uninvited visitors on occupied Gabrielino-Tongva land. Paired as interlocutors for a session of Freedom School 2024 on "research justice" led by Ananya Roy and Carla Orendorff, researchers at the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy. We used spare moments between curriculum activities to talk about what this term might mean to us individually, and to explore how we could approach talking about it together. Much of this initial reflection focused on questions of positionality and researcher subjectivity as we grappled with our discomfort with the ways that class, race, citizenship and other privileges situate us vis-à-vis our fields of study. Through our conversations, however, we came to recognize we shared an understanding that any discussion of what "research justice" *could* be had to depart from merely a static accounting of our own identity markers and a basic sketch of power relations.

The presentation given during the Freedom School by Ananya and Carla on their work with unhoused community members at Echo Park Lake and Aetna Street brought the affective dimension of "research justice" to the fore. Through images and narrative, they immersed us in the hope, heartbreak, and struggle that necessarily accompanies all attempts to make the world radically otherwise. Ananya and Carla's reflections covered the messy process of thinking, researching, and organizing across power differentials, which necessarily translated into vastly different proximities to both state and non-state violence (see Roy and Rosenstock 2021; Roy et al. 2022). What does it mean to engage in research when your collaborators can and do lose their lives in the struggle? In what ways does research bear witness to this violence but also refuse the limits imposed by such violence? What is the role of research and scholarship when communities face disorganization and disappearance? What is owed by the land-grab university to unhoused communities? These questions and the provocations Ananya and Carla raised during their talk are fresh in our minds as we tentatively embark on our attempt to come to terms with "research justice."

We began by situating ourselves spatially, personally, professionally, and relationally to contextualize how it is that we come to reflect on this notion of "research justice" in conversation. We do this even while acknowledging the self-serving nature of statements of positionality presented as proforma appeals to absolution from guilt and responsibility associated with the privileges of western academia (Gani and Khan 2024). We do this because we believe that the spatial and relational contingencies enabling this collaboration and the positions from which we speak should matter to our audiences when deciding whether to engage with the thinking we share. We cannot presume to know who will choose to read this piece, but we note that musings on ethics from within the violent apparatus of the ivory tower may have little practical relevance to you. Part of an attempt to resist bluntly wielding the epistemic authority with which we are empowered is to remind you, reader, that you can put this piece down. You are not obliged to listen to us.

Uneasy as our relationships may be with academia in general and to the specific institutions with which we are affiliated, we must nonetheless accept the responsibility of accounting for our attempts to grapple with "research justice" from these positions. This is

particularly so given that we claim to be committed to contributing our labor toward creating conditions of possibility for the unfolding of truly liberatory futures beyond colonialism, imperialism, anti-Blackness, and their attendant violences. Such a reckoning is an ethical obligation for those of us who are positioned as beneficiaries of historical and contemporary colonialism (both authors), and who have chosen, in this time of accelerating planetary crises, to pursue careers as professional knowledge workers.

We agree with Grande's (2018, 171, emphasis added) "theorization of the academy as *an arm of the settler state* – a site where the logics of elimination, capital accumulation, and dispossession are constituted – which is distinct from other frameworks that critique the academy as fundamentally neoliberal, Eurocentric, and/or patriarchal." Working from this understanding requires a comprehensive justification for attempts to engage from *within* academia with people and communities (acknowledging here academia's reification of the term "community") who are subjected to violence, traumatization, suffering, and land theft by the same logics that codify the epistemic authority of the university. It obliges us to lean into the collaborative identification of strategies and tactics oriented towards liberation, rather than assuming that academics' intellectual labor and conditional access to resources and space are beneficial by default.

We are also guided by Gilmore's (2022) reflection on the place of method with respect to research as "a script for enlivening some future possibility – an experiment." Thinking of method in this sense informs our engagement with "research justice" as a flexible but principled orientation guiding both the process of scripting and its material unfolding towards liberatory future possibilities. Implementing this ethos requires working against the predatory and proprietary imperatives of the ivory tower. These demands have only intensified through the neoliberal turn's push for research "impact," including through an increasing proliferation of tokenistic research engagements with marginalized communities.

These reflections suggest that for the term "research justice" to characterize something truly transformative, it must be engaged processually. Through our conversations, we have decided to present a non-exhaustive collection of ethical considerations and/as material practices that have arisen in our attempts to grapple with the potential and pitfalls of research: knowledge politics, process, reciprocity and accountability, and confronting contradictions. These elements help us to grapple with "research justice" as a relational unfolding, an orientation rather than a destination.

Knowledge politics

Priya: Why do we *do* research on matters of social injustice? Laden as it is with conceptual baggage and legacies of violent extractivism, why do we continue to maintain a cautious claim to research's relevance to social justice? I want to clarify that while in this piece we retain part of standard definitions of research as a detailed and methodical inquiry on a specific issue, the term must be conceptually disaggregated from the scientism that has hampered its relevance to insurgent social transformation. This means recognizing the importance of research as a tool for critical inquiry to come to grips with the myriad violences of late capitalism while, per Gilmore (2022), maintaining a principled resistance to the privatization of intellectual endeavors and their separation from organizing. What follows is far from a novel set of reflections on the politics of knowledge production, and has been informed by a diverse group of thinkers including Berenstain et al. (2022), Gilmore (2022), James (1996), Moreton-Robinson (2012), Smith (1999), and Tuck and Yang (2012, 2014).

In the opening pages of *Resisting State Violence*, James (1996, 4) states that the book's project "rejects the projection of detached thinking as 'subversive' – a projection that obscures the conservative tendencies of elitist theory as well as its creative plasticity in masking acquiescence to hierarchies." I was encouraged to read *Resisting State Violence* in the early days of my doctoral studies by a dear friend and abolitionist movement stalwart, and James' introductory paragraphs on the counterrevolutionary work of academic elitism and abstract theory have stayed with me ever since. Her pithy critique targets the valorization of knowledge work divorced from collective struggle and from "concrete political battles" (James 1996, 4). In the absence of this engagement with liberation movements, where "the intellectual-interrogator takes precedence over the activist-intellectual" (James 1996, 3), we risk losing sight of the necessity of political *involvement* as a core component of robust political critique. As such, James' writing prompts me to think carefully about the epistemic politics of contemporary social research—including my own—that seeks to claim some relationship to movement work for radical social transformation.

Complementary to the abstraction James has identified, research as a knowledge intervention is normatively geared towards reproducing "academic expertise." This is a frequently paradoxical term when applied to situations of social in/justice, given the singular, rarefied status of the "expert" as compared to the collective physical and intellectual labor required for transformative political practice. Additionally, as contemporary social researchers working within Western neoliberal academia, we are constantly pressured to adopt an entrepreneurial orientation towards research. This predatory and proprietary demand has only intensified through the neoliberal turn's push for demonstrable research "impact," including through an increasing proliferation of tokenistic research engagements with marginalized communities. Writing on the perils of damage-focused research, Tuck and Yang (2014, 813) identify that "the academy's unrelenting need to produce 'original research' is what makes inquiry an invading structure, not an event." In our work as knowledge producers, resisting "expertise" thus demands that we attend to the social, political, and material capital we stand to accrue when we position ourselves not just as distant but as individually and uniquely competent knowers (Gilmore 2022).

Troubling the positioning of academics as fly-in, fly-out experts in spaces of liberatory struggle requires recognizing and working against our already-existing relations of complicity in upholding epistemic and material oppressions (see Dotson 2014). This in no small part compels us to resist the frequently invasive modes of knowing that characterize "academic expertise" and the epistemic power it relies on and reproduces (Berenstain et al. 2022; Dotson 2014, 2018). In crafting processes of inquiry, this suggests a rejection of the normative "ethical justification for research," which Tuck and Yang (2014, 242) have elsewhere identified as "defensive and self-encircling—its apparent self-criticism serves to expand its own rights to know, and to defend its violations in the name of 'good science.'" As Line elaborates below, grappling with this self-assessed right to know is more than simply deploying critical reflexivity, but rather making a genuine commitment to relational accountability with people struggling against oppression.

Working against "expertise" also demands a critical interrogation of our theories of change in research. Our training as social science researchers not only teaches us to see ourselves as epistemic authorities, but often leads us to understand the work we do as inherently transformative by virtue of its mere *interest* in issues of social injustice. Here, it is worth turning to Tuck and Yang's (2014, 236) reminder that "the hidden theory of change in the metanarrative of social science research is that research itself leads to change." However, it should be clear by now, especially to those of us who have been stuck in the loop of revealing the consequences of structural oppression, that research on its own does not transform these conditions. How many of us have spent time in our work meticulously documenting experiences of racism, discrimination on the basis of gender and/or sexuality, ableism, further vulnerabilization of climate survivors, anti-poor and anti-homeless violences in academic publications, reports, state and independent inquiry submissions, media engagements, only to have these empirical records dismissed and ignored, to the primary detriment of already marginalized people?

What many of us have seen in our own work, myself included, is that a revelatory approach to social injustices is neither necessary *nor* sufficient to transform systems of violence. On the contrary, research-as-revelation is often irrelevant when it comes to attempting to convince decision-makers about the ways that marginalized people are harmed, traumatized, surveilled, violated, and unhomed (Tuck and Yang 2014, 236). If those with whom we claim to work in solidarity ask, "what is the point of this research?" or "what will research do for us?," can we provide a satisfactory answer? What are our responsibilities as knowledge workers who care about dismantling systems of violence beyond the black-letter requirements of institutional ethics review to support the crafting of genuinely transformative research projects (see Tuck and Guishard 2013)? "Research justice" guides us to work in ways that go beyond just "raising awareness," which Pohlhaus (2020, 249) emphasizes "does not actually end violence." Who do we presume is lacking in awareness anyway?

Finally, I want to attend to the ratcheting effect of the relationship between the production of knowledge as a commodity and our professionalization within the academy. As Harney and Moten (2013, 34) warn, the professionalization of criticality does not necessarily lead to the application of expanded technical "competencies to more radical ends." This cautionary assessment of the domestication of critique in contemporary academia is complementary to Gilmore's (2022) analysis of the "how" of "oppositional [intellectual] work." Against the reformist tendencies of professionalized "careerist, particularist, and luxe modes" of critical intellectual labor, Gilmore identifies the vital necessity of public and politically committed intellectual practice. The cultivation of radical sensibilities associated with Harney and Moten's (2013, 26) "subversive intellectual" and Gilmore's (2022) "organic praxis" requires both a concerted disloyalty to the academy and a reintegration of individual experts/private intellectuals into collective theoretical endeavors borne out of active political struggle. As I continue to grapple with what it means to work in academia, I engage with these imperatives as guiding principles.

Prioritizing research process over outcome

Line: When I began my doctoral studies on September 1, 2017, my research focused on the resistance, through communal land ownership, of the Martín Peña communities in Puerto Rico against gentrification in self-built neighborhoods. However, my plans abruptly shifted just days later as Hurricane Irma ravaged the Caribbean, followed by the even more devastating Hurricane Maria two weeks later. These disasters fundamentally transformed the region to which I had grown deeply connected, prompting me to shift my research toward a more urgent issue: how did communal land help these communities protect themselves against climate change? Due to the urgency of the situation in which the communities found themselves, this research became an active, reciprocal collaboration with these communities at its core. The affected communities were not passive subjects of study but active partners, shaping the research process and outcomes. Together, we forged networks of solidarity, organizing community-to-community exchanges that connected climate vulnerabilized groups across the world and fueled international alliances. As a feminist researcher, I sought to speak *with* these communities, not *for* them, embodying the ethos of *acompañamiento*—walking alongside them, in solidarity, as is often expressed in the social sciences of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

The research process was long and messy, and any academic endeavor to write it down will fall short of fully capturing its depth and complexities. For me, the process of doing research—making spaces for knowledge exchange, mobilizing action, and fostering solidarity—was more significant than the eventual academic product such as the dissertation or peer reviewed articles. This approach aligns with Participatory Action Research (PAR), which centers the participation and leadership of the communities being studied, prioritizing their needs and working toward collective emancipation (Cornish et al., 2023).

I termed my approach "Insurgent Participatory Action Research (Insurgent PAR)," drawing inspiration from Adam Gaudry's exploration of "insurgent research." Gaudry highlights how insurgent researchers prioritize their accountability to the communities they work with, rather than to academic institutions. Insurgent research actively challenges colonial and oppressive structures, holding researchers responsible for ensuring that they do not misrepresent or exploit the communities they study. Instead, such research must actively contribute to their ongoing struggles (Gaudry 2011). I have argued that while not all PAR is inherently insurgent, all research committed to decolonization, particularly when engaging vulnerabilized and oppressed communities, must involve PAR, engaging these communities at every stage—from formulating questions to designing fieldwork, organizing activities, analyzing findings, and writing. Without this level of community involvement, research risks remaining extractive, serving academia and not the communities themselves.

Reciprocity and accountability

Line: Feminist research methodologies provide essential epistemological frameworks for engaged scholarship, especially in advancing research justice. A critical step toward achieving this is moving away from the traditional pursuit of objectivity and neutrality in research, which, as feminist scholars argue, can be misleading and dishonest. Donna Haraway (1988, 589), for instance, challenges the notion of detached, "unlocatable" knowledge claims. She advocates for knowledge that is always "situated and embodied," emphasizing the importance of understanding knowledge as emerging from specific, complex, and contradictory positions. Haraway critiques the conventional view of objectivity as a "view from above, from nowhere," arguing that such a stance masks a very particular perspective—often male, white, heterosexual and heteronormative, and human—falsely presenting it as universal (Rogowska-Stangret 2018). Haraway refers to this disembodied objectivity as the "god trick," an ideological mechanism that legitimizes oppressive, masculinist knowledge production by invalidating alternative perspectives (Rogowska-Stangret 2018). In contrast, feminist researchers prioritize "the vantage points of the subjugated," Haraway asserts, as "vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful" (1988, 583). In my own research, I deliberately adopt this feminist, locatable "view from below," aligning myself fully with the struggle to defend communal land rights.

Sherry Ortner (2019), in her discussion of "the engaged turn" in research, extends this critique by highlighting how feminist researchers go beyond traditional academic critique to embrace a more embodied and affective scholarship. Engaged scholarship, according to Ortner, must make space for "affect"—the emotional dimensions of research that are integral to fully understanding the complexities of

the topics studied. My research, centered on land and survival, reflects this approach. The communities with whom I work are fighting for their lives, and addressing their struggles solely through rational, detached analysis would be insufficient. The inclusion of emotional realities—our anger, sadness, frustration, passion, hope, joy, and love—is essential to fully comprehending their experiences.

In my work I recognize that I cannot approach my research as a neutral, detached observer. My body and emotions are not tools I can reset every time I "enter the field." Ortner contends that adopting an engaged feminist stance does not compromise core scientific principles such as accuracy, evidentiary rigor, or truth. On the contrary, it demands that researchers openly acknowledge their emotional, personal, and political investments, rather than concealing them behind a façade of neutrality. This transparency fosters trust—an essential element in collaborative research (like in any other type of human interaction) and in working towards research justice—and ultimately leads to richer, more intimate insights. By embracing subjectivity and affect, engaged researchers can produce work that is both rigorous and deeply attuned to the lived experiences of the communities with whom they collaborate.

Confronting contradictions

Line: Adopting an engaged stance that actively pursues research justice requires confronting the inherent contradictions in my positionality throughout the research process. Feminist scholars highlight that research inevitably reflects micro power relations, which are often entangled within the very systems we seek to transform (Mora 2017, 48). As a white, able-bodied, middle-class woman affiliated with a European university, I am deeply aware of these contradictions and the power dynamics they create. My ability to travel repeatedly to the Caribbean, funded by a European salary and research grants, is a privilege that cannot be ignored. To confront this contradiction, I have positioned this study as part of international solidarity work, recognizing that it is only through internationalism that we will be able to tackle some of today's biggest crises.

Research justice, at its core, is about avoiding "epistemic extractivism." The communities with whom I work were always clear in their rejection of this extractive practice, criticizing those who come to study their community processes only to claim the knowledge as their own. Linda Tuhiwai Smith captures this phenomenon in her seminal work *Decolonizing Methodologies* with the subtitle "They Came, They Saw, They Named, They Claimed" (1999, 80). She highlights the Western tendency to assert ownership over knowledge production and the research process itself, often disregarding the need for reciprocity (Smith 1999, 176). A powerful example of this critique comes from a member of a Mapuche community, who posted on Facebook, denouncing the practice of epistemic extractivism and calling for a more politically engaged scholarship. They condemned those who study the lives of the Mapuche, and other Indigenous peoples, without maintaining any real commitment to their ongoing struggles. Here is our translation of their words:

"Against those who fatten libraries and build knowledge that remains locked in the bubble of the academy. Against all those who have no political commitment to our people who are fighting. What do I do with your thesis, what do I do with your paper when the [police] come to pave me, when they jail me for defending my mapu?"

Despite being acutely aware of these tensions and historical complexities, I engaged in the collection of knowledge to bring it back to Europe and publish it under my name, even if co-authored with people from the communities or region. This trajectory brought me to a path to promotion in the academic world (even though a Ph.D. is by no means a guarantee for employment in academia). Therefore, I conducted this research with a profound sense of humility, recognizing and acknowledging the power differences at play. Eager to listen and learn, I addressed these dynamics with the intention of fostering a genuine knowledge exchange. My research argued for a shift not only towards non-extractive ways of relating to land but also towards non-extractive methods of conducting research. Addressing the complexities and contradictions that arise in this process, I argue for meaningful action beyond critique—developing an alternative research path grounded in the knowledges and leadership of the communities at the heart of my research, to whom this work remains accountable.

Priya: By now, it should be clear to readers that notwithstanding the various reservations about academia canvassed throughout this piece, I still work as an academic researcher, at least for now. Why is this so? On reflection, the answer lands somewhere between contractual obligation and cautious hope. Speaking honestly, "research justice" as a term is not one that I would have chosen to describe my ideal ethical approach to critical inquiry. Nonetheless, it has been a valuable, clarifying provocation on which to gnaw in the midst of weighing early career academic employment insecurity alongside a suite of political commitments that this job cannot and should not accommodate. Both by desire and by circumstance, I have one foot out the door. But when I am told that my ability to share anonymous critiques of state violence via the public platform I am afforded as an academic "expert" provides the safest avenue for an interviewee to express these concerns, I pause. When I am able to direct my labor towards movement-directed research "homework," as Ananya has put it, I pause. When I am able to support student researchers thinking through ethical and methodological concerns in their own work, I pause. While I still struggle to convincingly identify my purpose within the university, perhaps there is *something* to my being a researcher after all. Whatever it is, I cannot answer what that something is alone.

Tuck (2018, 151) teaches us that "when we bring the settler colonial roots of the academy to the forefront, we can also speak realistically about the futurities it can entertain." We contend that any discussion of "research justice" must grapple with the work that universities do in the world, as well as the compromises we accept to maintain a connection to them. It must also include critical attention to the compromises and violences with which we burden those outside of the academy, even as we aim to engage in research and teaching as practices of solidarity. It must acknowledge with humility both the limits of our wisdom as researchers and the limits of academic research's transformative potential (Tuck and Guishard 2013, 19). In this paper, we have only begun to unpack a small number of the ethical considerations and material practices that our joint reflections on research justice have surfaced.

We are all equipped with different capacities to enact these possibilities and hold space for building careful, accountable relations based on our relative positions of institutional authority. Returning to Tuck and Yang (2018, 11), "to think of justice as an imperative, rather than as an end, might help us put our own justice projects in relation to others. Our theorizing is enhanced when we understand how projects are fulfilling an imperative, answering a calling inspired by the rising sign of social justice." If we understand research to be a vehicle through which solidarity can be wholly and meaningfully expressed across power differentials, then it has been extremely challenging to square this with the exploitative realities of neoliberal academia. If research is understood, however, as a tool that is sometimes *but not necessarily* put to work in service of land and housing justice, perhaps it can provide us with opportunities for, rather than constraints on, working towards relational accountability.

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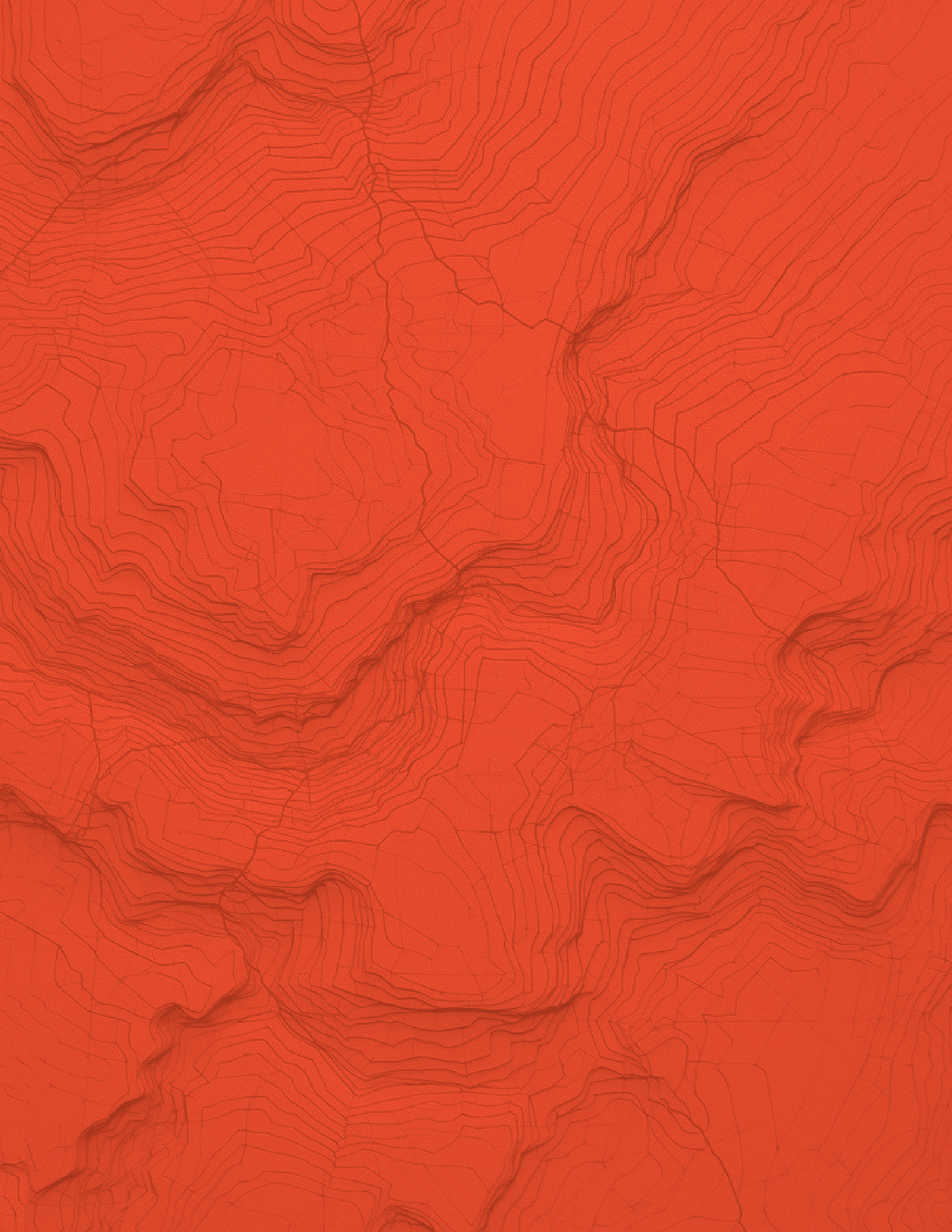

III. RECONSTRUCTING


STAY
STRONG
FREE PALESTINE
UCLA
SWITZERLAND
ST. MORITZ

The Abolitionist University

Jennifer L. Tucker, David Kelly, Davarian L. Baldwin, Hamid Khan

"The University is a critical institution or it is nothing."

— **Stuart Hall (Giroux 2016)**

Universities are places of learning as well as institutions that manifest the violences of late-stage capitalism. Universities develop "better" bombs, archive stolen Indigenous artifacts on stolen land, and push out communities of color with gentrifying campus expansions. Scholars like Bourdieu (1990) and Althusser (1970) argue that formal education reproduces social inequality, rather than challenging it. Furthermore, many of our disciplines retain the imprint of their racist origins. Colonial geographers mapped the world in the service of conquest (Bell, Butlin, and Heffernan 1995), urban planners designed cities to segregate and control subjugated populations (Roy 2006; Rabinow 1995) while sociological theories of the culture of poverty blame poor people for their deprivation while justifying cuts to social services (Goode 2018). Indeed, academics develop the theories that justify racial capitalism's inherent violence, from scientific racism's bunk hierarchies of human worth to liberalism's acquiescence to genocide in Palestine. Against those who critique academic ivory towers as somehow apart from the rough and tumble struggles over our shared futures, universities are intimately imbricated in the fabric of our unequal society.

Often, critics use the rubric of neoliberalism to analyze the crises of higher education (Giroux 2016; Mountz et al. 2015). To be sure, neoliberal dynamics have commodified education, constructed students as consumers, exploited workers through adjunctification and precaritization, undermined public funding, spawned skyrocketing student debt, reduced student and faculty voice by cordoning off decision-making with professional bureaucrats, and allowed market-forces to shape curriculum. These neoliberal dynamics have decimated academic labor while undermining core educational values like critical thinking, academic freedom, community engagement, and social justice. While sympathetic to these critiques, our perspective—which draws on Davarian Baldwin's key text, *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower* (2021)—goes further to argue that universities are key vehicles of late-stage capitalism. Universities organize capitalist accumulation through research and development in key economic sectors from biotech to weapons manufacturing, and they are central to the management of both labor conditions and land use practices for whole cities and regions. Furthermore, they nurture ideological justifications for capitalism's predations and inherent racialized hierarchies.

Photo credit (left): Anthony Orendorff

The frame of the neoliberal university also misses how carceral logics structure higher education. Thus, we propose the analytic of the *carceral university* to track the imbrication of academic life with the logics and material practices of policing, punishment, securitization, and war economies. The Stop LAPD Spying Coalition pinpoints this as "academic complicity" (2023) and maps the manifestation of carceral logics across the university, thereby provincializing carcerality by documenting its expression beyond the prison. Our frame of the carceral university better diagnoses the current crisis of higher education while illuminating more strategic avenues for action. The carceral university was on full display in Spring 2024, as administrators deployed campus police armed with military equipment to crack down on anti-genocide student protesters while attempting to silence pro-Palestinian voices with all manner of lawfare and slippery thinking, like NYU's attempt to classify Zionist colonizers as a protected class (Lennard 2024).

Amid these structures of violence, universities are also sites of rebellion. Students have long been at the forefront of struggles over the mission, practices, and publics of universities. From the abolitionist anti-slavery struggle to today's movement for a free Palestine, student movements have resisted oppression and envisioned more just, humane social worlds. Radical scholars have nurtured dissident theories of human freedom and offered politicized frameworks in their classrooms. Communities have also called on researchers to join in the work of movement building. From the anti-racist Freedom Schools of the civil rights movement to Robert Bullard founding the field of environmental justice out of work with Black Texans fighting environmental racism, these community collaborations exemplify the liberatory potential of the university. These collaborations are rooted in praxis, that is, the inseparable intertwining of theory and action.

These energies foreshadow *the abolitionist university*, that is, formal sites of learning that organize praxis for liberation. We understand abolition as an ongoing project of dismantling systems of oppression and rebuilding social relations oriented toward care, social justice, human flourishing, and environmental justice. During our discussions at the Insurgent Ground Freedom School, Hamid Khan of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition described abolition as a multigenerational process of unlearning aimed toward minimizing harms caused by structures of oppression. While the term "abolish" invokes tearing down oppressive systems, practices, and institutions, in fact, abolition is about building societies without the need for carcerality. Ruth Wilson Gilmore emphasizes this by saying, "abolition isn't just absence. . . Abolition is a fleshly and material presence of social life lived differently" (2017, 351). Abolition uplifts the preciousness of all life, while centering those who have been most harmed by racial capitalism's depredations. Discursive battles are key to the struggle as both neoliberalism and carcerality, as Jackie Wang (2018, 261) writes, have a "stranglehold on our imagination." Abolition is also an enactment, in daily life, of ways of being otherwise. The abolitionist university as a framework can direct our collective energies as we engage institutions of higher education in a long-term project of remaking social relations beyond capitalism and state domination.

Our framework of the abolitionist university is materialist, intersectional, and anti-racist. This directs us to a conjunctural analysis that can adequately attend to the historical and contemporary social forces that created the polycrisis. Today, our formal institutions are shamefully unwilling to adequately respond to the global polycrisis of climate emergency, endless war, predatory economies, and resurgent, racist authoritarianisms. The university is implicated in these crises. As a result, the university and other formal institutions of liberal representative democracy are increasingly targets of suspicion from across the political spectrum. Rooted in the Black Radical Tradition and theories of racial capitalism, abolition analyzes racism as constitutive of capitalism, while also deploying an intersectional approach to analyze how capitalism exploits difference more broadly, be that gender, sexuality, ability, immigration status or other forms of difference. The devaluation of some people's labor creates profit opportunities for others. As Jodi Melamed (2015, 77) explains, "[c]apital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups."

Key to our conjuncture is conflict between three antagonistic social forces over the form and future of our shared worlds, educational and otherwise: 1) liberal reformers, 2) white supremacist, authoritarian, and increasingly fascist social forces, and 3) radicals committed to the deep structural and epistemic transformations necessary to move towards just social worlds. As conservative forces target the university with moral panics around "wokeness," critical race theory, and "gender ideology," liberals are often wolves in sheep's clothing. They promise protection for individual rights but align with reactionary forces on carcerality, militarism, US imperialism, economic injustice, and climate inaction, consistently failing to offer the deep structural changes that our conjuncture demands.

Our manifesto derives from conversations at the Insurgent Ground Freedom School with diverse, radical scholars and activists committed to just, livable futures for all. These fruitful conversations inspire the nine propositions for the abolitionist university that follow. We hailed from places as diverse as South Africa, Australia, Argentina, the US, and Belgium, each with specific national contexts that shape the

political economy of the universities to which we are each connected. Yet across these differences, we were all grappling with the constraints of the carceral university, while enacting a thousand "beautiful experiments" in liberation and abolition, to invoke Saidya Hartman (2019). We see the following propositions for an abolitionist university as provisional invitations to dialogue and action in the spirit of organizing praxis for liberation.

Our collective consists of Jennifer Tucker (University of New Mexico), David Kelly (RMIT University), Davarian Baldwin (Trinity College), and Hamid Khan (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition). Jennifer is a scholar-activist studying how racial capitalism shapes urban life, with a focus on the small and large rebellions of marginalized communities that move us toward more just social worlds. Currently, their activism seeks to enact the abolitionist university through campus-based Palestine solidarity organizing. Davarian's academic and political commitments have focused on the diverse and marginalized communities that struggle to maintain sustainable lives in global cities. His research and advocacy works to develop justice-centered practices for building equitable communities with a specific focus on university-driven economic development. David is a geographer whose work contributes to tracing the intertwined forces of racial capitalism and colonialism in shaping urban life, with a focus on the changing configurations of the landlord under conditions of crisis. Through teaching, writing, and organizing, David highlights the structural conditions that make dwelling precarious and centers the political struggles of tenants and the housing precariat in enacting multiple ways of dwelling-otherwise. Hamid's life journey is to expose, disrupt, organize, and fight back against structures of power and systems of knowledge built on colonial plunder, conquest, and eugenics. His organizing against the national security police state is rooted in Los Angeles.

1. For the speculative abolitionist university

The abolitionist university must always be a speculative endeavor. The carceral university shapes us all—albeit differently—and it cannot but limit our relationalities and confine our imaginations. We choose to think with Bloch's notion of "concrete utopias," an orienting horizon of possibility for our collective struggles which always emerge from our situated lived realities of overlapping and differentiated oppressions. Like Octavia Butler's Afrofuturism, it "recuperates the present as a practice ground for transformation" (Olson 2024). This is a speculative but pragmatic prefigurative politics which seeks to flame existing embers of possibility within the ruinations of racial capitalism and carceral universities.

Our writing collective does not have consensus on key theoretical and strategic issues like the utility of engaging the state, the possibility of recuperating redistribution from liberalism's violences, how movements should contend for power, our authority to speak, or even the status of the university as a site of liberatory struggle—although we all acknowledge the university as a key site of struggle. In this, our collective reflects how social movements are themselves often riven with political and strategic disagreement. We are invested in a coalitional politics that reaches all the places where higher education institutions create harm, building connections across all kinds of difference. While this is easier said than done, we must move beyond the internecine battles that have historically undermined left movements.

2. For new articulations of land, labor, capital and state capacity

Universities are configurations of land, labor, capital, and state capacities, currently organized for extraction and accumulation. The abolitionist university reorganizes these factors of production to meet human needs and move us toward liberation.

Universities are leading political and economic urban institutions—as major employers, land developers, and health care providers—often with their own police forces. These schools are often the largest employer in town, setting wage ceilings that impact entire labor markets. As landholders and real estate developers, universities can be forces for gentrification and spatial segregation. 75% of four-year colleges and universities in the US have their own campus police enacting racialized social control on campus, and even beyond them (Reaves 2015).

"But communities are pushing back, demanding that universities contribute to, rather than extract from, communities and cities."

In the name of serving the public good, universities are tax-exempt institutions with near-zero tax bills despite huge endowments and property holdings. But what is this public good? Universities facilitate and hoard private capital behind the guise of their non-profit status. Rashid Khalidi critiques his employer Columbia as a "money-making, MBA, lawyer-run, hedge fund-cum-real estate operation, with a minor sideline in education" (Iqbal 2024). Indeed, Columbia is one of the largest private landowners in NYC. As developers, universities can be terrible neighbors. Echoing the violences of urban renewal, Columbia fought to designate the historically Black neighborhood of West Harlem as blighted, thereby justifying eminent domain evictions for campus expansions. Furthermore, universities compete for students with high end facilities, commodifying urban life via the disgraced Creative City model, which promises economic uplift through the creative economy, but which does not benefit working class residents (Florida 2013). And like the best Wall Street sharks, university administrators innovate new techniques of extraction and accumulation, even using public, untaxed land for private research development and profit.

But communities are pushing back, demanding that universities contribute to, rather than extract from, communities and cities. The powerful movement for reparations demands that campus communities excavate and redress their ties to transatlantic slavery. Brown responded with a $10 million reparations program fund to "confront legacies of slavery and ensure racial justice include research and scholarship" ("Brown & Slavery & Justice" n.d.). A coalition of residents and academics in Hartford pressured Yale to significantly increase its payments in lieu of taxes to support urban services. The Smart Cities Research Lab at Trinity College advocates, among many things, for meaningful community-based agreements, community-directed assessments of land use, and community engaged endowments (Smart Cities Lab 2021). These strategies help us reconfigure the university in the service of abolitionist futures.

3. For true community safety and police-free campuses

Cops don't create safety; rather, the police fabricate and maintain an unequal social order, often with violence (Vitale 2017; Neocleous 2000). Following the invest/divest model popularized by the Movement for Black Lives, the abolitionist university directs resources away from policing towards community care (Movement for Black Lives n.d.).

Universities are complicit in the bipartisan "punitive turn," which saw policing and prisons become "catchall solutions to social problems" (Gilmore 2007, 2). In the 1970s and 80s, the bipartisan law-and-order coalition consolidated carcerality to contain left social movements and resolve capitalist crises. At the same time, neoliberal austerity slashed social protection and higher education budgets, exemplifying what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007, 245) calls the "anti-state state." By developing pro-policing technologies, theories, data, PR ploys, and policy reforms, universities enact and normalize policing (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2023). As sites of knowledge production, universities mystify the social function of policing. They also develop racist policing technologies. Indeed, George Kelling developed his discredited theory of broken windows policing at Rutgers while UCLA anthropology professor Jeff Brantingham personally profits from racial profiling by licensing his crime forecasting model PredPol to police departments. Violent policing is often turned against campus rebellions, reflecting policing's broader social function of repressing left social movements.

This story is global. Through Cold War counterinsurgency, the US provided police training to dozens of regimes to contain freedom movements and secure the conditions for capital accumulation. These militarized technologies of repression then boomeranged back

home in new forms of racial control (Schrader 2019). Today, transnational academic collaborations endorse endless expansion of policing and the Israeli Defense Forces trains US police forces in the tactics of violent repression.

As articulated by the Cops Off Campus coalition, building true safety for all requires removing "ALL cops off ALL campuses" ("Cops off Campus Coalition Demands" 2021). The 2020 racial justice uprisings brought ideas of abolition into mainstream discourse—taboo just a few years ago—helping to free our collective imagination from the chains of carcerality. Radical political imagination seeds material change. Dozens of campuses have Cops Off Campus coalitions. The University of Minnesota cut its contract with the Minneapolis Police Department after its officers murdered George Floyd while campaigners convinced UC Santa Cruz to disarm police of lethal weapons. As we divest from systems of harm, universities can help build robust systems of care and social protection while also meeting students' basic needs for adequate housing, health care and food.

4. For open and tuition-free education

We reject debt-funded, exclusionary education. Realizing the promise of higher education as a vehicle to contest inequality, build democratic capacities, and realize justice requires tuition-free education and open admissions.

Unlike the constant upward tick of police budgets, state funding for US higher education has yet to return to pre-2008 levels, when governments bailed out the financial sector with crushing austerity. Rather than socializing the cost of producing workers and an educated citizenry, students and families foot the bill. Today, student debt levels are crushing; in the US they topped 1.7 trillion USD in 2024 ("Student Loan Debt Statistics" 2024). Even countries with more robust social safety nets are turning to debt-funded education. Furthermore, *de facto* racial segregation sorts communities into zones of "good schools" (read: predominantly white neighborhoods funded by a strong tax base) and zones of failing schools in historically disinvested poor communities of color. College readiness thus becomes an asset that only some communities can afford.

We embrace expansive educational access to support diverse groups of learners, first generation college students, and students with disabilities. Again, student movements offer a vision of alternative futures. The #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa fought for accessible education as necessary to repair the harms of apartheid and entrenched racialized inequalities. The movement stopped fee hikes, won subsidies and financial aid, and developed a generation of radical leaders. In 1970, Black and Puerto Rican student radicals won open admissions at the City University of New York system (CUNY). These students envisioned open admissions as necessary to redress the racialized neglect of K-12 education. Organizers won a guaranteed spot in a CUNY school for every NYC high school graduate along with remedial supports for students.

Open, tuition-free colleges align with long-standing visions of education as a human right and a foundation of (little-d) democratic society. The 1868 founding document of the University of California aspired to tuition-free education ("The History of UC Tuition since 1868" 2014) while its 1960 master plan definitively affirmed that "state colleges and the University of California shall be tuition free to all residents" ("A Master Plan for Higher Education in California 1960-1975" 1960). Some states today enact this vision. In 2022, the New Mexico legislature established tuition-free college for New Mexico residents, dramatically increasing enrollments and expanding access for working class students and students of color. This program foreshadows the radical possibilities of state-mediated redistribution and investment, even as we note that calls for public resources can fail to challenge the state's foundational logics of dispossession and control.

5. For divesting from economies of harm

Through pension funds and endowments, universities invest in capitalist harms like prisons, war economies, and petro-capitalism. We envision redirecting the financial power of the university to support economies of care, not carcerality and empire.



Photo credit: Anthony Orendorf

It matters where universities invest. The University of California system has about $32 billion of its $175 billion endowment invested in companies that profit from Israeli occupation, apartheid, and war crimes (Austin 2024). These investments are antithetical to UC's stated core values of equity, accountability, integrity, and positive public impact ("Mission, vision and values" n.d.). Given that Israel's military is conducting scholasticide by destroying 80% of Gaza's schools and every single university ("UN Experts Deeply Concerned over 'Scholasticide' in Gaza" 2024), universities have an ethical obligation to divest. Maya Wind (2024) shows how Israeli universities sustain the setter colonial ethno-state through military and security research, legal manipulation, repression of dissidents, and ideological production to justify Palestinian dispossession and oppression.

Divestment campaigns target university endowments, giant pools of capital invested in hedge funds, real estate, private equity, and other vehicles to increase savings, expand capital projects, and fund future operations. While endowment size varies, some are huge. At $50 billion, Harvard's endowment is larger than the GDPs of 127 countries ("World Bank Open Data" 2023). Addicted to endowment growth, administrators refuse to tap these resource pools for living wages or lower tuition, even when endowments returns are high. Their myopic view of fiduciary duty excludes all social values. Like opaque financial markets, university investments are non-transparent.

Today's student-led movement to disclose and divest follows the lead of the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. BDS exemplifies non-violence by endorsing economic, educational, and cultural boycotts of and divestment from companies and institutions that support Israeli apartheid and war crimes. BDS has been so successful that Israeli officials often call it an "existential threat" (Thrall 2018) and seek to criminalize the movement. While naysayers slander divestment activists as naive, past divestment successes—from campaigns to divest from fossil fuels, private prisons, and South African apartheid—show otherwise (Stephens 2024).

In a few short months, the student movement to disclose and divest is already achieving victories. Due to student pressure, campus administrators at Rutgers and the University of New Mexico agreed to disclose their investments; Evergreen State College and UC Riverside agreed to divest from weapons and arms manufacturing; Trinity College Dublin committed to divesting from companies with ties to Occupied Palestine; and the University of Barcelona is breaking institutional ties with Israel.

6. For transformative pedagogies

The neoliberal reduction of education to economic optimization alongside white supremacist curricula steeped in epistemological domination compromises university education. We envision the abolitionist university as organizing praxis—the intertwining of theory and action—for liberation.

Erasing, delegitimizing, or destroying the knowledge of oppressed peoples is key to domination: dynamics on brutal display with Israel's scholasticide. More banal forms of epistemic injustice also undermine the liberatory potential of the university, like the neoliberal university's equation of academic success with economic productivity.

Radical scholars and activists have long enacted projects of knowledge production otherwise. Fields like feminist, Black, ethnic, and Indigenous studies all offer essential conceptual and methodological resources for dissecting the histories, logics, and practices of oppression. They also equip us to chart pathways toward more liberated futures. These crucial fields of inquiry were all forged through struggle. In 1968, the Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation Front at San Francisco State led the way with a 133-day strike to form a department of Black Studies and a College of Ethnic Studies (Evans 2023). Situated within the carceral university, today these fields are underfunded, undervalued, and often under attack. These attacks extend beyond university funding priorities. Since Trump's 2020 executive order banned so-called "divisive concepts" in federal contracts, the extreme right has passed hundreds of local, state, and federal measures attacking anti-racist education (Alexander et al. 2023), attacks which will likely increase after Trumpism's 2024 electoral win.

Yet we can still create liberated zones within the carceral university. Radical pedagogy—derived from the Latin *radix* meaning root or essence—aims toward transforming the root causes of oppression. We can bring this "transformative theory" (hooks 1996) into our classrooms and other university spaces (Peña 2022). The abolitionist university also lifts up epistemic plurality, centering the knowledge produced by social movements, scholars in the Global South, and those living on the frontlines of racial capitalism, including "poverty skolas" (Gray-Garcia and Garcia 2019) who build theory from their lived experience of poverty. During the spring of 2024, Palestine solidary encampments enacted an embodied radical pedagogy, opening libraries and offering free food, first aid, and mental health services. In spaces of communal care, encampments decommodified life's essentials, modeling worlds otherwise. In shared living spaces, teach-ins and study groups taught transformative theory, locating the root causes of genocide in settler colonial pathologies and strategizing pathways towards a free Palestine, interlinked with other struggles for more just futures.

7. For deep publics

Public universities are sites where exclusionary boundaries determine access to resources, knowledge, and power. The abolitionist university challenges these boundaries by fostering multiracial coalitions rooted in solidarity and justice, working across divides of knowledge production and political organizing to dismantle complicity in state violence.

The Stop LAPD Spying Coalition's Working Group on Academic Complicity exemplifies this approach by bridging the university and the community, involving students, academics, and community members in collective struggle (2023). By interrogating academic complicity, they expose how universities align with state and corporate interests, shaping exclusionary logics that perpetuate harm. Nancy Fraser's (2009) concept of "boundary struggles" highlights how institutions like universities are arenas where inclusion and exclusion are contested. Public universities, far from being neutral arbiters of the public good, actively reproduce anti-social forces through their research priorities and partnerships. Stop LAPD Spying Coalition critiques these dynamics, revealing how technologies like PredPol—developed at UCLA and funded by the Department of Defense—reinforced racialized surveillance and control under the guise of public service. Despite claims of reform, the ongoing street sweeps in Skid Row reflect the persistence of state violence and the failure of liberal reforms. These examples underscore the importance of dismantling university complicity in systems of harm and fostering academic rebellion.

We use the term deep publics to signal inclusion, alliance-building and solidarity across difference and beyond state rubrics like citizenship. Hunt-Hendrix and Taylor (2024, 6) describe solidarity as both a principle and a practice of building "bonds of commonality across our differences" via communal care and without assuming unity or sameness. Anti-genocide student encampments demonstrated alternatives rooted in deep publics, creating community-based safety mechanisms, interfaith prayer spaces, and democratic possibilities in conditions of struggle (Eid 2024). Interfaith prayers during these encampments represent a profound form of public formation through solidarity and resistance modeling collective care. This vision requires the cultivation of care for difference, so that it becomes central to politics and social life, transforming university structures to prioritize solidarity and justice.

Pathways toward the abolitionist university include dismantling exclusionary boundaries, fostering deep public formations, and centering the commons in knowledge production. By rejecting complicity and institutionalizing care, universities can become sites of solidarity through care-full struggle.

8. From Land Grant to Land Back Universities

Universities are integral institutions to the colonial project, operating as engines of land dispossession, imperial expansion, and epistemic violence. The abolitionist university mandates land back, returning stolen lands and resources to Indigenous communities as a non-negotiable step toward decolonization and justice.

In the U.S., the Morrill Act of 1862 legalized the expropriation of over 11 million acres of Indigenous lands, funding white agricultural and mechanical colleges. Subsequent iterations extended land grants to Black institutions in 1890 and First Nations in 1994, yet all iterations relied on state-sanctioned land theft from close to 250 tribal nations. Globally, many universities occupy contested stolen lands, exploiting and reproducing colonial relations while presenting themselves as public goods. Today, these institutions benefit from unique land-based regulatory and tax exemptions, consolidating their role as accumulators of stolen wealth and power. They privilege knowledge production that aligns with capital's imperatives while delegitimizing and/or extinguishing liberatory scholarship.

However, as la paperson (2017) argues, "within the colonizing university also exists a decolonizing education." Universities have always been sites of struggle over place, belonging, and self-determination, with affordances that enable the reconfiguration of its relations to people, places, and things. In Australia, the campus of the University of Sydney was instrumental in supporting the 1965 Freedom Ride, a pivotal moment in Australia's civil rights movement (Creed 2023). Led by Charles Perkins, one of the first Aboriginal students at the university, the Student Action for Aborigines (SAFA) used campus resources and spaces to organize their campaign. The university provided meeting spaces where students could strategize and build coalitions, fostering a collective effort similar to the U.S. civil rights movement. With its institutional credibility, the university was invoked as a space that could amplify SAFA's message, drawing national attention to racial segregation and discrimination in Australia. Freedom Rides equipped students with the tools to conduct research and document injustices, providing evidence that framed systemic inequality as a national and international crisis.

Much like student-led actions in the American South, the Freedom Ride exemplifies how universities can serve as platforms for grassroots insurgencies. In appropriating the resources, spaces, and epistemes that the university campus assembles, the Freedom Ride movement provided a base for the acceleration of the civil rights agendas and anti-colonial land justice movements in Australia.

9. For liberating labor for life-work

Labor in the contemporary university is structured through exploitation and precaritization, fragmenting workers and subordinating intellectual and emancipatory efforts to the imperatives of capital. The abolitionist university envisions reclaiming university labor through militant, wall-to-wall industrial unions fighting for the common good. This vision rejects siloed, skill-based solidarity—disciplines working in isolation—and instead builds expansive solidarity rooted in the shared struggles of all university workers, students, and communities.

The pandemic laid bare the brutality of the bosses in the higher education industry. Over 650,000 higher education jobs were lost in the U.S. during the first year of COVID-19, disproportionately affecting contingent workers and low-wage staff. As universities enacted sweeping layoffs, cut vital programs, and abandoned commitments to students and communities, they revealed their reliance on disposable labor and the precarity underpinning their operations. This crisis underscored the need for systemic transformation through collective organizing.

Recent actions prefigure this transformation. The University of California workers' strike in 2024 mobilized university workers in a unified effort to confront austerity and exploitation. Their expansive demands, which included solidarity with Palestine, demonstrated how labor struggles can align with broader movements for collective liberation. Similarly, the Bargaining for the Common Good campaign at Rutgers University saw faculty, staff, and graduate workers win significant contract victories by advocating for demands that addressed both working conditions and broader demands that explicitly address global and local racial, economic, and social injustices.

Actions such as these create "liberated zones" (Roy 2024) where organized labor can be directed in the service of projects that refuse capture and capitulation, working against the grain of carceral and genocidal "death-making institutions" (Interrupting Criminalization et al. 2023). This labor repurposes resources for what Beverley Mullings (2021) calls life-work—productive and reproductive labor that sustains and enhances human flourishing.

Conclusion

Universities reflect and manifest the brutal conditions of today's polycrisis. Many of our most urgent issues—from equitable urban development to Palestinian liberation—run through higher education institutions. As academic workers, this is where we plant our flag to fight for abolitionist futures. Join us!

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IF EVERYONE CAN'T AFFORD THE RENT
THEY SHOULDN'T
OUR TENT

Black Reconstructions and the Housing Question

Robin D. G. Kelley

In 2015, an interviewer asked the eminent Marxist geographer David Harvey what he thought about the uprising in Ferguson, Missouri, in response to the police execution of eighteen- year-old Michael Brown Jr. While sympathetic to the protests, he insisted that racism was simply not part of the logic of capital accumulation, conceding, "I don't see the current struggles in Ferguson as dealing very much in anti-capitalism."[1] Harvey, usually an astute observer of class antagonisms under capitalism, failed to see that the rebellion also targeted a predatory system of policing that used citations, fees, fines, and arrest warrants to extract millions of dollars from mostly poor, Black, overpoliced communities, while cutting funding for public schools, affordable housing, and essential services to give corporations huge tax abatements. Harvey's misreading was consistent with many leftists who believed the Occupy Movement's "universal" message of income inequality would spark a genuine mass uprising in the U.S. but were caught off guard when the national and international mobilization around "Black Lives Matter" dwarfed that of the "99 percent."

The outcome should have surprised no one. Throughout U.S. history, virtually every moment of possible radical transformation has centered on battles for racial justice. A key element in these battles has always been the question of land and housing. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to claim that housing has been a pivot point in racial justice struggles in the 20th and 21st centuries, not only because it is a fundamental necessity, but because it is linked to other struggles: income, health, education, safety, mobility, reproductive justice, policing, and other forms of state-sanctioned racist violence. We can return to Ferguson/St. Louis to prove the point. The fight against racist policing did not begin in 2014. The grandparents and great-grandparents of Michael Brown who fled the South for the Arch City endured a different modality of policing—enclosure, displacement, the residential color line. They arrived just as the city launched massive "slum clearance" projects, razing several Black neighborhoods and displacing tens of thousands of residents to make room for the redevelopment of downtown, the riverfront, and the interstate highway. All of these projects benefited from generous tax abatements, while many Black home and business owners lost whatever capital they had to eminent domain and other aggressive measures.[2]

Thousands of displaced families ended up in public housing, notably the Carr Square Village housing project, which opened in 1942; the Darst-Webbe housing projects completed in 1956; and what was arguably the nation's most infamous housing project, Pruitt-Igoe. The massive complex, composed of thirty-three high-rise buildings and completed in 1954, was poorly designed, grossly understaffed, and starved of funds by a city housing authority devoted to downtown redevelopment. Even as the complex fell into disrepair, the St. Louis Housing Authority (SLHA) frequently raised the rent to make up for its own meager budget. Families began to move out. By 1969, only 43% of the units were occupied. The rent had become so exorbitant that by 1968 one out of every four tenants were spending half of their income on housing.[3]

Photo credit (left): Anthony Orendorff

The tenants responded by waging a massive rent strike, not just in Pruitt-Igoe but Carr Square Village, Darst-Webbe, George L. Vaughan Homes, and Cochran Gardens.[4] Re-envisioning the housing project as a cooperative, they demanded a stake in ownership and control, representation on the housing authority's Board of Commissioners, oversight of financial and personnel decisions, housing set aside for seniors, more recreational facilities, and updated units.[5] After a nine-month battle, the SHLA gave in to nearly all of their demands, but then two years later began the process of demolishing Pruitt-Igoe. Thousands of public housing tenants suddenly had to relocate. Some families began to trickle into North St. Louis County, flipping municipalities that were over 90 percent white in 1960 to more than 90 percent Black by 1980. Ferguson's shift occurred after 1980, with the proportion of Black people living there rising from 14 percent in 1980 to 52 percent in 2000.[6] As the white folks fled to the safety of the outer suburbs, federal, state, and private monies for development followed, along with grocery stores and other retail outlets. Municipalities had the power to levy an additional sales tax on top of the state's sales tax, allowing well-to-do suburban enclaves to cut property taxes and give tax abatements to developers to build more retail outlets. Simply put, Black shoppers subsidized predominantly white and wealthier municipalities, while their own property taxes remained high and their neighborhoods lacked amenities.[7] The residents of the predominantly Black municipalities in North St. Louis County endured organized abandonment: joblessness, illicit economies regulated through violence, underfunded schools, and overpoliced neighborhoods.[8] The costs of managing the crisis rose as potential sources of government revenue evaporated. Municipalities increasingly turned to the police to extract revenue from the people they are supposed to protect and serve. Three decades of organized abandonment in Ferguson and its environs birthed a new movement against state violence, a predatory criminal justice system, and a neoliberal variant of racial capitalism.

In the wake of the 2014 rebellions, Reverend William J. Barber wrote *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear* (2016).[9] Leader of North Carolina's Forward Together-Moral Monday Movement, and co-founder (with Reverend Liz Theoharis) of Repairers of the Breach and the Poor People's Campaign, Reverend Barber called for a "Third Reconstruction" that would unite all oppressed people to bring an end to structural racism, patriarchy, poverty, inequality, ecological devastation, the carceral state, war, and militarism.[10] In the spring of 2020, when some 26 million people took to the street to protest the police killings George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless others, and to demand that the billions of dollars spent on policing be used to address social needs, Barber's *The Third Reconstruction* proved prescient. I said as much at the time, adding that this generation of abolitionists, led in large part by Black women and queer, trans, and non-binary folks, possess a far more visionary conception of abolition than our predecessors. But unlike the first and second reconstructions, when the federal government appeared to be on the side of justice, the feds joined state and local forces to repress the movement.[11]

The last point is important because "reconstruction" refers to the horizon of possibility created when the reigns of state power *appear* to be deployed to dismantle structures of racial inequity, expand democratic access, and redistribute *some* wealth and resources. Appearances can be deceiving. While it is true that the interests of the federal government and those of the Black freedom sometimes converged, the former consistently represented ruling class interests. Neither the first nor the second reconstructions in the U.S. sought to dismantle the structures of racial capitalism or settler colonialism. Then again, most Reconstruction-era leaders accepted the liberal logics of capital accumulation, private property, wage labor, and the rule of law. Some did not. After the Civil War, men and women once held as property were determined to establish a new political order based on full racial equality, the right to vote, and access to power and property—the vaunted 40 acres and a mule. They understood that without land they could not secure their freedom, build wealth, protect themselves from vigilante violence, or even sustain key social institutions. They erected churches and schools, not just for worship and education but as gathering spaces for political organizing, as safe havens, and as barricades against counterrevolution. "Freedpeople" knew they weren't truly free. Freedom was not handed down to them by the state or seized on their behalf by Radical Republicans. Knowing that freedom without justice was impossible, Black men overwhelmingly sought elected or appointed office administering the criminal legal system. Black men whose bodies still carried the marks of slavery held positions as constables, judges, jury commissioners, justices of the peace, sheriffs, county magistrates, and even jailers and prison wardens. They might have been the architects of a very different criminal justice system, but Jim Crow ensured their removal and installed a system of convict leasing, torture, lynching, and ever more jails.[12]

Likewise, had a multiracial working-class insurgency prevailed, we may have had a very different nation. The 1870s witnessed intense class conflicts (the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the St. Louis General Strike, the rise of radical labor parties like the Knights of Labor and the Greenback Labor Party), but this experiment was met with counterrevolution. Southern white men switched from the biracial, abolitionist Republicans to the "redeemers," whether it be the Democrats or, in states like Texas, the "White Man's Party." In the 1880s and '90s, white Populists betrayed their Black Populist allies, who had joined them in a united struggle to redistribute railroad land

grants to farmers, reduce debt by inflating currency, abolish private national banks, nationalize railroads and telegraphs, and impose a graduated income tax to shift the burden onto the wealthy, among other things. Many of these one-time white "allies" joined the Ku Klux Klan and led the efforts to disfranchise Black voters. White backlash, massacres, outright coup d'etats, lynching, and the consolidation of white supremacy, prevailed—exacerbated by a major economic downturn. The Southern Bourbon democrats resumed the reign of terror, though it took them another three decades to crush abolition democracy and install the Jim Crow regime.[13]

In 1889-90, when the federal government offered up Indigenous lands in the Oklahoma Territory for settlement, tens of thousands of Black people fled the South for the new "promised land." There was a bitter irony here, for these were the very same lands on which Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, and Cherokee tribes had been resettled after they were forcibly removed from their homelands in the South in the 1830s. And there was already a significant number of Black and mixed-race families living in the territory, the descendants of slaves once owned by members of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes, many of whom had been denied land rights because their race prohibited them from claiming Indian descent.[14] African American homesteaders took advantage of the land grants and established all-Black towns where they could exercise the franchise, create their own businesses, and hopefully insulate themselves from racist violence. Nearly two dozen such towns were formed bearing names such as Boley, Langston, Ferguson, Lincoln City, Canadian Colored, Arkansas Colored, Bookertee, Arcadia, Vernon, Red Bird, and Wewoka. However, racism, state-sanctioned discrimination, and mob violence from neighboring communities followed; less than half of these settlements survived beyond the First World War.[15]

The absence of decolonization as an aim of Reconstruction meant that dispossession of Indigenous people would continue unabated. It also created a significant analytical lacuna in how we understand what political theorist Kevin Bruyneel calls "the story of land." While W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* centers on the question of land, missing is "the story of how land comes to have its political, economic, and cultural meaning and value in the political struggles of this period. This is necessarily a story of dispossession of land from Indigenous nations and its transformation and mobilization for other purposes, be it as the basis for the liberation of working classes or for consolidating the hegemony of racial capitalism."[16] Settler colonialism depends on the transformation of land into property, which is not simply an ontological distinction between Western and non-Western conceptions of land, but a material fact accomplished through the violent process of enclosure. While Civil War disrupted the system of human bondage, it accelerated Native dispossession and extermination. Throughout the conflict and its aftermath, white settlers and the U.S. military continued to massacre Native people, abrogate treaties, seize land and subsoil rights, and force sovereign nations onto reservations. The brutal wars on Indigenous nations in the West—notably the Comanche, Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Crow, Lakota, Apache, Ute, Navajo, and Shoshone—were waged in the interest mining capital, railroad companies, and commercial agriculture, not settlers in covered wagons. In 1887, the Dawes Act further divided up Native lands into individual allotments in an effort to break tribal sovereignty and make more land available for *white* settlers.[17] Thus, while some formerly enslaved people tried to take advantage of the Homestead Acts and various government land allotment schemes, most ended up with nothing. As Kevin Bruyneel trenchantly observes, "Black and Indigenous relationships to land in their distinct form, be they historical, actualized, collective, relational, individual, or aspirational, were obstacles to white settler and corporate ambitions for land and territorial expansion."[18]

With no prospect of reparations or the promised "40 acres," rural Black people in the South were rendered homeless – denied or dispossessed of land they may have purchased, inherited, or claimed as reparations for generations of unrequited labor. They were forced to secure shelter by sharecropping on plantations still in the hands of the "rebels," leaving them vulnerable to evictions at the whims of landlords. In the cities, segregation often meant renting overpriced slum dwellings. But even those who could afford decent housing and land did not have the law to back them up. They were subject to mob violence, lynching, unlawful arrests in order to provide labor for the convict leasing system, and outright land theft.

The triumph of big capital and the installation of the Jim Crow racial regime set the stage for the Second Reconstruction, or the struggle to restore basic civil and human rights. At least this is the prevailing wisdom. But if reconstruction is the horizon of possibility created by mobilizing state power to, at the very least, reduce inequality and redistribute *some* wealth and resources, then Depression-era New Deal policies represented a small, incomplete step toward a more just order. The New Deal, after all, targeted capitalism's crisis by wielding Keynesian strategies of massive expenditures in infrastructure, federal job creation, public housing and low-interest home loans, and a social safety net in the form of social security and unemployment insurance—paid by workers themselves. However, a powerful labor and unemployed movement forced the state to accept some concessions, such as direct relief and legal protections for the right of unions to organize. But New Deal policies, especially in the South where the majority of Black people still resided, were

neither democratic nor inclusive. For most Black rural and urban working people, the New Deal led to greater inequalities and outright dispossession. The New Deal's agricultural programs benefited landowners and landlords by federally subsidizing crop reductions. In theory, the money was supposed to be fairly distributed to tenant farmers and sharecroppers, but that never happened. Instead, the landlords kept the money, evicted the tenant farmers and sharecroppers on their land, and used the federal payments to hire them back as cheap wage laborers while investing in mechanical cotton pickers. And the New Deal did not protect or recognize the rights of agricultural laborers or domestic workers under the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Wagner Act, and related legislation.[19] Radicals fought for workers' power and racial equality under a social democracy, but instead got labor camps (Civilian Conservation Corps), the destruction of food, the repatriation of Mexican workers, and the consolidation of a one-party dictatorship in the South that denied Black people the franchise, maintained segregation, and ensured that Black relief workers earned less than their white counterparts.

The industrial demands of World War II stimulated the economy and lifted the U.S. out of depression, but the putative prosperity eluded much of the working class. By war's end, two million people were out of work. Between 1940 and 1945, the cost of living rose by 45% while wages increased by a mere 15%. Meanwhile, during this same period, corporations reported $117 billion in profits. Frustrated workers fought back. In 1945, the Department of Labor reported at least 4,750 strikes involving 3.5 million workers. The following year, 4.6 million workers walked off their jobs in nearly 5,000 different labor actions. The numbers were unprecedented. Work stoppages wracked the auto, steel, rubber, meatpacking, oil refining, electrical, retail, and transportation industries, and union-busting efforts in cities such as Rochester, New York, Stamford, Connecticut, and Oakland, California, led to general strikes. The wave of layoffs, substantial cuts in overtime pay, and severe housing shortages left workers vulnerable, especially Black workers, commonly referred to as "last hired, first fired."

While the gains from 1945-46 strike wave were mixed, the militancy and accumulated strength of organized labor terrified business and government. The collective power of labor, especially in cases of Left-led, interracial unions, threatened to severely curtail corporate power and usher in a new political order that would further regulate business, expand the welfare state, protect workers' rights, and tax corporate profits. The ruling class declared war. In the name of fighting "communism," Left-oriented labor militants were fired, deported, or brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act (1947), which restricted workers' right to strike and organize unions, imposed hefty fines on union officials who failed to oppose unauthorized strikes, and required union officers to sign loyalty oaths affirming they are not Communists. The Congress of Industrial Organizations enforced these principles and expelled unions that would not comply.

Meanwhile, labor leaders cut deals with employers at the expense of workers' power and racial equity. In 1950, UAW leader Walter Reuther signed a landmark contract that came to be known as "the Treaty of Detroit," between the union and the big three automakers: Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors. The treaty institutionalized collective bargaining and tied wages and benefits to productivity and growth. Workers won annual cost-of-living raises, healthcare, vacation, and pension benefits (thus relinquishing labor's demand that the state, not the employer, provide health and retirement benefits). But the workers had to agree to no strikes over five years, limiting rank and file power within the UAW and the scope of what they could bargain over. The purpose of the Treaty was to secure a lasting peace between labor and capital through consumerism rather than worker control of the shop floor (e.g., determining the pace of work, assignment of tasks, introduction of technology, and length of the working day). As a result, most auto workers could afford to buy homes, while the industry reaped massive profits without worrying about work stoppages. No coincidence that the postwar bargain occurred as the federal government subsidized the creation of all-white suburbs across the country. Once-precarious white industrial workers suddenly became property owners. Black workers not only faced discrimination in both the housing and mortgage market but remained subject to a segmented occupational structure that locked them in the worst, most dangerous, lowest paid jobs. Most unions sanctioned racist wage differentials, forcing Black workers to rely on the courts to remove the barriers to equal pay and occupational mobility. Moreover, union leaders turned a blind eye to racial discrimination in housing precisely these policies benefitted a large proportion of their rank-and-file. They chose race over class.

Black movements fighting for a Second Reconstruction, like their postbellum predecessors, initially treated the oppressions of race and class as inseparable. In the early stages of the Southern movement, Black-led labor unions often took the lead. Local 22 of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers of America (FTA), based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, led by an extraordinary group of Black women, notably Moranda Smith, Velma Hopkins, Theodosia Simpkins, and Viola Brown, successfully organized workers at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. They not only secured higher wages and better conditions but turned the union into a political force for civil

and human rights in the city. They protested segregation, fought sexual harassment at work, revitalized the local chapter of the NAACP, launched voter registration campaigns, set up worker education classes, established a library stocked with volumes on African American history and political economy, and helped elect Winston-Salem's first black alderman in 1947.[20] Local 22 was a force to be reckoned with before becoming a casualty of anticommunism.

Colds War repression ultimately forced elements of the Civil Rights Movement to pivot from labor struggles but it could not completely exorcise the Second Reconstruction of its economic justice agenda. The 1963 March on Washington, for example, was about two things: ending racist violence and securing "jobs and freedom." The lead organizers, Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph, both had roots in socialist and labor movements, and the Negro American Labor Council (NALC) was the march's lead sponsor. It had organized local rallies under the slogan, "Freedom from Poverty through Full Employment," and threatened to hold a national one-day work stoppage to pressure Congress to pass the Civil Rights bill. It also fought to raise the federal minimum wage and extend its coverage to all workers, and backed efforts to organize domestic workers, abolish the House Un-American Activities Committee, and build up the American Labor Party as a third-party alternative.[21]

So what happened to this vision of economic justice? First, the dominant organizations focused almost entirely behind passing the watered-down Civil Rights bill, supporting a Voting Rights bill, and trying to influence the Democratic Party. Second, and unsurprisingly, the labor movement betrayed the coalition's racial justice agenda. AFL-CIO leader George Meany and the United Auto Workers' Walter Reuther made lofty statements and financial contributions in support of Civil Rights, while acceding to its rank-and-file white members that worried that the elimination of racial barriers to equal wages, access to skilled jobs, and unfettered access to housing, would threaten their privileged status.[22] The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), however, never abandoned economic justice. They went even further than the unions, calling for the redistribution of wealth, reparations, and workers' power. SNCC founded the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union (MFLU) which organized a strike in the spring of 1965 to demand $1.25 an hour for chopping cotton. In January 1966, after the planters had evicted them, the strikers briefly occupied the Greenville Air Force base and then created encampment dubbed "Strike City."[23] Unfortunately, lacking economic leverage and federal support, the MFLU was defeated. But that defeat profoundly shaped the politics of the MFDP, which pursued a radical economic vision even when middle-class black Mississippians were finally admitted into the mainstream Democratic Party. By 1968, the MFDP backed a Guaranteed Annual Income, extended day care for poor and working mothers, comprehensive medical care for all, increased federal provisions for food stamp programs, free higher education, an end to the draft, and full military withdrawal from Vietnam.[24]

The struggle for fair, safe, affordable housing and ending *de jure* and *de facto* spatial segregation was a priority of the Second Reconstruction (1950s to 1970s). How the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), finance capital, the real estate industry, and outright racist violence conspired to maintain residential segregation and inequality is a well-known story and considered a precursor to Civil Rights-era housing struggles. Postwar federal policy promoted new patterns of housing and segregation in response to Black northern migration. The Housing Act of 1949 sanctioned segregation in public housing of both buildings and neighborhoods. Put simply, private developers received *federal* dollars to build segregated housing units all across the country. When the Chicago Housing Authority launched an "open occupancy" policy for its public housing projects, white residents responded with a level of violence equal to what protesters endured in Birmingham, Alabama. Between 1947 and 1951, nine separate riots broke out in which white mobs threw rocks at police, overturned cars, set fire to buildings, and physically attacked potential Black occupants. The fight to keep the Trumbull Park Homes white lasted nearly a year, with Black families enduring at least nine-months of unrelenting terrorism.[25]

The solution for working class white families was to move to the suburbs and take advantage of low-interest loans to purchase a home. The Interstate and Defense Highway Act of 1956 subsidized suburban growth by funding freeway construction, which cut up cities, reinforced segregation, destroyed Black and Brown communities, and undermined public transit for those who could not afford cars. The Act also incentivized industrial relocation, moving high-paying manufacturing jobs away from core urban communities, and boosted suburban tax bases at the expense of the central cities. Armed with massive federal subsidies, developers and politicians who were never interested in building low-income housing or revitalizing inner cities could now use "slum clearance" to justify building freeways through neighborhoods with deteriorating or dilapidated housing.

The consequences extended beyond lost equity and intergenerational wealth. Subsidized white flight left Black residents to survive deteriorating cities with limited or no access to publicly funded institutions (better schools, hospitals, and healthcare) as well retail outlets, fresh affordable food, decent jobs, and services such as sanitation, fire stations, and libraries. The one "service" municipal governments did not cut was law enforcement. Ghettoes were treated as sites of containment and counterinsurgency. As in the first Reconstruction, transforming the criminal legal system was inseparable from the struggle to create a just economy. The result, not surprisingly, was war. Historian Elizabeth Hinton determined that between May 1968 and December 1972, the U.S. witnessed at least 2,326 separate uprisings in Black communities alone. The casualties were overwhelmingly Black. Police and the National Guard turned Black neighborhoods into war zones, arresting tens of thousands of people and employing tanks, machine guns, and tear gas to pacify the community.

The passage of the 1968 Fair Housing Act and the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Act were supposed to be the crowning achievement of the Second Reconstruction, but like the First (when the 14th Amendment, for example, was wielded by the U.S. Supreme Court to protect corporations while the same court upheld Jim Crow), this new housing legislation became the foundation for what Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor calls "predatory inclusion." Section 235 of the 1968 Fair Housing Act was designed to assist low-income people unable to meet the credit requirements for a bank mortgage to buy their own homes. In theory, shifting funds away from public housing construction to subsidized home purchases by low-income families would promote home sales, lift families out of poverty by enabling them to accumulate equity, and break the cycle of residential segregation. This is not what happened. First, potential Black homeowners were steered into the Northside to existing low-income or "transitional" neighborhoods already experiencing white flight, or to subdivisions real estate agents believed were ripe for "blockbusting." Whites who qualified for the program were steered out of transitional neighborhoods into securely all-white enclaves. Second, beneficiaries of Section 235 were locked into mortgages on homes considered substandard or in need of repair. In St. Louis, seventy-five percent of the mortgages under Section 235 were to purchase existing houses, not for new construction. But here is the catch: in order to qualify one had to be poor, which meant buyers had no surplus to maintain their homes, let alone renovate. As a result, many families ended up losing their homes, leading to a spike in FHA repossessions and foreclosures.[26]

Since real estate and financial interests drove the program, it became an opportunity to unload formerly unsellable housing stock, while potential Black homeowners were steered into existing low-income ghetto neighborhoods or "transitional" neighborhoods already experiencing white flight. These new "owners" were locked into mortgages on homes considered substandard or in need of repair, but since a buyer had to be poor to qualify, she had no surplus to maintain, let alone renovate, a home. The result, of course, were waves of foreclosures and deepening poverty, occurring just as the world entered a global slump, the U.S. embraced neoliberalism, and the state *defeated* the radical insurgencies of 1968.

This last point is worth pondering because many of the radical social movements that emerged in this period—Black Panthers, Young Lords, National Welfare Rights Organization, etc. —envisioned housing not as a commodity but as a social right. The struggle for housing in the Third Reconstruction builds on this radical tradition and resists a housing "market" governed by racial capitalism. In order to understand the current movements and changes in policy and strategy, we should acknowledge the present-day consequences of the defeat of the radical vision of *both* the First and Second Reconstructions. And this is why we need a Third Reconstruction.

In the end, the defeat of both reconstructions has imperiled the entire planet. Black, Brown, and Native communities have been subject to environmental hazards created by racial capitalism long before anyone declared a climate catastrophe. Racism and spatial segregation explain why these communities have long lived near toxic waste dumps, freeways, bus barns, oil and gas production, industrial pollution, dilapidated and insecure housing, vermin, lead paint, gun violence, trauma, surveillance, trigger-happy police, poor schools, and prisons. They are fleeced by landlords, insurance companies, grocers, liquor stores, check-cashing joints, utilities and water companies, and the state—in the form of excessive fees, fines, and regressive sales taxes accompanied by little to no services.

It is not enough to mitigate these inhumane conditions – to simply build more affordable housing or offer the victims of housing discrimination reparations, as the city of Evanston, Illinois, tried to do. According to the plan, Black families who lived in Evanston between 1919 and 1969 were eligible for $25,000 grants to purchase homes in the city. A sales tax levied on cannabis would fund the program. The plan does not address structural racism, differential property values based on race, the racial wage gap, employment discrimination, organized abandonment, or racial banishment – nor does it tackle inequities in debt, interest rates, taxes, services,

policing, and the like, or the conditions that render some people vulnerable to precarity and violence. And what does it mean to secure Black property ownership on stolen land?

The Third Reconstruction must be anti-capitalist and decolonial. It must free the land from the hold of colonial/capitalist relations and restore it to its rightful stewards, so the earth can flourish, so people can flourish, so the historical and contemporary structures of violence might end and open up a radically different future. It means ultimately rejecting the idea of land as property and the liberal vision of freedom based on ownership, possession, and anthropocentrism. It means recognizing, as George Lipsitz does in his powerful new book, *The Danger Zone is Everywhere*, that health and housing are inextricably linked, and that collective public resources must be decommodified if we want to create a just, safe, and caring world. Housing justice in the Third Reconstruction means redirecting resources from prisons, police, and the military to not only housing but education, universal healthcare, living wage jobs, and green energy. It means no more cages, carceral shelters, banishment, or evictions.

Finally, the Third Reconstruction must be revolutionary and should not expect the state to back our demands. The Third Reconstruction will not be ushered in by the Democratic Party or won by a good ground game in the next election. It is already in motion, from Land Back to the Dream Defenders, from Sankofa City to the Right to the City Alliance, from Detroit's Feedom Freedom Farm to Cooperation Jackson, from Strike Debt to Reclaiming Our Homes, from tenants' unions to the National Union of the Homeless, from the Red Nation to Sweetwater Foundation. These and other movements are doing what our ancestors did in the 1860s—waging their own versions of the General Strike by taking back land and homes in defiance of the state; creating worker, childcare, and housing cooperatives; turning vacant lots and abandoned homes into energy-efficient low-income housing, community centers, and workshops; planting urban farms to provide organic vegetables in food deserts; building for an ecologically sustainable and just future.

Notes

[1] Alex Dubilet, "Response: Dispossession, Uselessness, and the Limits of Humanism," *Syndicate*, April 1, 2015, https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/seventeen-contradictions-and-the-end-of-capitalism.

[2] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Temple University Press, 2011); Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 99; Walter Johnson, *The Broken Heart of America: St. Louis and the Violent History of the United States* (Basic Books, 2020); Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New Village Press, 2016).

[3] Keona K. Ervin, *Gateway to Equality: Black Women and the Struggle for Economic Justice in St. Louis* (University Press of Kentucky, 2017); Katharine G. Bristol, "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth," *Journal of Architectural Education* 44, no. 3 (1991): 163-71; Clarence Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis*, 1936-1975 (University of Michigan Press, 2010), pp. 212-16; Johnson, *Broken Heart*, pp. 356-57; George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* (Temple University Press, 1988); Chad and Jamie Freidrichs, *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* documentary (2011).

[4] Lipsitz, *Life in the Struggle*; Ervin, *Gateway*; Michael Karp, "The St. Louis Rent Strike of 1969: Transforming Black Activism and American Low-Income Housing," *Journal of Urban History* 40, no. 4 (2014), pp. 648–670.

[5] Ervin, *Gateway*.

[6] Gordon, *Mapping Decline*, p. 104; Kevin Fox Gotham, "Separate and Unequal: The Housing Act of 1968 and the Section 235 Program," *Sociological Forum* 15 (2000), pp. 13–37; Richard Rothstein, "The Making of Ferguson," *Journal of Affordable Housing & Community Development Law* 24, no. 2 (2015); N. Cambria, P. Fehler, JQ Purnell, B. Schmidt, *Segregation in St. Louis: Dismantling the Divide* (Washington University in St. Louis, 2018), pp. 50-51; Jodi Rios, *Black Lives and Spatial Matters: Policing Blackness and Practicing Freedom in Suburban St. Louis* (Cornell University Press, 2020), pp. 120-122.

[7] Rios, *Black Lives and Spatial Matters*, p. 115.

[8] The phrase "organized abandonment" was first coined by David Harvey but fully elaborated by Ruth Wilson Gilmore. David Harvey, *The Limits of Capital* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 397; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Crisis, Surplus and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007), p. 178.

[9] William J. Barber, II, with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear* (Beacon Press, 2016); see also Robert Greene, "The Urgency of a Third Reconstruction," *Dissent*, July 9, 2018, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-urgency-of-a-third-reconstruction.

[10] Oddly, the term "Third Reconstruction" has recently been attributed to Peniel Joseph, because of his book *The Third Reconstruction: America's Struggle for Racial Justice in the Twenty-First Century* (Basic Books, 2022). Of course, the phrase has been around since the putative defeat of the "Second Reconstruction." For example, Manning Marable's first book, *Blackwater: Historical Studies in Race, Class Consciousness and Revolution* (Black Praxis Press, 1981), pp. 187-208, includes a chapter titled, "The Third Reconstruction: Black Nationalism and Race Relations After the Revolution," which draws analogies with the Bolshevik Revolution to envision a transitional stage toward dismantling the racist state under socialism.

[11] I discuss the Third Reconstruction in Jeremy Scahill, "Scholar Robin D. G. Kelley on How Today's Abolitionist Movement Can Fundamentally Change the Country," *The Intercept*, June 27, 2020, https://theintercept.com/2020/06/27/robin-dg-kelley-intercepted/.

[12] This capsule narrative draws on a lifetime of studying and teaching the Reconstruction era, and a voluminous literature, the foundation of which remains W. E. B. Du Bois's magisterial *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (Oxford University Press, 2014; orig. 1935). However, the very last point about the potential of Black leaders transforming the criminal justice system is speculation based on my reading of Douglas R. Egerton, *Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (Bloomsbury Press, 2014); Kidada E. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York University Press, 2012); and especially T. Thomas Fortune's *Black and White: Land, Labor, and Politics in the South* (Washington Square Press, 2021; orig. 1884). Fortune suggested that the penitentiary, which Du Bois praised as a progressive effort to eliminate the convict lease, was a further extension of slave-era repression. Fortune wrote: "The South must spend less money on penitentiaries and more money on schools; she must use less powder and buckshot and more law and equity; she must pay less attention to politics and more attention to the development of her magnificent resources. . . " (p. 89). Du Bois, of course, was not out of step with the times. With the exception of the Black Georgia legislator Peter O'Neal, who proposed abolishing the penitentiary system altogether, the Black Reconstruction legislators focused on improving conditions in prisons and jails and ending the convict lease system. The Southern oligarchy preferred prison camps since they were cheaper and prisoners were expected to fulfill the state's labor needs.

[13] See, for example, Charles Postel, *Equality: An American Dilemma, 1866-1896* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019); Omar H. Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (University Press of Mississippi, 2010); Joseph Gerteis, *Class and the Color Line: Interracial Class Coalition in the Knights of Labor and the Populist Movement* (Duke University Press, 2007); Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: A Grassroots History of the Progressive Era* (W. W. Norton, 2008; orig. 1987); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Harvard University Press, 2003); Peter J. Rachleff, *Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865–1890* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Harvard University Press, 2003); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Harvard University Press,1997).

[14] See Alaina E. Roberts, *I've Been Here All the While: Black Freedom on Native Land* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021); Barbara Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2006).

[15] Karla Slocum, *Black Towns, Black Futures: The Enduring Allure of a Black Place in the American West* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-*

1915 (University of Illinois Press, 1991); Norman L. Crockett, *The Black Towns* (University of Kansas Press, 1979); Kendra Field, *Growing Up with the Country: Family, Race, and Nation after the Civil War* (Yale University Press, 2018).

16 Kevin Bruyneel, *Settler Memory: The Disavowal of Indigeneity and the Politics of Race in the United States* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021), p. 50.

17 David Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Land Ownership in Oklahoma, 1832–1929* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Manu Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (University of California Press, 2018).

18 Bruyneel, *Settler Memory*, p. 63. On the rich and growing literature on Indigenous conceptions of land, see Mishuana Goeman, "Land as Life: Unsettling the Logics of Containment," in *Native Studies Keywords*, ed. Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle H. Raheja (Arizona University Press, 2015), pp. 71 – 89; John Witgen, *Seeing Red: Indigenous Land, American Expansion, and the Political Economy of Plunder in North America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Robert Nichols, *Theft Is Property: Dispossession and Critical Theory* (Duke University Press, 2020). See also Vivien Tejada, "Unfree Soil: Empire, Labor, and Coercion in the Upper Mississippi River Valley, 1812-1861" (PhD diss., Duke University 2024).

19 In 1938, the Supreme Court actually gutted the Wagner Act's provision protecting the right to strike by allowing employers to hire permanent replacement workers. See for example Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists in the Great Depression* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (Liveright, 2014); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making A New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1930* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 1996); James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

20 Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

21 Andrew E. Kersten, *A. Philip Randolph: A Life in the Vanguard* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), pp. 155-56.

22 See for example, William P. Jones, *March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York: Norton, 2013); Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (W. W. Norton, 2008); Robert Zeiger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America since 1865* (University Press of Kentucky, 2010); Alan Draper, *Conflict of Interest: Organized Labor and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1968* (Cornell University Press, 1994); Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988), pp. 786–811.

23 "Occupation of Greenville Air Base," Digital SNCC Gateway, https://snccdigital.org/events/occupation-of-greenville-air-force-base/.

24 "Program of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," 1968, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/mfdp_program.pdf.

25 Arnold R. Hirsch, "Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, Chicago, 1953-1966," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (September 1995), pp. 522-550; Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 184-192.

26 Gordon, *Mapping Decline*, p. 104; Kevin Fox Gotham, "Separate and Unequal: The Housing Act of 1968 and the Section 235 Program," *Sociological Forum* 15 (2000), pp. 13–37.



When We Heal the Land, the Land Heals Us

Brenda Contreras

In 2024, those living in the so-called United States of America took a front seat to the unraveling of what has long been legitimized as a First World democracy. We witnessed unequivocal corruption running through the veins of government agencies and corporations, energized through clandestine buy-offs and shielded with the protections of the law. The measure of gaslighting, corruption, and greed was so clear to the average American that by December 2024, when the CEO of UnitedHealthcare was shot and killed, popular opinion was on the side of the vigilante. The stories that are told regarding how we got to this point in time are all varied. Most of the popular ones are full of intentionally misleading fallacies and told through the experience of wealthy, white, cis, able-bodied men. It's only through the land that we find truth.

If we break through the concrete of empire, what we find are communities all across the nation that have been connecting like mycelium. Supporting, communicating, protecting, and grounding with the truth. In Northeast Los Angeles, our grassroots organization, Coyotl + Macehualli (Nahuatl for Coyote and Indigenous Person), has been focused on land use issues by defending, celebrating, and creating relationships with native plant species. The history of Tovaangar is almost always relayed in relation to colonization, and while our current reality continues to be greatly shaped by this violent history, the existence of the native plants, animal relatives, and native Gabrielino Tongva and Kizh peoples continue to be living anchors of truth (Dobson 2023; Tongva Land 2018). Through genocide, erasure, clearcutting, redlining, disinvestment, and gentrification, the land is still able to point us toward the North Star (Simpson 2014). What many native folks and those connected to the land have been able to see clearly is that the root of many of the modern challenges we're facing lie in settler colonialism (Tuck & Yang 2012).

Taken at the Wishtoyo Chumash Village - Photo credit (left): Marisa Lemorande



Drawing of the Takaape' Waashut, Tongva for Juglans californica – Illustration credit: Frank Kofsuske

For several years now we have been able to rally around the endemic Takaape' Waashut (Tongva for Southern California Black Walnut tree or *Juglans californica*). This native, threatened, and queer heterodichogamous tree has presented itself as a community organizer and inspired folks from different intersections to reconstruct and imagine grounded, relational ways of operating – and opting out of what empire has to offer. In 2022, the Takaape' Waashut Northeast Los Angeles Black Walnut Day Committee was formed, and since then has presented a season of annual events around Black Walnut harvest season to celebrate and uplift this threatened plant community member. At the kickoff event we attracted over 500 attendees and were able to provide free healthy meals, provide an array of workshops including a Tongva black walnut dice game, natural dye workshops, tenants' rights workshops, black walnut tree adoptions, community resources. and harm reduction materials.

On the defense side, in 2021 Coyotl + Macehualli filed two CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) lawsuits centering the Takaape' Waashut. This was not as a show of faith in the US legal system but a means to obstruct the channels of a corrupt system that banks on communities of color not fighting back. In one of the lawsuits, we presented such a threat that the city's own council could not handle the case, so they hired the top CEQA law firm in California, based out of San Francisco. Ultimately, what was a clear case of piecemealing (illegal under CEQA) was lost in the LA County court system due to a biased interpretation of the law and a legal system facing increasing political pressure to allow development at any costs (AEP 2019, 92).

Prior to reaching that lawsuit, we had researched the title history of the parcels in question. Oral history, which is upheld in Native cultures, had taught us that the Property Title business is a farce. Whether through deception, broken treaties, genocide or forced displacement, this is all stolen native land (Park 2016; Park 2023). In our research, we found Meeting Minutes indicating that rights had been given up in the 1960s. The resolution, which would be the formal declaration, was conveniently lost. If that resolution had been found, the issue would have been resolved and years of our lives would not have been stolen. The settler colonial system exposed itself for the illegitimate system it has always been.

Centering native plants, like the Takaape' Waashut, has led us to the intersections of land stewardship, tenant rights, climate change, physical and mental health, queer ecology, language revitalization, housing rights, environmental justice, cultural erasure, historical redlining, belonging, land return, waterways, community care, harm reduction, and more! This rhizomic network of varied struggles, as exemplified by the Takaape' Waashut Northeast Los Angeles Black Walnut Day Committee, is organized by the Takaape' Waashut, a living entity with its own agency and personhood. In turn, what we find is that we are part of nature. When we defend the land, the land defends us. When we heal the land, the land heals us.

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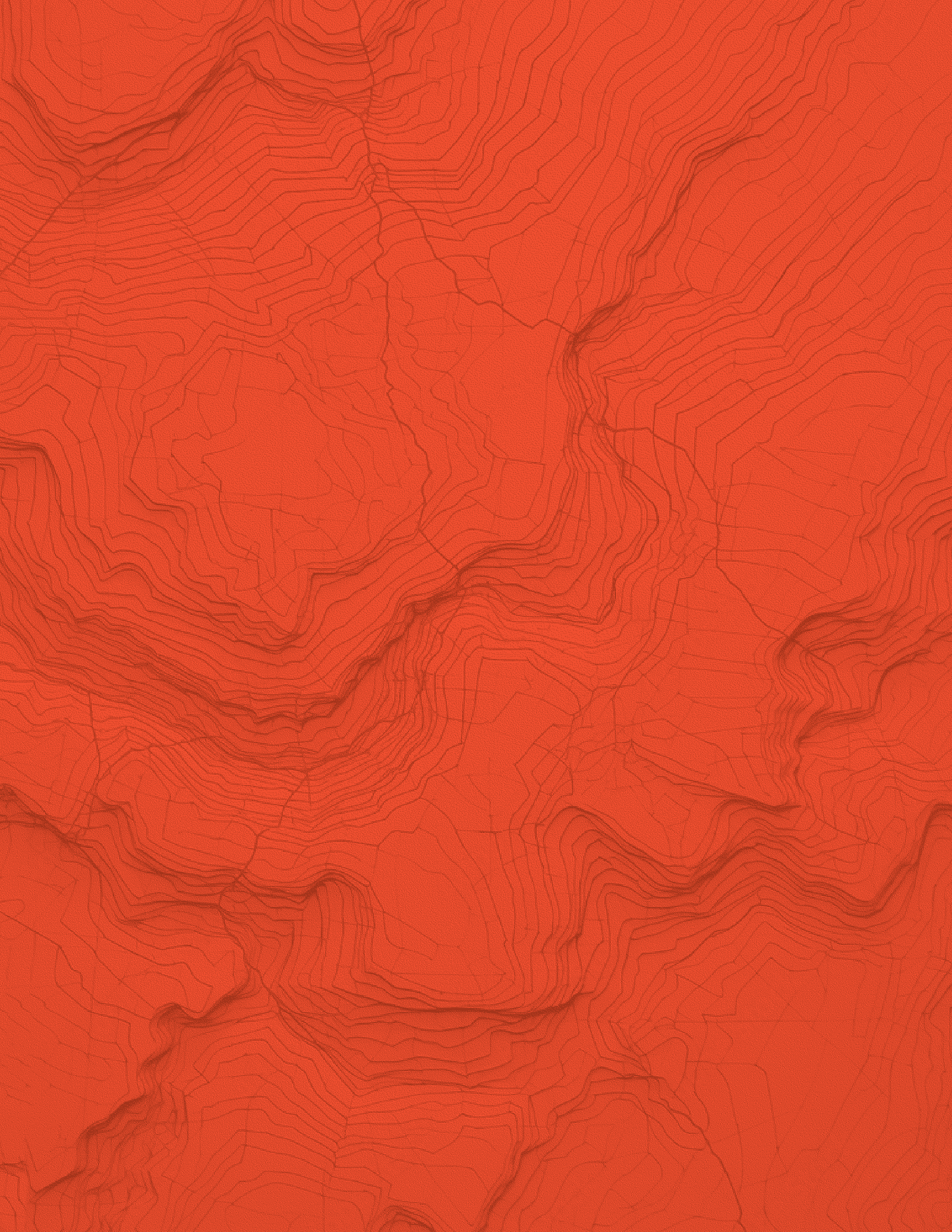

Author Biographies

Renato Abramowicz Santos is a Brazilian researcher in the Department of Sociology at the University of São Paulo (USP) and works at the Public Space and Right to the City's Laboratory (LabCidade) and at the Evictions Observatory. Renato was accepted as a UCLA Visiting Graduate Researcher in 2022, hosted by Professor Ananya Roy at the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy. Renato's master's research was about squat buildings and housing social movements in the central region of São Paulo, the largest and one of the most unequal cities in Brazil. The focus of the research was the production of space, political articulations and efforts of emplacement/settlement in the midst of the constant threat of those buildings' existence in a city in permanent dispute. Renato's doctoral research is about threats and evictions of populations who create spaces and livelihood in conditions of indetermination and urban conflict in São Paulo's downtown area. The research seeks to understand these elements in relation to state violence, but also how this same political violence produces networks of protection and resistance against these politics of dispossession and displacement.

Line Algoed is a PhD Researcher and Teaching Assistant at Cosmopolis Center for Urban Research at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels. She started her academic career after having worked for 15 years at the intersection of urban development, housing, community work, and international development. Her research centers on the importance of communal land tenure, particularly in the Caribbean where she has lived and worked for several years. She is also on the Executive Committee of the International Community Land Trust (CLT) Center, supporting community-led development on community-owned land globally. She works closely with the Caño Martín Peña CLT in Puerto Rico facilitating exchanges between community leaders fighting against ecocide and displacements. She is part of the action and research group "Stronger Caribbean Together for Land, Food, and Climate Justice" bringing together Caribbean communities from 11 islands and countries. She is a co-editor of the book, *On Common Ground: International Perspectives on the Community Land Trust*, co-edited with John E. Davis and María E. Hernández-Torrales.

Davarian L. Baldwin is an internationally recognized scholar, author, and public advocate. He is the Paul E. Raether Distinguished Professor of American Studies and Founding Director of the Smart Cities Research Lab at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. His academic and political commitments have focused on global cities and particularly the diverse and marginalized communities that struggle to maintain sustainable lives in urban locales. Baldwin is the award-winning author of several books, most recently, *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities Are Plundering Our Cities*. He also served as the consultant and text author for *The World of the Harlem Renaissance: A Jigsaw Puzzle* (2022). Baldwin sits on the executive committee of Scholars for Social Justice and the national council of the American Association of University Professors. His commentaries and opinions have been featured in numerous outlets from NBC News, BBC, and HULU to USA Today, The Washington Post, and TIME magazine. Baldwin was named a 2022 Freedom Scholar by the Marguerite Casey Foundation for his work.

Greg Baltz (he/him/his) is an assistant professor of law at Rutgers Law School-Newark. His scholarly interests are at the intersection of property, access to justice, and law and social movements. His most recent article, Tenant Union Law, is forthcoming in the Yale Law & Policy Review. He has also been published in the *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law & Social Change* and the *Law & Political*

Economy Blog. Professor Baltz is the co-director of the Housing Justice and Tenant Solidarity Clinic, where he supervises third-year law students as they learn to employ the law to support community organizations to build leadership, capacity, and power, including through litigation on behalf of tenant associations. Previously, Professor Baltz worked as a tenants' rights attorney at TakeRoot Justice, where he collaborated with tenant organizers and represented New York City-based tenant associations in rent strikes, tenant-initiated receivership actions, landlord bankruptcies, and legislative advocacy. He began his legal career as a Ford Foundation Fellow at Make the Road New York, where he litigated wage and hour and employment discrimination cases on behalf of organized immigrant workers. He is a graduate of Georgetown University and Harvard Law School.

Elizabeth Blaney, a former CPA turned community organizer and popular educator who has dedicated her life to building an organized base of community members fighting to change the political, social, and economic conditions that create oppression. In 1996, she co-founded Union de Vecinos, a grassroots community-based organization that formed the first tenant union in East Los Angeles and co-founded the citywide Los Angeles Tenants Union. More than twenty-five years later, Blaney continues to work at Union de Vecinos, Eastside Local of the LA Tenants Union, organizing neighborhood committees and tenant associations to create community-based solutions to dismantle systemic conditions of exploitation and racism.

Brenda Contreras (Macehual. b. 1984, Los Angeles/Tovaangar) is an experimental filmmaker and land defender. Contreras' ideas center around geography, memory, transgenerational trauma & the body, language and lack thereof. These themes are seen in both her artistic role and land defense work. She currently lives in Tovaangar and fights to bring agency back to the Land, flora and fauna with her non-profit Coyotl wan Macehualli.

Edgardo Contreras Nossa is a doctoral student in Urban Anthropology at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires. He has a Master in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Buenos Aires. He is a researcher at the Center for Habitat and Housing Studies [CEHyV / FADU / UBA] on urban problems and phenomena in different Latin American cities. Edgardo is also a doctoral researcher at the University of Montreal in the Department of Geography, currently researching collective ownership of the land, especially proposed by social movements in Buenos Aires. He is also a consultant for urban projects structuring and urban instruments design for multilateral organisms and different levels of governments. Edgardo is a former advisor in the Parliament of the city of Buenos Aires in the urban planning and housing commission and in the recovery of land value in the National Ministry of Territorial Development and Habitat. He is a member of the winning team International competition IDB UrbanLab 2016, Santa Marta, Colombia. Edgardo is a fellow of the ELAP program of the Canadian government at Ryerson University, Toronto (Master's degree 2014) and University of Montreal (PhD degree 2024). He is a member and co-founder of the surbanistas organization.

Guadalupe Granero Realini (Architect. MSc Urban and Regional Planning. PhD student Urban Philosophy. University of Buenos Aires) works on territorial justice, researching and thinking about the multiple oppressions the planetary urbanization is producing on and through territories. She focuses on contemporary extractivist processes in Latin America, which dispossess from urban to peasant and Indigenous communities, across cities, as well as natural environments. She carried out research at Ryerson University and Université de Montreal as an ELAP awarded scholar. In 2017, she published *Territorios de la Desigualdad*. *Política Urbana y Justicia Espacial*. Whenever possible, she teaches and collaborates with grassroots movements and alternative media. She served as Director of Training and Technical Assistance in Land Policies in the Ministry of Territorial Development and Habitat of Argentina and worked as a technical adviser to national and international organizations on urban and housing issues.

Lisa "Tiny" Gray-Garcia is a formerly unhoused, incarcerated poverty scholar, revolutionary journalist, lecturer, poet, visionary, teacher, single mama of Tiburcio, daughter of a houseless, disabled, indigenous mama Dee, and the co–founder of *POOR Magazine/ Prensa POBRE/ PoorNewsNetwork*. She is also the author of *Criminal of Poverty: Growing Up Homeless in America*, co-editor of

Decolonizer's Guide to a Humble Revolution, Born n' Raised in Frisco, and *Poverty Scholarship: Poor People-Led Theory, Art, Words, and Tears Across Mama Earth*. In 2011, she co-launched The Homefulness Project – a landless peoples self-determined land liberation movement in the Ohlone/ Lisjan/ Huchuin territory known as Deep East Oakland, the Bank of ComeUnity Reparations, and co-founded a liberation school for children, Deecolonize Academy. Tiny is also the facilitator of several cultural and theatre projects such as the Po Poets Project/ Poetas POBREs Proyecto (co-founded with Leroy Moore), welfareQUEENs, the Theatre of the POOR/ Teatro de los pobres. She has taught Poverty Scholarship theory and practice in universities, street corners, and encampments from Columbia to Skid Row. In 2022, she narrated a short movie based on her children's book, When Mama and Me Lived Outside: One Family's Journey Through Homelessness, which has subsequently won 22 awards across the country. In 2023, she began production on a feature length movie based on her first adapted screenplay with an all houseless cast, to be released in 2024.

Terra Graziani is a researcher and tenant organizer whose work focuses on histories of and experiments in the abolition of property. For the past ten years, she has been part of the tenant movement in California in various roles at organizations including Tenants Together, the Eviction Defense Collaborative, the Los Angeles Center for Community Law and Action, and the Los Angeles Tenants Union. Terra helps run the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP), a critical cartography collective organizing against dispossession in solidarity with gentrifying communities through research, art, oral history, data work, and mapping. She founded the Los Angeles chapter. She is a researcher at the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy and served as a coordinator and core partner on its National Science Foundation Research Coordination Network on Housing Justice in Unequal Cities and a researcher on its Mellon Foundation Race & Racialization project titled Housing the Third Reconstruction. Her writing has been published in *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography, Urban Geography, Radical Housing Journal, and ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*. Terra earned her Master's in Urban and Regional Planning at UCLA and her Bachelor's degree in Social and Cultural Geography at UC Berkeley. She is currently a PhD student in Geography at CUNY Graduate Center and her dissertation locates the tenant in legacies of land struggle in the US South.

Sterling Johnson (they/he) is a black, queer and disabled, scholar-activist, organizer, lawyer, geographer, writer, orator and doctoral candidate in the Geography and Urban Studies Department at Temple University located in Philadelphia, PA/Lenapehoking. His research focuses on Political Ecology of Health and the Body and Black geographies and theorizing the connections between homelessness, harm reduction, displacement, decolonization and settler colonialism. Even with these interests, he is focused on how Black people can thrive in this world free from racist ableist views of our abilities and worldview. He is the Board President of the Philadelphia Community Land Trust (arose from 2020 Phila. Parkway Encampment Protest), an organizer with Philadelphia Housing Action, and member of the following groups: Black and Latinx Community Control, the National Survivors Union, the Pennsylvania HIV Justice Alliance, and the Masculinity Action Project. Their experience has been working in collaboration with their community to gain resources, build infrastructure for liberatory practice and defend against state violence and combatting hegemonies of misogyny, misogynoir, classism and transphobia. He earned a bachelor's degree at the American University and master's degree from George Washington University in Geography. He has a juris doctorate from the University of California College of Law, San Francisco (formerly Hastings).

David Kelly (he/him) is a geographer and ethnographer attending to the intensification and lived experience of precarious dwelling. He has collaborated with First Nations people, people with disability, public housing tenants, homeless households and communities affected by urban renewal. His scholarship specifically attends to the social and spatial life of policy, and how it shapes housing adequacy and capacities for seeking justice.

Robin D.G. Kelley's research has explored the history of social movements in the United States, the African Diaspora, and Africa; black intellectuals; music and visual culture; Surrealism, Marxism, among other things. His essays have appeared in a wide variety of professional journals as well as general publications, including the *Journal of American History, American Historical Review, The Nation,*

Monthly Review, New York Times, Color Lines, Counterpunch, Souls, Black Renaissance/Renaissance Noir, Social Text, The Black Scholar, Journal of Palestine Studies, and *Boston Review*, for which he also serves as Contributing Editor. His books include, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); *The Ionious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original* (The Free Press, 2009); *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2002); with Howard Zinn and Dana Frank, *Three Strikes: The Fighting Spirit of Labor's Last Century* (Beacon Press, 2001); *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994); *Into the Fire: African Americans Since 1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) [Vol. 10 of the Young Oxford History of African Americans series]; *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

Hamid Khan is an organizer with the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition. The mission of the coalition is to build community-based power to dismantle police surveillance, spying, and infiltration programs. The coalition utilizes multiple campaigns to advance an innovative organizing model that is Los Angeles-based but has implications regionally, nationally, and internationally. An immigrant from Pakistan, Hamid came to the United States in 1979. As founder and former Executive Director of South Asian Network (19902010), Hamid helped create the first grass roots community-based organization in Los Angeles committed to informing and empowering thousands of South Asians in Southern California to act as agents of change in eliminating biases, discrimination and injustices. Hamid serves on the board of Political Research Associates, an organization that seeks to advance progressive thinking and action by providing research-based information, analysis, and referrals. In 2003, Hamid was selected for LA Stories: The Power of One by the Facing History and Ourselves. Hamid was also honored by the California State Assembly in 2006 for "excellence in public service and his dedication and contributions to the people of the State of California and beyond."

Priya Kunjan (they/them) is South Asian migrant settler living and working on Kulin Nation lands (Melbourne, Australia) as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at RMIT University and a volunteer current affairs broadcaster at 3CR Community Radio. Their current research focuses on experiences of housing precarity in Melbourne, with an emphasis on private renters and public housing tenants facing estate redevelopment.

Michele Lancione (he/they) is Professor of Economic and Political Geography at the Polytechnic of Turin, Italy, and Visiting Professor of Urban Studies at the University of Sheffield, United Kingdom. He is co-founder and editor of the *Radical Housing Journal*, corresponding editor at *IJURR*, and co-director of the Beyond Inhabitation Lab in Turin (with AbdouMaliq Simone). Michele's qualitative work offers a critical approach to home and homelessness, focusing on a relational reading of housing and habitation and on processes of dispossession in the contemporary urban. In recent years he focused on Italy as well as on Bucharest, Romania, where he took part in Roma-led housing justice struggles, which also resulted in a feature documentary entitled *A început ploaia/It started raining*.

His current funded research include a 5-year European Research Council project entitled Inhabiting Radical Housing, and a 4-year Italian Ministry of Universities project on Precarious Housing in Eastern Europe. Michele's most recent book is titled, *For a Liberatory Politics of Home* (Duke University Press, 2023).

Lindsay Massara is a doctoral student at the Peter A. Allard School of Law at University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. She is supervised by Dr. Brenna Bhandar. Lindsay's research broadly considers British colonial administration and the genealogy of common law emergency. She traces the phenomena of emergency and martial law in the colonies to magnify circuits of power and complicate formations of race, property logics, and a rule of law. Her work is situated within socio-legal spaces, informed by critical legal studies and TWAIL (Third World Approaches to International Law). Prior to joining Allard, Lindsay taught international law, human rights, and law and development courses at the University of Oregon School of Law. She began her career as a lawyer working at the Oregon Court of Appeals.

Luisa G. Melo is a woman of color, interdisciplinary scholar, and visual artist from the marginalized periphery of Brasilia. She was trained as a graphic designer in Brazil and an urbanist in Mexico; she is currently a PhD student in City, Culture & Community at Tulane. Her scholarship is the result of a long academic journey where she has crafted a unique path that integrates the arts with the city's social-spatial analysis and counter-hegemonic movements in Brazilian social peripheries. Each part of her personal-academic journey adds different colors to the lenses she uses to analyze practices of freedom emerging in the anti-Black city: her origin, identity, artistic training, broad geographical experiences, and community activism. She seeks to build spaces of freedom within her academic practice and community-engaged scholarship: thinking, theorizing, and organizing in the midst of "remembering we were never meant to survive" (Lorde 1997).

AnMarie R. Mendoza was born and raised in the San Gabriel Valley and identifies with both the original people (Gabrieleno-Tongva) and the distinctive working-class communities of the area. AnMarie has a Bachelors degree in Political Science and a Masters in American Indian Studies from UCLA. Generations of her family have witnessed, endured and contributed to the molding of Los Angeles (Occupied Tongva territory) and it is for this reason she continues her academic study in Urban Planning. She is creator and director of the "Aqueduct Between Us," a docuseries about water in Los Angeles from an indigenous perspective.

Marina Moscoso Arabía has a strong academic background in Social Sciences and Urban Studies. She has studied and/or conducted research in San Juan (Puerto Rico), Barcelona (Catalonia), Buenos Aires (Argentina) and the United States. Her current research focuses on the past and present of the squatting movement in Puerto Rico and the instrumentalization of the governmental apparatus as a real estate business. She is the co-founder of Casa Taft 169 (2013), a grassroots initiative pursuing the "off' grid" rehabilitation of a long standing "public nuisance", and Centro para la Reconstrucción del Habitat (2017), a nonprofit conceived to support access to nuisance properties for community benefit.

Marina is currently a PhD student in Human Geography at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, a minor in Gender Relations and International Development, and affiliated student of the Latin American Cities Collective. She is also an Improvise and Intervene Fellow, the 2nd cohort of the Humanities Research Institute's Interseminars, an initiative funded in part by the Mellon Foundation.

Annie Powers is an organizer and historian whose work focuses on the political struggles of poor and homeless communities. Annie is a PhD candidate in History whose dissertation examines the National Union of the Homeless, the first formation of unionized unhoused people in United States history. They are Research Coordinator with the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy, and their work emphasizes archiving and collectively learning from organized encampment communities. Annie organizes with poor housed and unhoused tenants as a member of Union de Vecinos, the Eastside Local of the Los Angeles Tenants Union.

Bryan Quintanilla is a writer, researcher, cartographer, organizer and translator. Los Angeles born and raised, he has been a member of the LA Tenant's Union since 2018. His interdisciplinary work touches on the intersections of race, culture, public policy, history, erasure and radical politics in Los Angeles and Hollywood in particular. Currently he is an MA candidate at California State University Los Angeles, whose work looks at the intersection of radical organic community organized spaces and the erasure imposed on these spaces by neoliberal policies in Hollywood. Additionally, he is an avid traveler of the city at night, who can largely be found plying the wears of the obscure, in a neighborhood that is willing to offer.

Jessi Quizar is an Assistant Professor at the University of Washington Tacoma in the School of Urban Studies. She researches racial capitalism, grassroots planning, and urban land and resource struggles in the U.S. Her work centers on the organizing and theorizing of Black and Indigenous communities to shape cities— particularly the city of Detroit—and has been published in *Theory, Culture, and*

Society, Antipode, American Indian and Culture Research Journal, The Detroit People's Atlas, and the award-winning edited volume *Racial Ecologies*. Jessi is a member of the Black | Indigenous 100s Collective, which uses long-term poetic conversation as a route towards building Black and Indigenous relationship and radical co-creation. Her current research explores the ways that anti-Black racism and settler colonialism operate together in processes of gentrification in Detroit.

Kareem Rabie is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Illinois, Chicago. His work focuses on privatization, housing, and the state-building project in the West Bank and he is the author of *Palestine is Throwing a Party and the Whole World is Invited*, published by Duke University Press in 2021. Previously he was Assistant Professor of Anthropology at American University in Washington, DC; visiting fellow at CUNY's Center for Place, Culture, and Politics and Committee on Globalization and Social Change; Harper-Schmidt Fellow at the University of Chicago; and Marie Curie Fellow/Senior Researcher at the University of Oxford's Centre on Migration, Policy, and Society (COMPAS). His current research focuses on the new economic and human geographies between Palestine and China.

Mpho Raboeane holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree in Politics Philosophy and Economics and LLB from the University of Cape Town. She is the Executive Director at activist Urban Land Justice organisation, Ndifuna Ukwazi. She is an attorney specialising in constitutional law, land and housing issues and human rights litigation. Her passion is building people's power through political conscientisation and has an acute interest in undoing internalised oppression.

Andrés F. Ramirez is a doctoral student in the department of urban planning at the University of California Los Angeles. His research interests include public space, Southern urban theories, insurgent planning, and Indigenous urbanism. As part of his dissertation, Andres accompanies Indigenous urban communities in Colombia and studies their claims for Indigenous Rights to the City. This research examines how Indigenous struggles contest and reconfigure state-based property regimes. Andres also works as a graduate student researcher at the Institute for Transportation Studies, where he supports a multi-year research project on the impact that freeways have on ethnic groups across Southern California. Andres is an alumnus of the Urban Humanities Initiative and is a member of the UnCommon Public Space Group, a collective that uses community-based events to explore pressing public space issues and to advance spatial justice.

Ananya Roy is Professor of Urban Planning, Social Welfare, and Geography and The Meyer and Renee Luskin Chair in Inequality and Democracy at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is inaugural Director of the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy at UCLA, which advances research and scholarship concerned with displacement and dispossession in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the world. Working in alliance with radical movements, the Institute seeks to build power and abolish structures of inequality, within and beyond the university. Ananya's work has focused on urban transformations and land grabs as well as on global capital and predatory financialization. With enduring theoretical commitments to postcolonial critique, feminist thought, and critical race studies, she refuses the whiteness of canons of knowledge, forging theory and pedagogy attentive to historical difference. Ananya has led a National Science Foundation Research Coordination Network on Housing Justice in Unequal Cities and a Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar on *Sanctuary Spaces: Reworlding Humanism*, which is concerned with the place of racial others in liberal democracy. Her most recent book, co-edited with Veronika Zablotsky, is *Beyond Sanctuary: The Humanism of a World in Motion* (Duke University Press, 2025). Ananya's current research is concerned with "racial banishment," the expulsion of working-class communities of color from cities through racialized policing and other forms of state-organized violence.

Shanti Singh is the Legislative & Communications Director at Tenants Together, California's statewide base-building coalition of tenant unions and allied local housing justice organizations. Her day-to-day work includes political education and policy & messaging support for local and statewide campaigns for rent control and other tenant laws/protections, as well as public investment in and community control of land and housing. She formerly co-chaired the San Francisco Democratic Socialists of America and was California Deputy

Data Director for the Bernie Sanders 2020 presidential campaign. She is a San Francisco city commissioner who has worked on social housing, public banking, green public banking, and gig economy worker issues, and serves on the board of the San Francisco Community Land Trust.

Ben Teresa is an Associate Professor in Urban and Regional Studies and Planning at Virginia Commonwealth University. His research and teaching focuses on producing knowledge that is useful for how the people and communities who are most affected by urban political-economic change can develop capacity and autonomy to collectively shape their future. This agenda encompasses three main substantive areas of research: 1) the process of financialization, or the increasing role of financial institutions, actors, and logic in real estate development, housing, and education; 2) eviction and housing instability; and 3) the political economy of the arts and arts policy. He is the co-founder and director of the RVA Eviction Lab, a collaboration of faculty and students for community-responsive research and data that supports the advocacy work of those who are most affected by housing instability.

Jennifer L. Tucker is an associate professor of Community and Regional Planning at the University of New Mexico. Her research focuses on urban inequality, social justice struggles and the frontiers of racial capitalism in the Americas. As an anti-racist feminist with a long history of social movement activism, she is committed to scholarship and action that expands our political imaginations toward enacting justice. Their recent book, *Outlaw Capital: Everyday Illegalities and the Making of Uneven Development*, shows how transgressive economies and grey spaces are central to globalized capitalism.

Leonardo Vilchis, with Pico-Aliso residents, co-founded Union de Vecinos to stop the demolition of the projects. They won a contract for the 250 organized families to stay in the development. In 2007, Leonardo with local residents began a democratization project in Maywood to increase civic engagement, resulting in a movement that changed city government, removed anti-immigrant checkpoints, and fired a corrupt city police department. His experience has helped put Union de Vecinos, Eastside Local of the LA Tenants Union, in a leadership role against gentrification in Boyle Heights. Leonardo is also a co-founder of the Los Angeles Tenants Union.

Diane Wong is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University, Newark. Her research and teaching interests include Asian American activism, race and ethnicity, critical urban studies, abolition studies, gender and sexuality, cultural and media studies, and community rooted research. Her current book project, *You Can't Evict A Movement: Intergenerational Activism and Housing Justice in New York City*, combines ethnography, participatory mapping, archival research, augmented reality, and oral history interviews to examine intergenerational resistance to gentrification in Manhattan Chinatown. Her other book, Asian America Rising: Movement Moments and New Visions in the 21st Century (co-edited with Mark TsengPutterman), presents a series of contemporary case studies that represent the diversity of Asian American political activism, community building, mutual aid, and issue-based organizing. She is co-editor of a special issue on "Asian American Abolition Feminisms," for *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. Her work has appeared in *PS: Political Science & Politics, Urban Affairs Review, Women's Studies Quarterly, Amerasia Journal, Politics, Groups,* and *Identities, Gateways,* and a variety of books, anthologies, podcasts, and exhibitions. As a socially engaged artist, Diane is a member of the Chinatown Art Brigade and recently co-curated the exhibits "Archives as Memorial" and "De-Gentrification Archives" in New York City.



Photo credit: Anthony Orendorff

Acknowledgements

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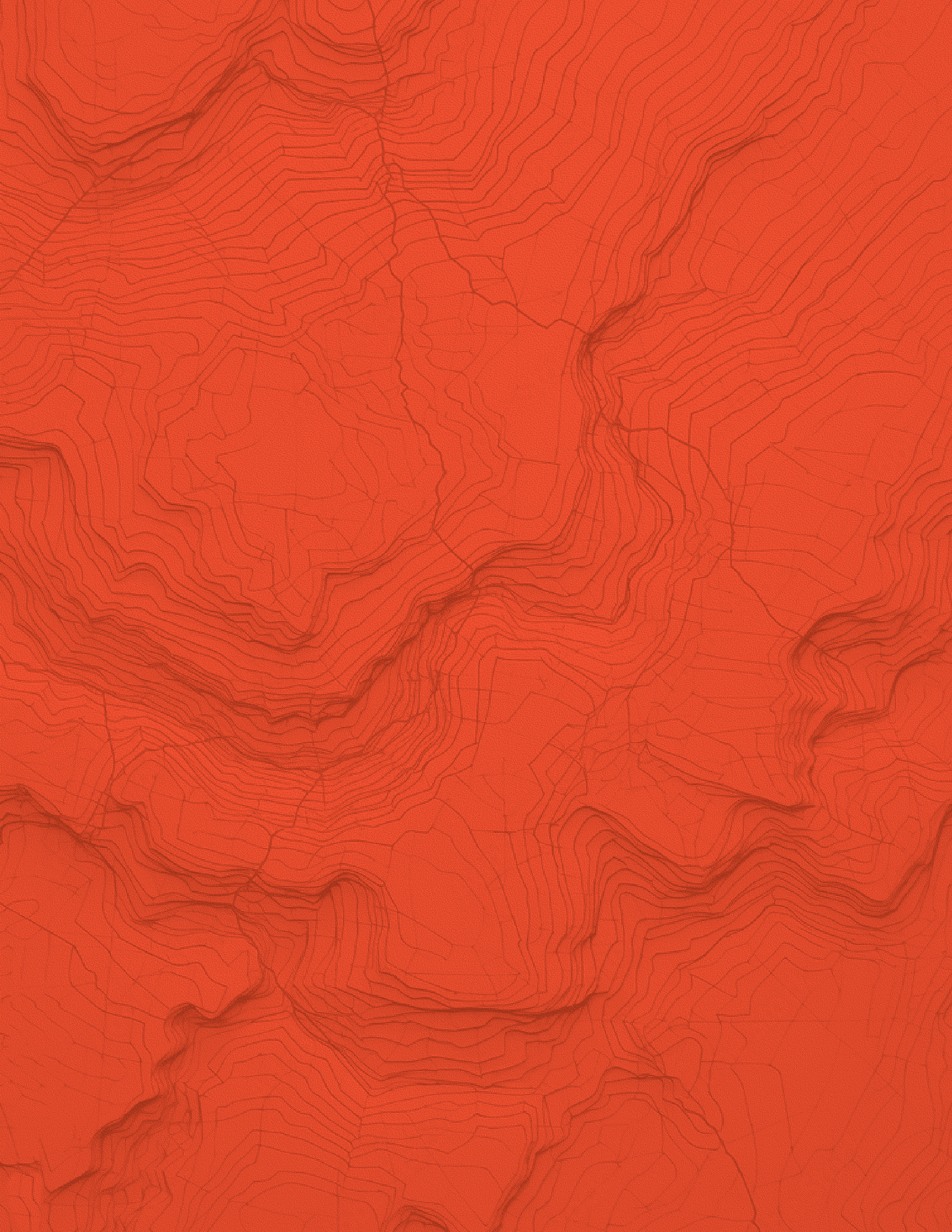



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