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EDITED BY ANANYA ROY, RAQUEL ROLNIK,
TERRA GRAZIANI, AND HILARY MALSON

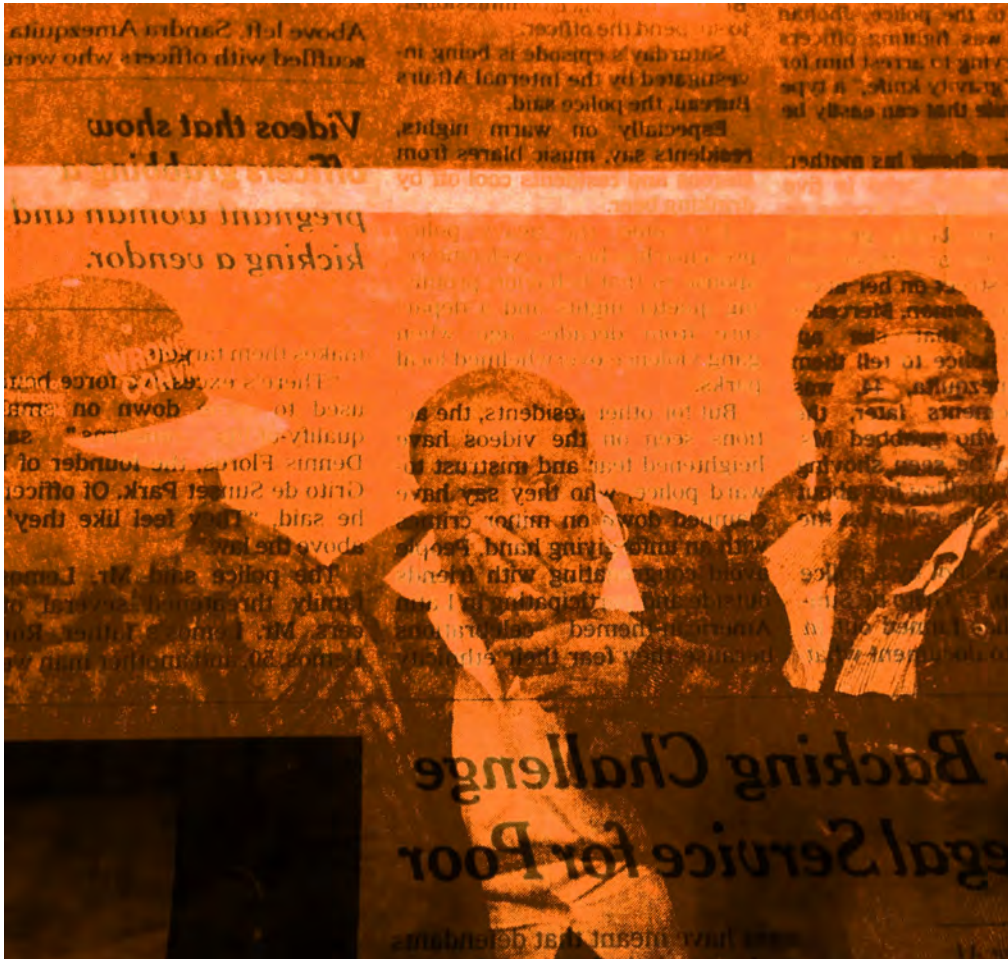


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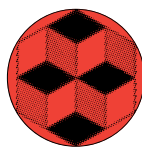
METHODOLOGIES FOR HOUSING JUSTICE RESOURCE GUIDE



EDITED BY ANANYA ROY, RAQUEL ROLNIK, TERRA GRAZIANI, AND HILARY MALSON

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UNEQUAL CITIES

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The Institute on Inequality and Democracy at UCLA Luskin, and by extension the Housing Justice in Unequal Cities Network, acknowledge the Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (Los Angeles basin, So. Channel Islands) and are grateful to have the opportunity to work for the taraaxatom (indigenous peoples) in this place. As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to Honuukvetam (Ancestors), 'Ahihirom (Elders), and 'eyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present and emerging.

METHODOLOGIES FOR HOUSING JUSTICE RESOURCE GUIDE

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Eden McNutt

Artist Statement

Often it can feel like the news is imposed on us. So often, decisions are made that we have no voice or say in, but then we're left to deal with the repercussions – left feeling the weight of a system that bears down on us and tries to further disempower us. By experimenting with newsprint, I'm able to reflect on the power of words, media, and language, and how they specifically affect marginalized communities.

By placing newsprint on a light table and using computer processing to further increase the contrast, it's possible to bring both sides of the paper into view. Sometimes this exposes the injustice and hypocrisies at work. Two articles appeared on one side of this page: one about videos that expose excessive police violence, and the other about funding being cut from programs that provides legal services for poor communities. Printed on the other side of the page was the image of a Black family after hearing a verdict sentencing one of their family members to prison. One of the men in the photos has his hand over his mouth in disbelief and another has a hat on that says, "Wrongly Convicted."

– Eden McNutt

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Statement on Quotations

While working with the authors of this volume’s “Rebel Archives” chapter, the searing words of a short, straightforward poem by Lucille Clifton lingered at the edges of my mind: “[t]hey ask me to remember / but they want me to remember / their memories / and I keep on remembering / mine.” The “Rebel Archives” authors drew from their own diverse backgrounds to shape their collective insights into radical memory work as a meaningful housing justice methodology. One Okinawan scholar shared how testifying in court in native languages can inscribe resistance against the settler state into their official archive, while an organizer based in Skid Row recounted the community’s recent refusal to be erased by neighborhood rebranding. As I listened to their conversations, it is perhaps unsurprising that the insights of a woman from my own community came to mind.

The methodologies in this resource guide may differ, but a counterhegemonic thread runs through them all. In striving to tie the chapters together, and in keeping with this publication’s commitment to epistemological experimentation, I turned to writers outside of the planning canon who inspire my work as a critical planning scholar. At the start of each chapter, you will find quotations from anti-colonial historians, Black feminist poets, radical psychiatrists, and revolutionary organizers. I hope these words offer an entryway into the spirit of each methodology, and serve as a reminder that inspiration in our struggles for justice can be found all around us.

– Hilary Malson

Methodologies for Housing Justice

Ananya Roy
University of California, Los Angeles

Raquel Rolnik
University of São Paulo

Two decades ago, Chela Sandoval's vitally important text, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, made the case for theory and methods that advance liberation. As Angela Davis notes in the foreword to the book, Sandoval gives us "a series of methods, not only for analyzing texts, but for creating social movements and identities that are capable of speaking to, against, and through power."¹ Sandoval's project is an inspiration for our endeavor to assemble and build methodologies for housing justice. As in the case of *Methodology of the Oppressed*, our concern is with methodologies of theory and research that are also emancipatory. Such methodologies must then, as Sandoval argues, "cut through grammars of supremacy."² From mapping to planning, the methodologies foregrounded in this Resource Guide are deliberate counterpoints to the dominant epistemological frameworks that undergird the production and transformation of space under conditions of racial capitalism. In particular, we seek to challenge definitions of the housing question that are based in technocratic supply-side and deregulatory solutions. Instead, we insist that housing must be understood as a political economy of segmented markets, racialized redlines, and speculative frontiers. Similarly, we insist that housing justice is not a gift handed by governments to communities but rather is forged through insurgency, resistance, and conflict. Learning from struggles in Brazil, we view urban conflict as a process through which subordinated groups become collective subjects.³

1 Davis 2000: xii.

2 Sandoval 2000: 2.

3 Sandoval 2000: 2.

4 Sandoval 2000: 5.

5 Roy 2003.

A challenge to epistemological and institutional dominance thus requires oppositional politics grounded in relationships of accountability. Sandoval articulates an "oppositional consciousness" that is shaped by "accountability to U.S. third world feminism" and the subordinated communities that such feminism seeks to center.⁴ For us, the commitment to housing justice requires accountability to communities on the frontlines of housing precarity. We do not owe any such accountability to "propertied citizenship" and the political configurations that prop up the powerful prerogatives of property.⁵ We have learned such accountability from traditions of thought that analyze and critique world-systems of racial capitalism and its heteropatriarchal formations. From Black studies to decolonial critique, from indigenous studies to postcolonial feminism, such traditions serve as the foundations for a repertoire of methodologies for housing justice.

This Resource Guide is the outcome of a Summer Institute on Methodologies for Housing Justice convened by the Institute on Inequality and Democracy at UCLA Luskin as part of the Housing Justice in Unequal Cities Network, which is supported by the National Science Foundation (BCS 1758774). Held in Los Angeles in August 2019, the Summer Institute brought together participants from cities around the world. As is the case with the overall scope and purpose of the Housing Justice in Unequal Cities Network, it created a shared terrain of scholarship for movement-based and university-based scholars. Dissatisfied with the canonical methods that are in use in housing studies and guided by housing justice movements that are active research communities, the Summer Institute was premised on the assertion that methodology is political. Methodology is rooted in arguments about the world and involves relations of power and knowledge. The method itself – be it countermapping or people's diaries – does not ensure an ethics of solidarity and a purpose of justice. Such goals

require methodologies for liberation. Thus, as is evident in this Resource Guide, our endeavor foregrounds innovative methods that are being used by researchers across academia and activism and explicitly situates such methods in an orientation towards housing justice.

What does an orientation towards housing justice entail for methods for research and methodologies for social action? First, our focus is on structural mechanisms of dispossession and displacement in unequal cities, specifically the financialization of land and housing and the criminalization of poverty. While established scholarship is concerned with market-driven displacement in the age of neoliberalization, we emphasize state-organized violence against racialized bodies and communities as foundational to market rule. Without imposing a uniquely American conceptualization of race, we seek a global understanding of segregation, expropriation, subordination, illegalization, disappearance – processes that are not adequately explained in the canon of urban political economy. As lead instructors of the Summer Institute, our own research is concerned with such forms of violence under conditions of racial capitalism. Roy's scholarship draws attention to racial banishment, a form of social death enacted through legal violence.⁶ Rolnik's analysis of the global circuits of financialization emphasizes forms of extractivism that capture lived territories and create a new, permanent condition of colonial occupation, imposing a state of permanent temporariness for some specific, often racialized, bodies.⁷

6 Roy 2017.

7 Rolnik 2019.

8 McFarlane 2011.

9 Byrd 2014: 614.

Second, we are convinced that in order to pinpoint the structural mechanisms of dispossession and displacement, it is necessary to adopt a comparative and transnational approach to housing justice research and praxis, or what McFarlane has called “a critical geography of urban learning.”⁸ Many of the methodologies highlighted at the Summer Institute – eviction observatories, militant ethnography, radical participatory action research – emerge from key global nodes of struggle and knowledge production: Athens, Barcelona, Bogotá, São Paulo, and more. Such global thinking – what we have conceptualized as thinking from the South, with cities such as Athens and Barcelona folded into such Southern geographies through their subordinated position within the hegemonic European project of austerity governance – is essential for an expanded repertoire of methodologies for housing justice. But thinking from the South also entails a repositioning of dominant EuroAmerican cities, such as Los Angeles, in the long history of colonialism and imperialism. The Summer Institute, grounded in Los Angeles, took place at the University of California, Los Angeles, a campus of manicured beauty which sits on land stolen from the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples, and at the LA Community Action Network, which fights for liberation from the heart of Skid Row, the ground zero of Black death and disappearance in Los Angeles. To consider housing justice, we had to take account of the many histories of banishment that are folded into contemporary formations of housing precarity, from the elimination of indigenous people to the repatriation of Mexican citizens to Japanese internment to the forced removals that made possible the city's urban infrastructure to the large-scale deportation of Salvadoran and Cambodian youth. Los Angeles then must be understood as what Byrd has described as a world of “many Souths,” a place that does “imaginative work for the nation-state as sites of remembrance, trauma, absence, and survival.”⁹

Third, this endeavor asserts the importance of technologies of research and representation in struggles for housing justice. Data, maps, stories, archives are all enlisted in such struggles. But we are also acutely aware of the politics and ethics of data, including the pressing questions of who collects and controls data, how these tools, platforms, and repositories are used, and for what purpose. In previous publications of the Housing Justice for Unequal Cities Network, we have

argued that there cannot be housing justice without research justice.¹⁰ Too often academic research has relied on exploitative modes of knowledge production. Too often narratives generated by the non-profit industrial complex have been dictated and policed by the agendas of philanthrocapitalism. Too often data collected from frontline communities has been weaponized against them. Too often stories and testimonies of the dispossessed and displaced have been trivialized and commodified. In the age of techno-capitalism, an extraordinary array of digital tools, platforms, and repositories are available to social movements. At the same time, techno-capitalism also deepens what McElroy has called “double dispossession,” which she conceptualizes as the twinned process of spatial evictions and the appropriation of social identity.¹¹ Each chapter of this Resource Guide thus tackles the complex questions of knowledge ownership and use, of the politics of voice and representation, and of the possibilities of building solidarity through research.

Fourth, an orientation towards housing justice requires attention not only to the structural mechanisms of dispossession and displacement but also to strategies and imaginaries of emplacement.¹² Situated in different contexts of struggle, we have each come to use this term to indicate how communities reclaim lived territories in the face of racial banishment and against the empire of finance. If methodologies for housing justice are to live up to Woods’s call to be something more than an “autopsy,” then such methodologies have to contribute to the right to remember, the right to stay and the right to actively create new territories for life.¹³ As several of the chapters in this Resource Guide demonstrate, the right to stay is closely related to the right to remember. Put another way, our methodologies for housing justice are concerned with what Masuda et al. call thinking from and about the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, a site of “over a century of colonial urbanization” have called “the urban praxis of remaining.”¹⁴ “The dispossessed,” they insist, “do not fade from view; they remain. Those disappeared express through their descendants and allies a stubborn will to live, create, and ultimately to influence the processes that would realize a just urban life.”¹⁵

Why Housing Justice Demands Research on Financialization and Criminalization

A special focus of the Summer Institute and this Resource Guide is the financialization of land and housing, which we see to present distinctive challenges for housing justice research and praxis. With this in mind, it is worth outlining what we mean by financialization and why it matters. Cities around the world are facing renewed waves of housing financialization, with epicenters that have moved from the promotion of homeownership through indebtedness to rental housing. This is a global process put forward by a new colonial empire, faceless and flagless: global finance. This new colonial power, deterritorialized and abstract, fictitious and speculative by nature, seizes cities, capturing spaces built for life and rapidly transforming them into *landscapes for revenue*. Although financialization is a global process, it expresses itself in a singular and unique manner in each place, depending on the specific political economies of land and urban in each city.

The effects of the financialization of housing go well beyond the restructuring of housing markets, resulting in dispossession and displacement for marginalized groups. In the previous cycle of financialization in the global North, for example, mortgage lenders targeted Black homebuyers with subprime loans, while the systematic dismantling of public housing displaced low-income residents from their homes. In this latest cycle of housing financialization, those foreclosed houses and vacated properties have since been transformed into vehicles for

¹⁰ Roy 2019.

¹¹ McElroy 2019.

¹² Schiller 2016.

¹³ Woods 2002: 63.

¹⁴ Masuda et al. 2019: 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid*: 15.

revenue extraction. Global finance requires the unlocking of wealth embedded in residential built spaces. Often such unlocking means the eviction of urban residents who are priced out of housing markets. Likewise, in cities of the global South, eviction is also a widely used mechanism to dispossess the urban majority of their self-built communities as these sites become prime locations for financial speculation and global investments.

To study and challenge such structural mechanisms of financialization we need creative methodologies of research and social action. While in the history of cities, the mobilization of capital through cycles of valorization and revalorization of built space is not new, the scale and speed of today's processes indicate the massive concentration of global finance in the era of techno-capitalism. In particular, as Harvey has argued, the technological revolution of value representation with increasingly abstract circuits has transformed the relationship between social labor and built space.¹⁶ To unearth and make visible such circuits requires methodologies attentive not only to the here and now of financialization, embodied in built form, but also to time-space speculation and the algorithms and abstractions that undergird it. Put another way, while it is essential to study evictions in all their complexity, it is equally important to bring to light the logics of capital mobilization that drive evictions.

¹⁶ Harvey 2014: 241.

¹⁷ Aalbers 2016: 117.

¹⁸ Byrne 2016.

¹⁹ Fields and Raymond 2019; Wyly et al. 2009.

It is our contention that the financialization of land and housing is a state-led process, with strategic policies of deregulation enabling its rapid expansion.¹⁷ Methodologies for housing justice must uncover the central role of the state in underwriting the predations of global capital. Planning regulations and urban projects led by governments have actively generated what Byrne has termed "asset price urbanism," a practice in which financial performativity rather than needs or desires of residents defines the morphologies and uses which will reshape places and territories.¹⁸ Methodologies for housing justice must understand and unveil those forms and narratives in order to be possible for those affected to react, mobilize, and remain.

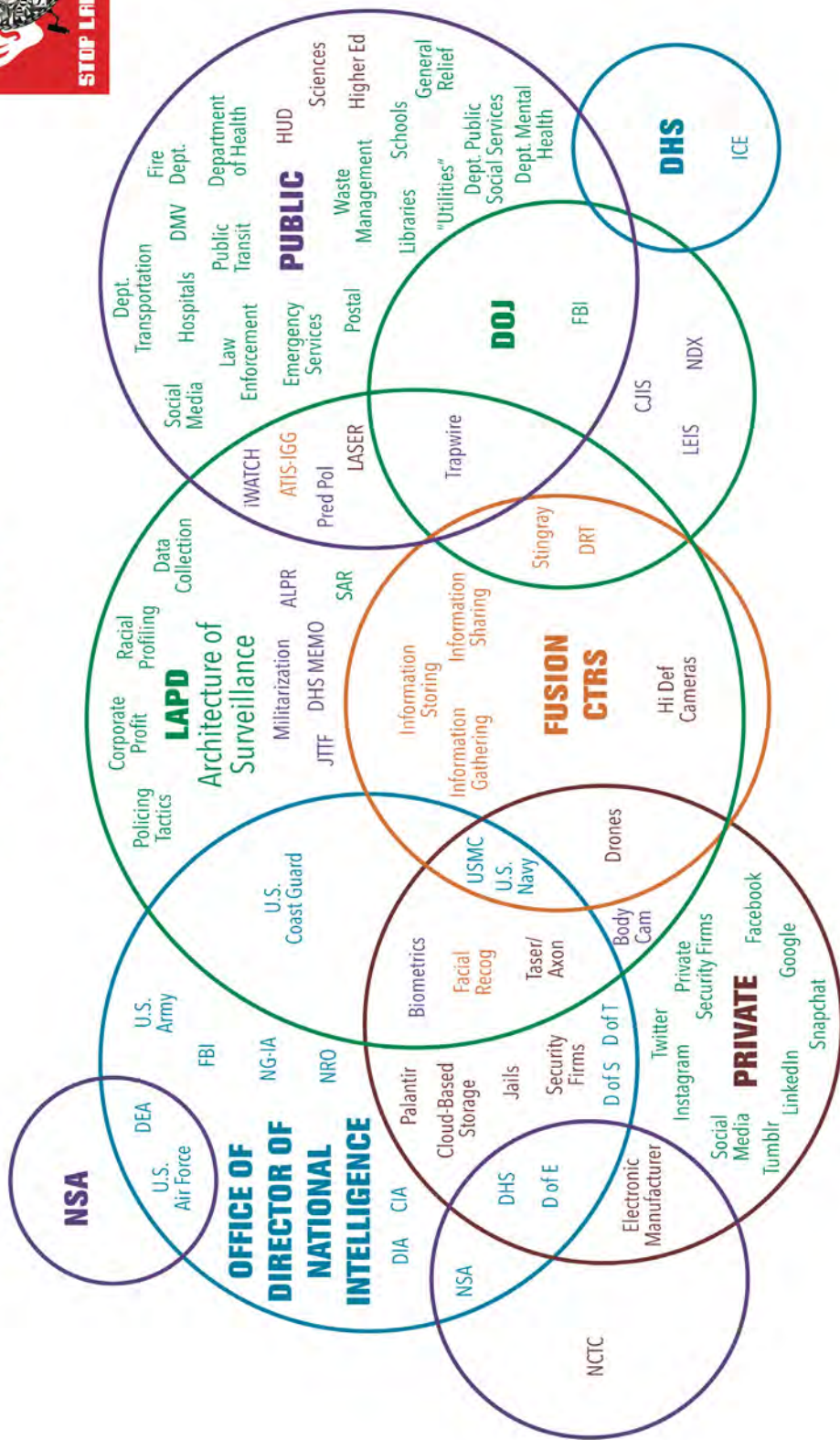
It is also our contention that the role of the state in producing housing inequality and precarity through financialization is manifested not only in policies of deregulation and asset price urbanism but also in those of criminalization, policing, and surveillance. In the United States, as scholars such as Fields and Raymond and Wyly et al. have shown, the contours of financialization deepen long-standing geographies of racial exclusion and segregation.¹⁹ Our interest in the concept of racial banishment foregrounds the practices of punishment and exile through which targeted communities are contained and controlled. In many U.S. cities today, including Los Angeles, municipal ordinances have criminalized the unhoused, placing them in a permanent state of spatial illegalization and social rightlessness. Methodologies for housing justice thus require systematic audits of the vast public resources deployed to enact such criminalization and meticulous analysis of the legal violence through which human life is rendered illegal. Also needed are modes of self-representation that can serve as a counterpoint to rightlessness. As financialization operates through global circuits, so regimes of spatial illegalization while manifested in local acts of exclusion and exile are embedded in global structures of colonial and imperial power. For example, the path-breaking analysis produced by Stop LAPD Spying has shown how local geographies of policing are driven by racialized algorithms of predictive policing and a highly complex architecture of surveillance. Methodologies for housing justice require making visible the apparatus of the stalker state as much as they require making visible the circuits of state-led financialization and speculation.

Figure 1: Information Sharing Environment, Stop LAPD Spying.



INFORMATION SHARING ENVIRONMENT

“STALKER STATE”



But in addition to the many challenges already outlined by us, there are several more in the assembling and building of methodologies for housing justice. We take up three of these in this Resource Guide. First, the structural mechanisms of financialization and criminalization produce not only displacement but also what Yiftachel has called “displaceability” and what de Miranda et al. have termed “permanent transitoriness.”²⁰ Targeted communities live under the constant threat of eviction, expulsion, and deportation and such threat must be understood as a form of material and symbolic violence. What are the anticipatory methodologies that can capture such time-space conditions of persistent insecurity and iterative precarity? Second, while it is urgently necessary to unearth the abstractions and algorithms of financialization and criminalization, it is also necessary to give prominence to the lived experience of such processes. As García-Lamarca and Kaika argue, financialization must be understood as “mortgaged lives” where “countless people who signed mortgage contracts found their lives directly dependent on the success or failure of capital accumulation strategies rooted in the built environment.”²¹ What are the embodied methodologies that can capture such entanglements and complicities? Third, if permanent transitoriness is a key feature of today’s housing inequality and precarity, then so is permanent insurgency. Our focus on housing justice, rather than a housing crisis, is meant to emphasize the resignification of space and society by social movements fighting dispossession and displacement. Such struggles often involve the reclamation of lost histories and the articulation of imaginaries of liberation. As we have noted before, the right to stay is closely linked to the right to remember. But the right to remember is contested terrain raising difficult questions about collective memory. What are the participatory methodologies that can capture claims to space and place?

20 Yiftachel 2017; de Miranda et al 2019.

21 García-Lamarca and Kaika 2016: 314.

22 Lorde 1984.

23 Crampton and Krygier 2008.

24 Acselrad 2008; Acselrad 2010; Sletto 2009; Sletto et al 2013.

A Repertoire of Methodologies

The curriculum of the Summer Institute was organized around key methodologies that illuminate structural mechanisms of dispossession and displacement and that make visible lived experiences of eviction, exclusion, and exile. We were particularly keen to learn about methodologies that are actively deployed in housing justice struggles in different parts of the world. While the chapters of this Resource Guide provide detailed elaboration of these methodologies, their possible use, and their limitations, we provide here a brief glimpse of these spaces of knowledge.

At stake across many of these methodologies is the following question: can the “master’s tools” – Lorde’s famous phrasing – be used for purposes of building another world?²² Take for instance the matter of cartography, a tool which runs through many of the methodologies tackled in the Summer Institute and this Resource Guide. Cartography, as part of Eurocentric modern science, has historically been an instrument of colonization and its control of territories and cultures, contributing to narratives of centrality and hegemony. However, there is an emerging production of cartographies, which appropriates techniques and knowledge for counter-hegemonic purposes. This is evident in collaborative cartography endeavors involving universities, social movements, community groups, collectives and activists.²³ From Latin America, especially from Colombia and Brazil, have emerged frameworks of “social cartography,” “participatory cartography,” and cartographies of social action.²⁴ All of these have in common a collaborative character, an understanding that mapping is an educational and political process, and an emphasis on territorial readings of lived space which discloses the invisible layers in institutional cartographic representations. Santos identifies such practices as “cartographic activism, a complex and multiple dialogic field” related to struggles, mobilizations, denunciation of rights violations,

and construction of alternatives.²⁵ This has coincided with the rise of critical, participatory, and feminist GIS as well as the effort in the social sciences and humanities to rethink the assumed divide between quantitative and cartographic methods on the one hand and critical human geography on the other hand.²⁶

But counter-cartographies are not immune from the difficult questions surrounding the politics and ethics of data. As Elwood notes, Volunteered Geographic Information or VGI has the potential “to create digital records of human observations and experiences never before recorded and saved as digital data” but also raises concerns about surveillance and erosion of privacy.²⁷ Related to this is the question of how the data is used by impacted communities and other decision-makers. Indeed, counter-cartographies remain vulnerable to capture by hegemonic actors and interests. For example, mapping technologies are being utilized as an instrument of social participation but within techno-bureaucratic systems of planning and public policy. And looming over all of this is techno-capitalism itself as global corporations such as Google provide “free” mapping tools while deepening the control and commercialization of information.²⁸

Finally, all of the methodologies discussed in this Resource Guide are haunted by absence. While we are committed to what Hernández has termed the “rebel archives,” or the “words and deeds of dissidents” that have evaded destruction by the forces of state violence, we recognize the stark limits of radical representation and even self-representation.²⁹ We recognize the silences of the archives and public records. We recognize the disappearance of place, memory, and people. Methodologies for housing justice cannot speak, with authenticity or completeness, for subaltern subjects and spaces. But they can be keenly attuned to the significance of absence. Gilliland and Caswell thus follow Black and postcolonial feminist scholars such as Arondekar and Hartman who construct “new imagined forms of archival evidence” at the very site of the limits and silences of the archives.³⁰ These are, in Hartman’s words, “impossible stories” that require bold and creative imaginaries of critique and liberation.³¹ ■

25 Santos 2011: 1.

26 Elwood 2008; O’Sullivan et al., 2018; Sheppard 2014; Wylie 2011.

27 Elwood 2008: 173-174.

28 Marino 2019.

29 Hernández 2017: 4.

30 Gilliland and Caswell 2016; Arondekar 2009; Hartman 2008: 10.

31 Hartman 2008: 10.

Eviction Observatories

<i>Inspiration</i>	São Paulo Evictions Observatory http://www.labcidade.fau.usp.br/mapa-denuncias/ and http://www.labcidade.fau.usp.br/category/obsremocoas/
<i>Instructor</i>	Raquel Rolnik
<i>Purpose</i>	To make permanent transitoriness visible such that this visibility can serve as the basis for collective action including political networks against evictions and planos populares or counter-plans to help communities affected by the threat of evictions to remain.
<i>Method</i>	Auto-representation by those facing evictions and threats of evictions with additional research and mapping conducted by university researchers (including at more micro scale) identification of the key reasons for evictions and eviction threats, often challenging the justifications through which powerful actors justify evictions.
<i>Provocation</i>	In what ways can such observatories track the time-space geographies of the displaced? What are the ethnographic methods through which the stories of the evicted can be told?

People's Diaries

<i>Inspiration</i>	The People's Debt Diaries Project, Athens and Barcelona (https://www.debtdiaries.net/about)
<i>Instructor</i>	Melissa García-Lamarca
<i>Purpose</i>	To uncover and share the lived experience of housing and financial dispossession and to build political alliances through such story-telling methods.
<i>Method</i>	Solicited diaries with questions that focus on the experience of dispossession, such as indebtedness, and that aim to bring to light the affect and feelings involved in such experience.
<i>Provocation</i>	In what ways can individual diaries come together to build a collective understanding of dispossession and collective power towards housing justice?

Countermapping

<i>Inspiration</i>	The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, New York (https://www.antievictionmap.com/)
<i>Instructor</i>	Elana Eden, Terra Graziani, and Erin McElroy
<i>Purpose</i>	Following Maharawal and McElroy, countermapping can be understood as “a set of critical cartographic and feminist data visualization practices that seek to render visible the landscapes, lives, and sites of resistance and dispossession elided in capitalist, colonial, and liberal topographies.” ³² They insist that countermapping be “accompanied by political action.”
<i>Method</i>	Cartographies of property and power that identify actors, policies, and territories along with narrative oral history and mural projects that make tangible “the life stories and community experiences of people” experiencing and fighting dispossession. ³³
<i>Provocation</i>	Countermapping is a cartographic and archival practice. It has a pedagogical role as well as a performative one. In what ways can these maps and stories serve as the basis for organizing and collective action as well as the imagining of just urban futures?

³² Maharawal and McElroy 2018: 380.

³³ *Ibid.*

Court Records as Living Archives

Inspiration Housing justice movements that fight spatial illegalization and social rightlessness, Cape Town, Delhi, Los Angeles

Instructor Shayla Myers

Purpose Understanding records of harm so that they can be challenged and building records of presence that can establish the case for rights, redistribution, and reparation.

Method Analyzing court records to take account of who has standing within legal reason, how state power and propertied power are asserted over different types of spaces, and how such records tell or elide the voices and stories of people facing housing inequality and precarity.

Provocation Not all collections of records are archives. Following Hall, we understand the constitution of an archive to be an “object of reflection and debate.”³⁴ Archives, Hall reminds us “are not inert historical collections. They always stand in an active, dialogic, relation to the questions which the present puts to the past; and the present always puts its questions differently from one generation to another.”³⁵ Can court records, and thus legal reason, be mobilized as a living archive by housing justice movements? What does it mean for housing justice research and praxis when the law becomes the site and logic of struggle, or what Bhan has termed the “juridicalisation of resistance?”³⁶

³⁴ Hall 2001.

³⁵ Hall 2001.

³⁶ Bhan 2016.

People's Audits

Inspiration Los Angeles Community Action Network and Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, Los Angeles (<https://cangress.org/> and <https://stoplapdspeying.org/>)

Instructor Hamid Khan and Pete White

Purpose As the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition argues, it is necessary to “watch the watcher;” i.e., to make visible the practices and impacts of state power with the intent of creating public accountability and policy change.

Method Pinpoint and track key policies, seek public records regarding the implementation and impact of these policies, highlight the lack of information available to the public, develop political methods that enact accountability from elected officials and those who hold public office.

Provocation Various state agencies are tasked with the work of audits. While people's audits enact public accountability that is shaped by the concerns of frontline communities, in what ways does the work of procuring and analyzing public records and tracking public policies burden organizations and movements with limited resources?

Radical Participatory Action Research

Inspiration Orlando Fas Borda's paradigm of participatory action research, Colombia

Instructor Amy Ritterbusch

Purpose To create a collective way of producing knowledge about suffering, vulnerability, trauma that refuses extractivist logics and honors those whose knowledge is often silenced and subordinated.

Method As Ritterbusch notes, this is a philosophy of life that centers human relationships of empathy through Orlando Fals Borda's concept of *sentipensar/ sentipensamiento/ sentipensante* which engages feeling and thinking simultaneously.³⁷

Provocation Participatory action research has been appropriated and mainstreamed by powerful institutions from governments and foundations to the World Bank. In what ways can a radical version of participatory action research be nurtured and how can it be distinguished from the globally circulating toolkit?

³⁷ Ritterbusch 2019.

Participatory Memory Work

<i>Inspiration</i>	The Texas Freedom Colonies Project (http://www.thetexasfreedomcoloniesproject.com/p/texas-freedom-colonies.html)
<i>Instructor</i>	Andrea R. Roberts
<i>Purpose</i>	To curate and preserve place through collective memory and craft “Black planning imaginaries [that] can disrupt cunning and virulent white/colonial spatial imaginaries in historic Black communities.” ³⁸
<i>Method</i>	To detect nontraditional sources and forms of memory, ethically collect and curate this knowledge, and leverage these collective recollections to organize dispersed constituencies and resist cultural erasure.
<i>Provocation</i>	As Roberts notes, there are many instances of “intangible Black geographies,” sites at which “evidence of placemaking has disappeared” but where “storytelling practices” maintain “attachments to, and stewardship of” communities. ³⁹ Who holds responsibility for collecting and caring for memories sustained through story and testimony?

³⁸ Roberts 2018a: 284.

³⁹ Roberts 2018b: 146.

Displacement Alert Maps and Watchlists

Inspiration Displacement Alert Project, Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, New York (<https://anhd.org/project/displacement-alert-project-dap>)

Instructor Benjamin Dulchin

Purpose To create data tools that anticipate displacement pressures and facilitate organizing to prevent such displacement.

Method To compile and interpret public information to produce risk indicators and risk maps that pinpoint the potential targets of predatory financialization and speculation; to make such information available to housing justice movements and advocates for organizing strategies and tactics.

Provocation Are displacement alert maps and tools vulnerable to capture by the same forces of financial speculation that such methodologies seek to resist? If so, how can organizations and movements guard their data and watchlists?

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We Have Always Been Here! Rebel Archives: Radical Memory Work as Resistance, Collective Care, and Healing

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“they ask me to remember
but they want me to remember
their memories
and i keep on remembering
mine.”

– Lucille Clifton



REBEL ARCHIVES
RADICAL MEMORY WORK
AS RESISTANCE,
COLLECTIVE CARE
& HEALING

INTRODUCTION: REBEL ARCHIVES

Remembering and honoring the past, as well as the present, is critical in building power for a more just future. There are many ways to remember the past and present. Some of these ways are seen as more “legitimate” in mainstream society - libraries or **archives*** full of books and documents, certified accounts of history by people with professional degrees. But what about the everyday ways we remember? For example, stories our grandparents told us about the times they had to (forcibly) move due to the political climate, or photos a neighbor has of their old house, or our own memories of displacement? Radical memory work means using these everyday methods of remembering as a way to record our *own* histories, to subvert the dominant institutional forms of remembering, and to support movements for social justice in the present moment. All too often, the histories of marginalized people are erased or invalidated, for example when a developer looking to turn a quick profit in a low-income neighborhood is quoted in a newspaper as saying “There was nothing in this neighborhood before XYZ was built.” We know that this isn’t true, that there are rich histories in our neighborhoods. Recording these histories is part of the radical work of fighting gentrification, erasure and displacement. In the words of Yusef Omowale, Director of a community-based “rebel archive”* in Los Angeles called the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research:

“Let us begin with the understanding that we have always been here— becoming” – Yusef Omowale

This chapter covers the many practices under the umbrella of what we and others call **rebel archives**.* This chapter is meant to be interactive - as you read through, we will ask you questions that will help you reflect on how you might engage in radical record-keeping and archiving, what you might put in your radical “archive,” and why it’s important that we remember collectively. We also discuss power

dynamics behind record-keeping and archives by unpacking accountability and consent. We bring this work full circle by closing this chapter with the possibilities of healing through radical and memory work and archiving. Enjoy!

***WHAT ARE “REBEL ARCHIVES” ?**

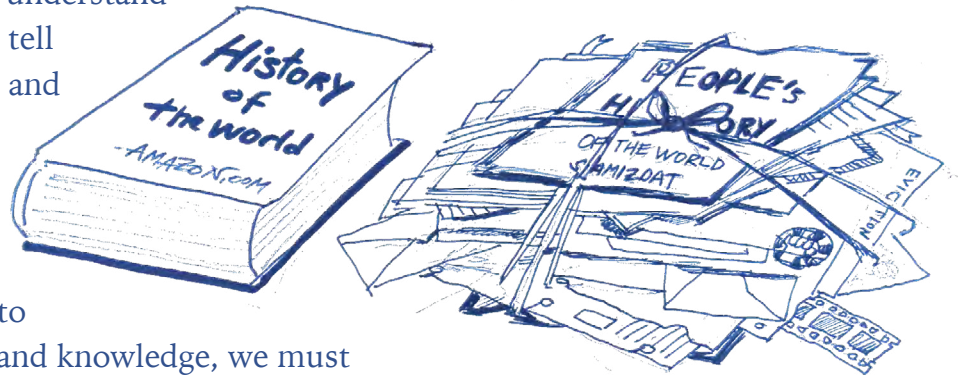
THIS IS BEST EXPLAINED BY THE FOLLOWING QUOTE BY KELLY LYTTLE HERNANDEZ, AUTHOR OF “CITY OF INMATES” WHO COINED THE TERM:

“THE LAPD AND LASD HAVE DESTROYED THE VAST MAJORITY OF THEIR HISTORICAL RECORDS. THEREFORE, THE RECORDS OF THE PUBLIC AUTHORITIES RESPONSIBLE FOR MANAGING THE JAILS OF L.A. NO LONGER EXIST. BUT, AS I QUICKLY LEARNED, THE PEOPLE WHO FOUGHT THE RISE OF JAILS AND PRISONS AND DETENTION CENTERS IN LOS ANGELES STASHED TWO CENTURIES OF EVIDENCE ACROSS THE CITY, THE NATION, AND THE WORLD. THE RECORDS OF THEIR RESISTANCE CONSTITUTE WHAT I CALL A “REBEL ARCHIVE.” IT IS A REBEL ARCHIVE BECAUSE IT SURVIVED DESTRUCTION. AND IT IS A REBEL ARCHIVE BECAUSE IT DOCUMENTS THE RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE OF COMMUNITIES TARGETED FOR ELIMINATION.”

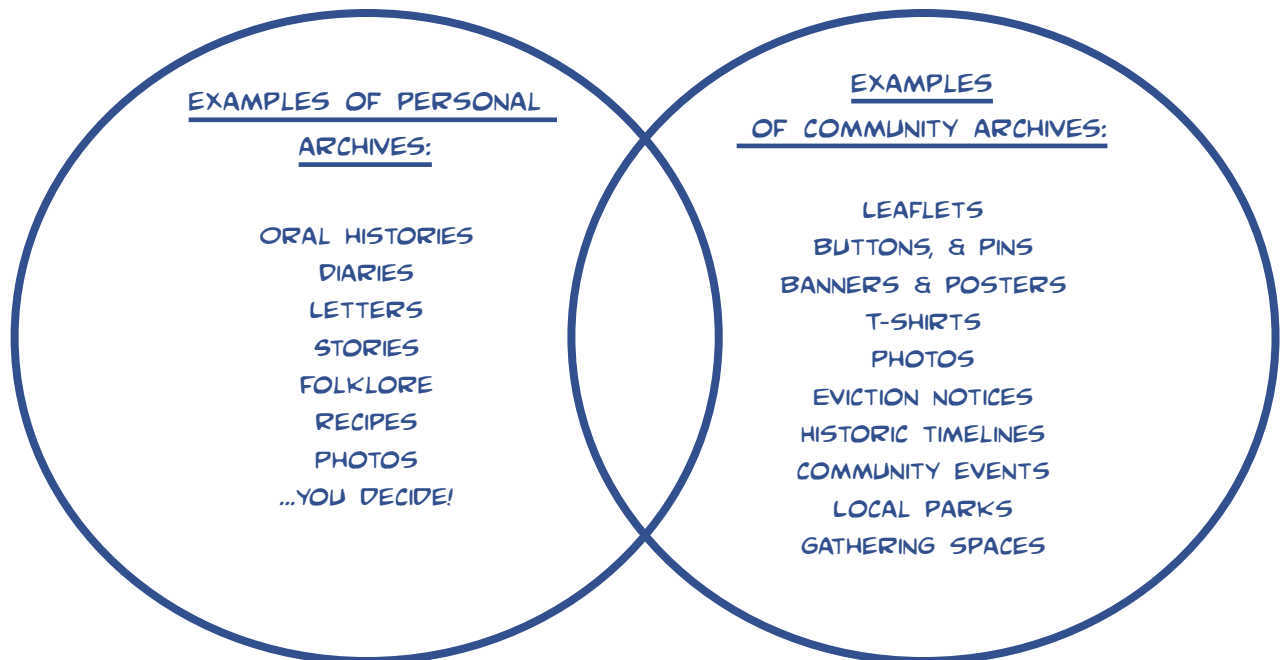
***WHAT IS AN “ARCHIVE” ?**

TYPICALLY, IT IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE A COLLECTION OF STORED INFORMATION/ DOCUMENTS, OR A PLACE WHERE RECORDS AND “OFFICIAL” HISTORICAL ARTIFACTS ARE PRESERVED. BUT, IF WE’RE TALKING ABOUT HISTORY AND PRESERVATION, SHOULDN’T WE BE LOOKING AT OUR OWN STORIES AND EXPERIENCES AS ARCHIVES?

In other words, framing the archive as a memory-building tool is one way in which we can begin to understand the political role and influence that archives offer our construction of historical narrative, or simply put, the way we understand the past and present. The stories we tell about our societies, our revolutions, and our role as everyday people are documented and retold to us through the political archive, and rarely by the people who directly experience these events. If we want to abolish this way of building history and knowledge, we must dismantle the archive as we know it and use our own archival tools to tell stories from the “bottom” in order to have a true participatory democratic archive—a rebel archive.



AN ARCHIVE CAN TAKE VARIOUS LIFE FORMS AND CONTAIN RECORDS OF OUR LIVES, FAMILIES, HOMES, NEIGHBORHOODS, COMMUNITIES, AND CITIES. THE ITEMS THAT GO INTO AN ARCHIVE IS ENTIRELY UP TO THE BUILDER OF THE ARCHIVE, AN ARCHIVE CAN TAKE VARIOUS FORMS AND CONTAIN RECORDS OF OUR LIVES, FAMILIES, HOMES, NEIGHBORHOODS, COMMUNITIES, AND CITIES. THE ITEMS THAT GO INTO AN ARCHIVE ARE DEFINED BY THE PEOPLE WHO BUILD IT.



THE ITEMS IN AN ARCHIVE CAN REVEAL MUCH ABOUT THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND HOW THE TWO TIMELINES INTERACT. THE CONTENTS OF AN ARCHIVE CAN ALSO BE USED AS AN ORGANIZING TOOL, TO BUILD TOWARDS A FUTURE THAT OUR COMMUNITIES WOULD LIKE TO SEE.

UNDERSTANDING ACCOUNTABILITY

First and foremost, when creating an archive we need to be asking: who are we accountable to in documenting this history? Recording history is a big responsibility! There are always many sides to a story, and it's challenging to fairly record and represent the stories and memories we hold or have heard. While social scientists see traditional archives as neutral and impartial records of history, containing primary documents that tell us the "facts" about what happened at a particular time and place, each archive is created by someone (often someone with power and privilege) whose positionality shapes decisions about what kind of records are included or excluded and whose voices are valued in the telling of that story. Understanding power and accountability is a necessary part of the rebel archive.

In other words, every archive is political. Archives can be sites of remembering, and of forgetting.

*"PRIMARY DOCUMENTS" MEANS ANYTHING THAT IS THE ORIGINAL SOURCE OF INFO. FOR EXAMPLE, YOUR LEASE IS A "PRIMARY DOCUMENT" AND IF YOU SEND A TEXT TO SOMEONE ELSE SAYING WHAT IS IN YOUR LEASE, THAT NOT BE A "PRIMARY DOCUMENT."

Colonial archives are both expressions and instruments of power, that have actively worked to shape our understandings of history in ways that reinforce that power (Sentance 2018). For example, most historical archives reinforce multiple settler colonial narratives in telling the history of the place now called the United States, rather than centering Indigenous nations' narratives. Because of this fraught relationship between archives and truth-telling, many scholars have learned to counter-read archives and understand them not only "as sites of knowledge retrieval but of knowledge production" (Stoler 2002, 90). This important work challenges and interrupts the stories that are told about our ancestors, our communities, our past, and our futures.

WE WILL TALK ABOUT THIS MORE LATER IN THIS CHAPTER, BUT "POSITIONALITY" MEANS: HOW YOUR BACKGROUND INCLUDING YOUR SEX, GENDER, CLASS, AND RACE EFFECTS HOW YOU SEE THE WORLD AND HOW THE WORLD SEES YOU.

But, while colonial archives have marginalized and erased voices of resistance, we can also create archives that affirm our histories rather than extracting from or claiming to discover them (For two: [Mapping Indigenous LA](#)). This demands being accountable to our communities and being self-reflexive about our work so that we do not reproduce these oppressive structures in our efforts to record memory.

We have to keep in mind questions like: Whose stories are being recorded? Do we have their consent to record their stories? What is our role in sharing the story - how do our identities shape how the story is recorded and retold? Reflecting on these questions will shape the political commitments that we bring to memory work.

REFLECTING ON YOUR POSITIONALITY

If we acknowledge that archives are political, then we also have to acknowledge that we as archivists are never “neutral.” We are constantly required to make choices that shape, limit, constrain, and open up new narratives. As literary critic Phyllis Rose reminds us: “There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one’s biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you’re leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you’re doing” (1985, p. 77).

Reflecting on our positionality is a really crucial part of cultivating this awareness. When we take on the role of researcher, archivist, or storyteller, we assume a unique and often complicated relationship to the people and communities that we are working with. Sometimes, we may be working as allies and outsiders with communities that we do not belong to. Other times, we are working as insiders within communities that we identify as our own. And, in both situations, we can occupy a space of difference as observers, archivists, and researchers. Often, we become an “insider-outsider,” occupying the gray space between the two as we develop and sustain meaningful relationships that are simultaneously shaped by our privileged position as a researcher or archivist (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999). The privilege that we carry in documenting peoples’ stories demands that we remain constantly attentive to the power relations that we embedded in. Ask yourself: What is your position in the act of record keeping? Do you have a personal connection to the stories being recorded or not? Reflect on how that might make a difference in how the stories are recorded and retold.



YOUR WINDOW ON THE WORLD OF HOUSING (IN)JUSTICE (RITTERBUSCH 2019)

An activity that helped us unpack our positionality is the four windows exercise that we learned from Amy Ritterbusch and Argenis Navarro Diaz when they presented their work on *Quemando la Torre, Huele el Cambio // Burn the Tower, Smell the Change*, and discussed the working relationship that goes behind Participatory Action Research (PAR). Diaz, an Afro-Colombian activist reminded us that when doing research with communities, it's important to build trust because it disrupts the traditional deficit relationship of "the researcher" and "the researched." She humbly reminded us that we walk with your shoes, and you walk with ours. Interrogating our diverse positionalities can help us to understand each other and why we engage in this work, so that we can struggle together *with* integrity and *without* denying our differences. This is a complicated aim-- because often times, our different positionalities and privileges prevent us from understanding the experiences of others. Yet, feeling and empathizing with each other

is crucial for truth-telling and building collective power. In her approach to the four windows exercise, Amy drew us to the powerful words of cultural anthropologist, Ruth Behar:

“We approach an anthropology that breaks your heart. We write vulnerably so that others respond vulnerably. We approach every day with our heart on our sleeves. A vulnerable observation is not one where I observe her actions and she observes me; rather, it is one where we go through the same processes together, struggling together, crying together, and experiencing pain together.”

(Behar 2014)

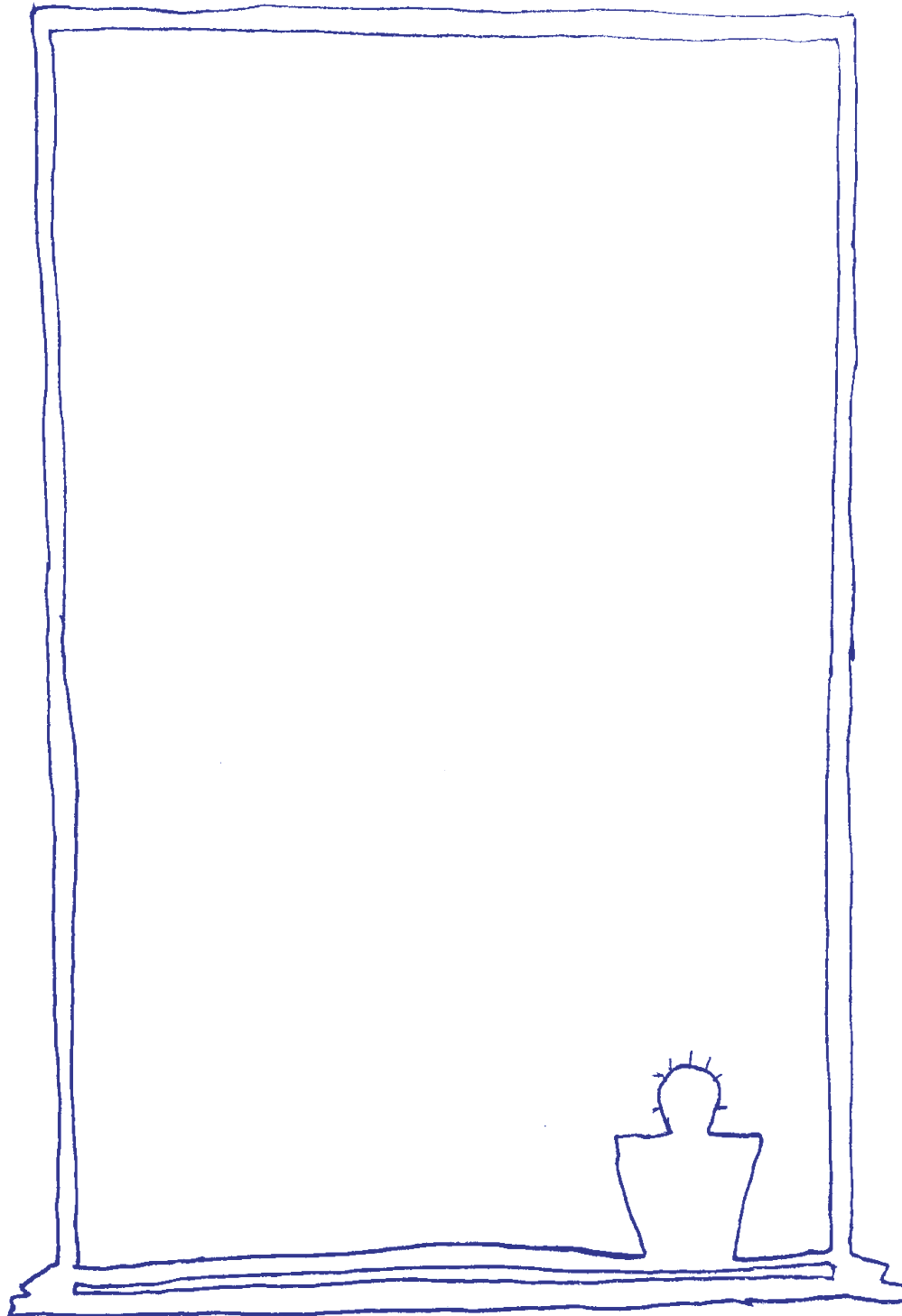


***WHAT IS "PAR" ?**

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH IS A COLLABORATIVE METHOD OF GATHERING INFORMATION THAT IS DRIVEN BY PARTICIPANTS OF THAT RESEARCH WHO ARE DIRECTLY CONNECTED TO THE TOPIC. IT OFTEN RESULTS IN A SOCIAL CHANGE OR "ACTION" TAKEN BY THE RESEARCH, AND PRIORITIZES THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE IT HELPS PRODUCE. PAR CAN INVOLVE INTERVIEWS, ORAL HISTORIES, INTERACTIVE MEMORY BUILDING AND RECORDING, AND MUCH MORE!

IN THIS EXERCISE, WE EACH DRAW A WINDOW THAT IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR PARTS. EACH SECTION IS ASSIGNED A CATEGORY: "LIFE HISTORY (CONSCIOUSNESS, SELF CARE)", "POLITICAL COMMITMENTS", "RELATIONSHIPS (POWER, COLLECTIVE CARE)", AND "STEREOTYPES/STIGMAS (THAT YOU AND OTHER PEOPLE HAVE)". NEXT, WE FILL EACH SECTION WITH DRAWINGS OR WORDS THAT REPRESENT OUR PERSONAL RESPONSES TO THOSE CATEGORIES.

THEN, AFTER WE WERE FINISHED, WE SHARED OUR WINDOWS WITH A PARTNER AND REFLECTED ON THE PEOPLE, PLACES, STORIES, AND EXPERIENCES THAT FILLED THEM.



AS AMY REMINDED US, THE OVERARCHING GOAL OF THIS EXERCISE IS TO QUESTION ONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITHIN A TROUBLED WORLD. THERE'S NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO GO ABOUT THIS.

UNDERSTANDING OUR POSITIONALITY IN A TROUBLED WORLD CAN INDEED GET MESSY AND COMPLICATED, BUT THE GOAL IS TO UNDERSTAND HOW WE NAVIGATE THE DIFFERENT PRIVILEGES WE CARRY AND OUR COMMITMENTS WITHIN THE WORK WE'RE DEDICATED TO. DOING THIS ACTIVITY IN A GROUP CAN ALSO BE BENEFICIAL IN ORDER TO ENGAGE AND DISCUSS YOURS AND OTHERS POSITIONALITY.

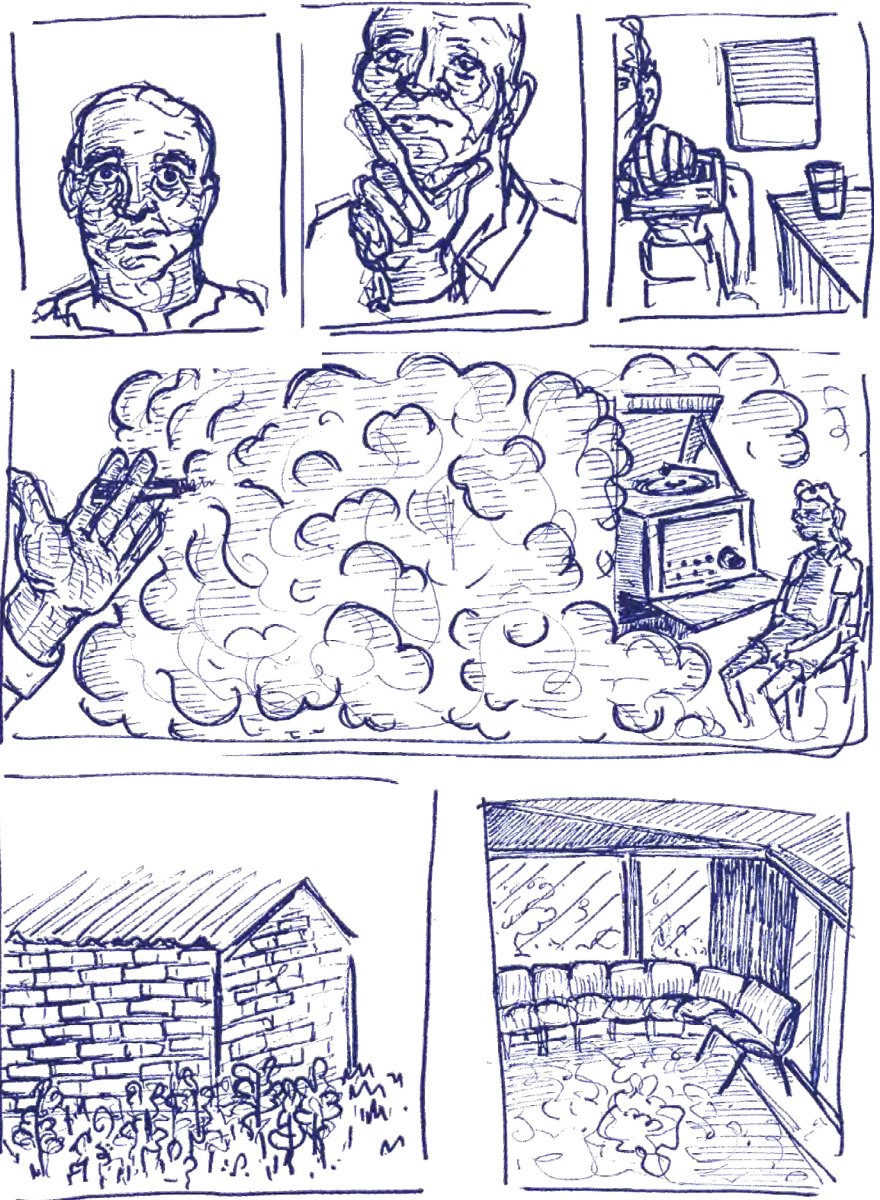
MY EXPERIENCE WITH PAR (CRANIA)

I learned about the unrecorded history of the town of Ahmadi, Kuwait, through my family's personal history, and not from a history book or public record. When they faced exile from their home in Palestine, my maternal grandparents, a university professor and a high school principal, sought a home in which to raise their children and continue to live in a free and safe environment. Ahmadi became that home.

The stories I heard from my mother and the photographs in her family album told a very different story than the story the national archives told, of a town built by the British. . When I attempted to research Ahmadi's enigmatic origins, I could not find any documented history predating the 1970s, after Kuwait had nationalized their oil company. The thirty-year period prior to that, during British colonization, remained a historical gap in my research - both visual and textual. So as an adult, I returned to Ahmadi to fill the gaps in my knowledge and find out why only a certain narrative was recorded and why my family's narrative did not fit the tale.

Researching this brought me to a method I had not used before: **Participatory Action Research*** (PAR). In many ways, I came to PAR intuitively because I wanted to bring people's untold stories to life and help them reclaim their identity. I had a growing list of contacts eager to discuss the history of Ahmadi with me, as they remembered it. And I was just as eager to hear their stories and memories, and incorporate them into an alternative history of Ahmadi, one told by its people.

I spent long hours sitting with my grandparents' friends, people who had kept personal belongings, memories, photographs, and old maps of their homes. Ultimately it was the participation of these individuals that shaped the research questions that informed this work. Research questions around the need to challenge and disrupt historical narratives steeped in colonial constructions, archival limitations, and minimal representation of multiple voices and lived experiences.



I shared all my sources with them, showed them what the national archives had published, and they helped me redraw these narratives with their own voices.

With their consent and the help of my sister, I redrew images of their homes and their memories into a visual story so that there would forever be a recorded version of their Ahmadi, a town they helped build. I walked and sometimes drove through Ahmadi with them. They helped me understand the context, time, and place of what they had lived in such a way that I was not going to access through the official archive. The most important thing I learned was what belonging in Ahmadi looked



like for my grandparents and their neighbors, people who were displaced from their homes in Palestine and rebuilding their communities. In the end, I felt I learned more from them than they did from me, but I tried to return the favor by sharing their history with the world and using the research they helped me build to create an alternative history of Ahmadi written by its forgotten residents.

The powerful lessons embedded in everyday lives, is that they are lived. Moments that live on in collective memories, and deserve a form of representation, have kept their legacy for generations. There are countless examples around the world of people, places and memories left out of the fixed rhetorical assemblages of history, and yet carry on through oral traditions, and small scale forms of preservation. If those alternative narratives are empowered and revealed, their impact can rattle the conventional prisms of historical constructions. As Edward Said reminds us, “ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied.” Decolonizing a history entails the subversion of its master’s tools, and participatory action research can be one way of doing this.

GAINING CONSENT*

In writing this chapter we have been careful to request consent from those whose stories we are sharing. In the same way, it is important to request consent from others when we hope to speak of their work, and it is necessary to give credit where credit is due. This practice can also be part of our archiving work. When possible, and appropriate, we should ensure that we have the informed consent of participating individuals and communities. This means being transparent about our process, our aims, and our motivations.

*WHAT IS "CONSENT" ?

CONSENT IS PERMISSION.
PERMISSION TO MOVE FORWARD
WITH OUR ACTIONS, PERMISSION FOR
SOMETHING TO HAPPEN. CONSENT IS
IMPORTANT IN RELATIONSHIPS AND
IT SHOULD BE A DAILY PRACTICE TO
REQUEST CONSENT FROM THOSE
AROUND US.



Sometimes, obtaining consent may not be possible. Two examples come to mind: The first is that you may not be able to contact the individuals you would need consent from. The second is that your request for consent will be refused. It will not always be in a person/group/agency's best interest to be included in an archive because they may not want their actions or existence to be remembered, but this is when it may be most important to make them a part of an archive. An elected official may not want to be remembered as someone who advocated for oppressive policies but it is something our communities need to remember. In these cases, we have to reflect on the power dynamics at play and make a decision knowing that we are accountable for our choices.

Sometimes, consent can be difficult to obtain because of histories of violence and trauma. People may have painful histories of survival that they might not want to recount or relive. And yet, we know that there is power in preserving and documenting them. In situations like this, we have to proceed with caution. Sometimes, we might spend more time building trust and doing healing work, so that communities eventually feel empowered to retell and reclaim these stories. Or, we might have to adapt our work to fit in with their needs—perhaps trying new methods or working on a smaller scale to allow for deeper participation and engagement. Other times, we may have to accept and understand that not all stories are meant to be shared, or that we may not be the appropriate person to do this memory work. Ultimately, we have to respect that people have ownership over their own stories and histories—they decide whether to hold them close or share them with others.

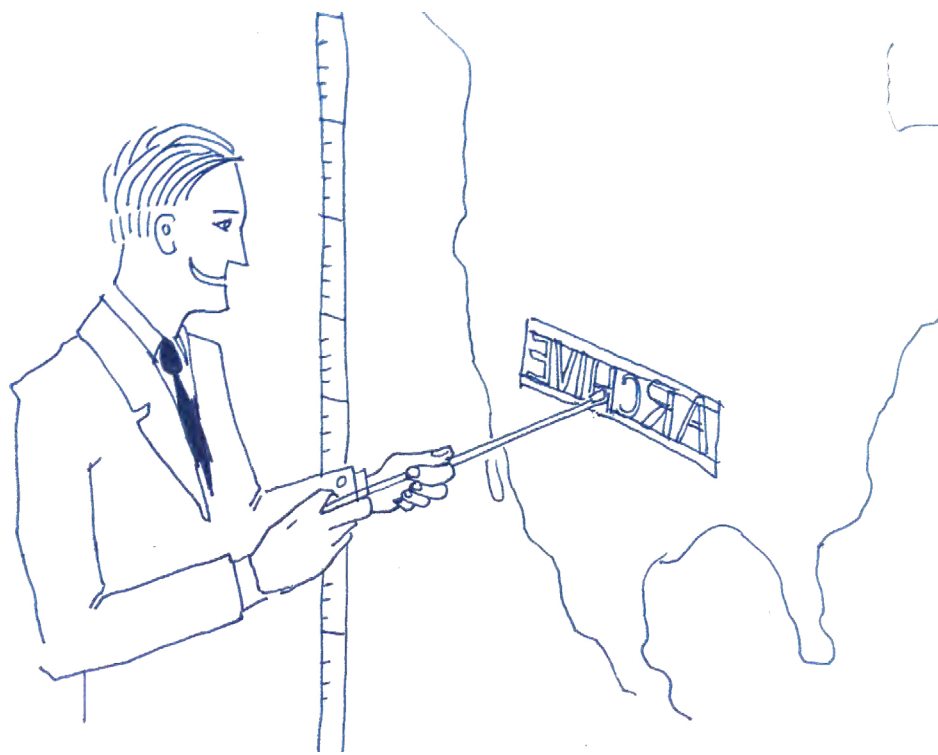
RECOGNIZING WHAT ALREADY EXISTS, SUBVERTING DOMINANT INSTITUTIONS

For people who are on the receiving end of systemic oppression*, one of the dangers posed by archives are that they are often created once the status quo is no longer threatened. Most of the time,

archives arrive to catalog, attach significance, and mythologize an unthreatening history, after the people and the place have been displaced and erased. A modern neoliberal twist on *unthreatening archiving* is the promise of “inclusion and recognition” by colonial institutions and the eventual “[*incorporation*] into the existing order of capitalism, American exceptionalism, patriarchy and violence” (Omowale 2018).

Rather than seeking to recuperate lost histories or to be included in dominant ones, we can refuse to participate in the tearing down of our collective memories. We can use our collective memories as a political tool to strengthen us in our struggles for justice as they happen. As Wiradjuri archivist Nathan Sentance writes, “archives should not just work to document bad history, but work to prevent bad history from happening” (Sentance 2018). Our history is alive and existing, even if you can’t find it in a library or an institutional archive. It’s important to recognize the forms of record keeping that already exist - in oral traditions, in people’s personal archives, in photo albums and diaries, in the stories we transmit across generations. To some, these forms of record keeping are “unofficial,” and therefore not valid, but we know that our communities hold deep knowledge and expertise in their own histories and experiences.

It’s important to remember that a “researcher” with degrees and university funding is not necessary to make those histories valid or legitimate. We decide what is legitimate, and we can create archives that affirm the lived experiences of our communities! This is the purpose of community-based archiving.



***SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION**
MEANS THE TYPES OF DISCRIMINATION THAT ARE BUILT INTO THE WAY EVERYTHING WORKS, FROM GOVERNMENT TO BUSINESSES TO SCHOOLS. "SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION" IS USUALLY CREATED BY A HISTORY OF CERTAIN PEOPLE HAVING POWER OVER OTHERS. WHEN PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE LESS LIKELY TO GET AN APARTMENT, THAT IS SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION. IF SOMEONE TELLS YOU THEY HATE YOUR SHOES, THAT IS PROBABLY NOT SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION.

USING THE RIGHT TO REMEMBER TO DEFEND OUR RIGHT TO STAY

Dominant systems of oppression use the power of remembering to create narratives that rationalize dispossession. They reserve the right to remember, the right to history, and the right to stay for a privileged few, while discounting and erasing the histories of others. These narratives can be countered by bringing to light stories that have been silenced by white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism. Asserting our right to remember the histories that we create in place can be a powerful tool in the fight to defend our right to stay in our places.

For example, Andrea Roberts engages in participatory memory work with descendants of Texas Freedom Colonies-- communities formed by formerly enslaved people after emancipation (see: [The Freedom Colonies Project](#)). This work complicates the assumption that freedmen/women settled only in urban neighborhoods or sharecropper cabins, and adds a much more complex narrative around African American placemaking. And, this growing archive of freedom colonies and the cultural reproduction carried out by descendents **“are significant because they highlight the conditions which breed impactful, rural, grassroots preservation practice rooted in identities of resistance and a rural, Black sense of place”** (Roberts 2018, 7). This participatory memory work has produced valuable tools for engaging with planning, preservation, and heritage policies in order to resist further loss of land and place.

Complicating flattened narratives of our history has the potential to help secure the right to stay by illuminating the full depth of life in our communities. But it can also be deeply challenging. As community archivist Yusef Omowale reminds us, liberal inclusion and recognition calls upon us to offer redemptive narratives and “to provide archives that offer proof of our innocence,” because only then will we be deserving of our rights to place, belonging, and home (Omowale 2018). We often confront the pressure to prove that we are worthy of the right to stay because we worked hard, or we assimilated, or because we are morally virtuous. But, Omowale powerfully argues that we should instead use archives to “restore the complexities of our humanity, acknowledging the limiting historical conditions that have shaped our choices, and let that serve as the only claim we need to make for a right to peace” (Omowale 2018). This political commitment to refuse participation in the dehumanizing narratives of liberalism and to honor the full texture and depth of life in our communities can make an archive truly radical and subversive.

QUESTIONS TO ASK
WHEN CONSIDERING TO
USE THE TOOLS OF
ARCHIVING IN YOUR
HOUSING JUSTICE
WORK...

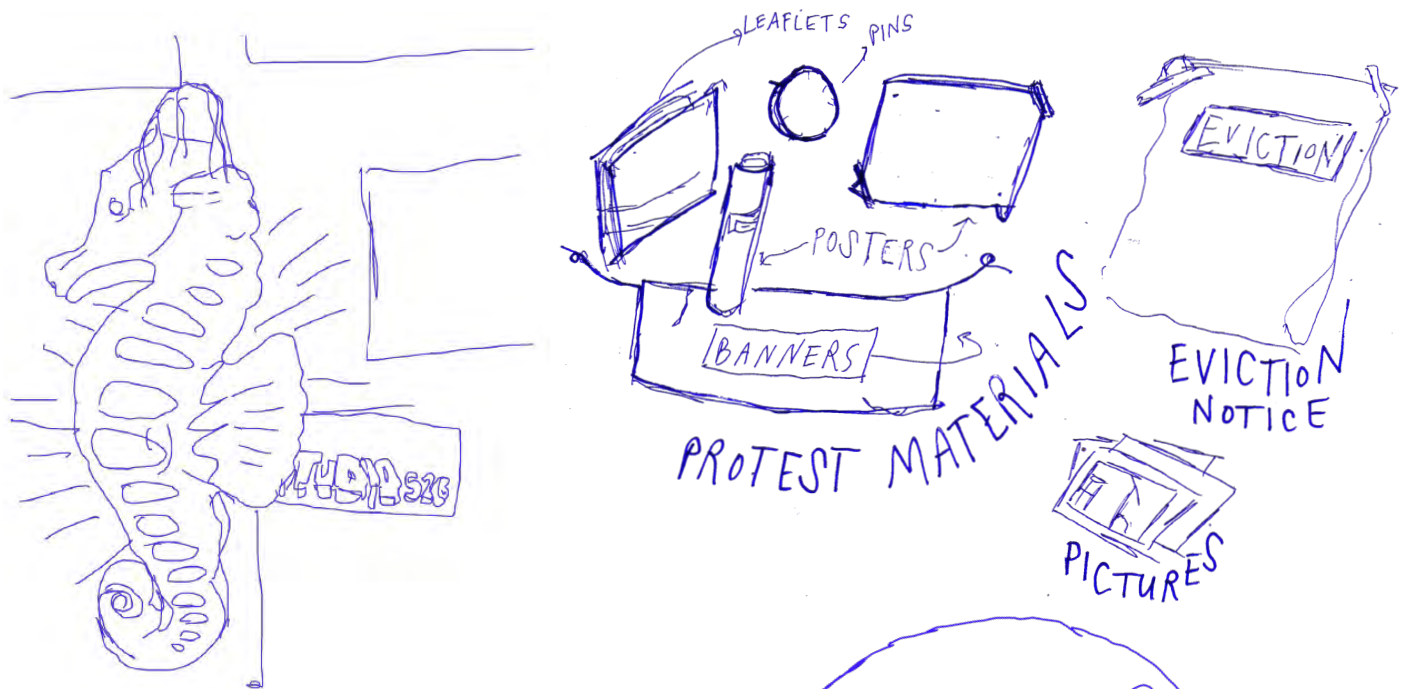
- IS YOUR ARCHIVE THREATENING TO EXISTING RACIAL CAPITALISM, PATRIARCHY, IMPERIALISM, AND/OR OTHER SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION?
- DOES YOUR ARCHIVE REFUSE TO CONFORM TO SETTLER COLONIAL INSTITUTIONS' INTEREST TO INTEGRATE IT?
- DOES YOUR ARCHIVING FURTHER A SPECIFIC GOAL IN YOUR HOUSING JUSTICE WORK? (AND HOW?)

IF THE ANSWER IS YES TO ALL THE
QUESTIONS, KEEP GOING! CHECK BACK
WITH THESE QUESTIONS PERIODICALLY.

PRACTICES OF REBEL ARCHIVING

If the problem with archives is that they are usually narrated through the voices of the powerful, then how do we abolish this way of building history? We can start by dismantling the archive as we know it and using our own archival tools to tell stories from the “bottom” in order to create a truly radical archive. It’s time to start thinking about the many ways you can (and already probably do!) record memories and documents as a way to affirm a community’s history and support movements for social justice.

There is no limit to what can be recorded or how! Many people don’t believe their stories are valid enough to be historical sources, but in fact people’s stories, memories, photographs, and other personal items can be incredible tools for storytelling at an intimate level that formal archives will never capture or have access to. You can choose to build a community archive with your neighbors and comrades in struggle, or you can build your own personal or family archive that reveals intimate details about anything from housing to immigration. The more people are empowered to record their own experiences,, the more nuanced and complex the stories we bring into the future will be.



THE ITEMS IN AN ARCHIVE CAN REVEAL MUCH ABOUT THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND HOW THE TWO TIMELINES INTERACT. THE CONTENTS OF AN ARCHIVE CAN ALSO BE USED AS AN ORGANIZING TOOL, TO BUILD TOWARDS A FUTURE THAT OUR COMMUNITIES WOULD LIKE TO SEE.



ARTIFACTS

FROM PROTESTS LIKE BANNERS, BUTTONS, T-SHIRTS, AND POSTERS. IF YOU GOT ARRESTED AT THE PROTEST MAYBE YOU HAVE A CITATION. THERE CAN ALSO BE ARTIFACTS FROM OTHER PARTS OF YOUR LIFE LIKE A SEA-HORSE LAMP THAT GOES ON WHEN STUDIO IS IN SESSION OR THE TEQUILA BOTTLE FROM THE LAST NIGHT IN YOUR HOME. AN ARTIFACT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE ANCIENT OR EXPENSIVE TO BE WORTH PUTTING IN YOUR ARCHIVE.

PLACES:

AN ARCHIVE CAN BE ANY PLACE THAT HAS BEEN DOING A SIMILAR THING CONTINUOUSLY IN THE EXACT SAME LOCATION OR GENERAL NEIGHBORHOOD. A RECURRING EVENT OR ACTIVITY LIKE A YEARLY FESTIVAL OR COMMEMORATION EVENT CAN SERVE AS A FORM OF ARCHIVE.

PHOTOGRAPHS

OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND EVENTS THAT YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED. PEOPLE AND PLACES CHANGE OVER TIME, SO A PHOTOGRAPH CAN HELP CAPTURE WHAT SOMETHING WAS LIKE IN THE PAST. A PHOTOGRAPH CAN ALSO GIVE A DIFFERENT VIEW TO WHAT SOMETHING IS LIKE IN THE PRESENT.

STORIES

CAN ALSO GO IN YOUR ARCHIVE. THESE CAN BE STORIES YOU TELL OR STORIES THAT WERE TOLD TO YOU. THEY CAN BE WRITTEN DOWN OR THEY CAN BE TOLD ORALLY. SOME STORIES ARE "TRUE" AND SOME STORIES ARE THOUGHT OF AS "NOT TRUE." ALL STORIES CAN BE IN YOUR ARCHIVE THOUGH. "NOT TRUE" STORIES ARE SOMETIMES CALLED FOLKLORE AND THEY ARE ALSO MEANINGFUL.

LETTERS

THAT YOU WROTE OR RECEIVED FROM OTHERS. LETTERS CONTAIN THOUGHTS THAT PEOPLE WERE HAVING AT THE TIME THEY WROTE THEM. SOMETIMES WRITING A LETTER HELPS PUT WORDS TO THOUGHTS THAT THE WRITER DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WERE THERE.

LETTERS ARE ALSO

SOMETIMES USED TO DISPLACE PEOPLE-- LIKE AN EVICTION NOTICE. THESE LETTERS ARE IMPORTANT TOO. EVICTION NOTICES COULD BE IMPORTANT TO SAVE SO THAT YOU CAN SHARE THE PAIN OF THAT NOTICE WITH OTHERS AND MAKE OTHERS FEEL LESS ALONE, OR, SO THAT YOU CAN DOCUMENT HOW YOUR LANDLORD TARGETED YOU AND SEE IF THEY ARE DOING IT TO OTHER PEOPLE TOO. EVICTIONS ARE IMPORTANT MOMENTS THAT DESERVE TO BE REMEMBERED. (OR, MAYBE SAVING AN EVICTION NOTICE IS TOO PAINFUL, AND THAT IS OKAY TOO!).

AN ARCHIVE CAN TAKE VARIOUS FORMS AND CONTAIN RECORDS OF OUR LIVES, FAMILIES, HOMES, NEIGHBORHOODS, COMMUNITIES, AND CITIES. THE ITEMS THAT GO INTO AN ARCHIVE ARE DEFINED BY THE PEOPLE WHO BUILD IT. HERE ARE JUST SOME OF THE WAYS RADICAL RECORD KEEPING CAN LOOK:

OTHER IDEAS FOR A COMMUNITY ARCHIVE: ORAL HISTORIES, LEAFLETS, PINS, BANNERS, FIXED GATHERING SPACES SUCH AS LOCAL PARKS, INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS DOCUMENTING A MOVEMENT OR ORGANIZATION, HASHTAG GALLERIES, COMMUNITY-RUN EXHIBITS, LIVESTREAMS OF DIRECT ACTIONS OR PUBLIC HEARINGS, ZINES, AND NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGE SOURCES.

TRADITIONS

CAN ALSO GO IN YOUR ARCHIVE. A TRADITION CAN BE ANYTHING FROM A CULTURAL CELEBRATION TO FAMILY MEAL TO A NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCK PARTY. MAYBE THOSE TRADITIONS ARE WRITTEN DOWN IN THE FORM OF A RECIPE OR INSTRUCTIONS. MAYBE THERE ARE PHOTOGRAPHS OR VIDEOS OF THEM. MAYBE THEY ARE RETOLD IN ORAL HISTORIES. TRADITIONS DESERVE TO BE REMEMBERED BECAUSE THEY CONNECT US TO OUR COMMUNITY, TO OUR PLACE, AND TO EACH OTHER. PUTTING A TRADITION IN YOUR ARCHIVE ALSO SHOWS THE IMPORTANCE OF THAT TRADITION TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS.

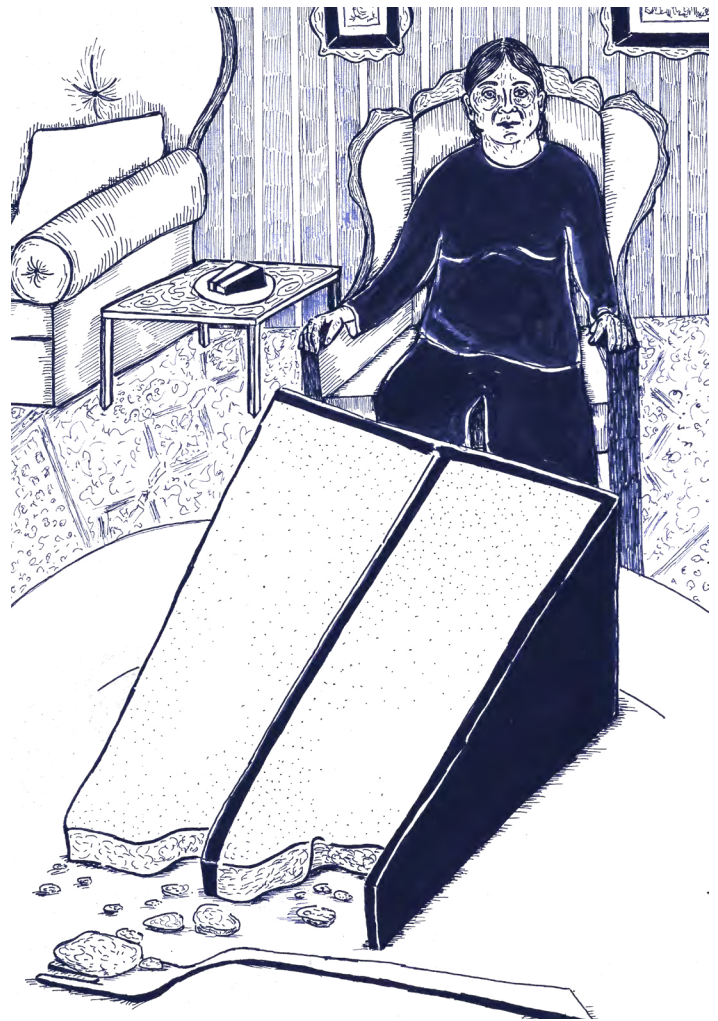
RADICAL MEMORY WORK AS RESISTANCE

Community-based, rebel archives do not need to only contain tangible items like documents, flyers or photos. Community archives can also be more abstract - they can contain stories, memories or rituals. Andrea Roberts, in her work on freedom colonies in Texas, reminds us that *memory* is a form of data that can be researched, documented and archived like any other form of data. Roberts writes about how formerly enslaved people in Texas founded over 500 'freedom colonies' from 1870 to 1920. From an outside perspective, it might seem that these important spaces of Black history and their legacies have disappeared. However, Roberts' research on one freedom colony, Shankleville, shows that descendants of the original colony founder still have attachments to the place, and keep their memories alive through storytelling, rituals, and performances, particularly the storytelling of the "foundational story," about how Shankleville was created.

USING ANDREA ROBERTS' RESEARCH AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION, YOU CAN ENGAGE IN YOUR OWN MEMORY WORK PRACTICES. FOR EXAMPLE, ROBERTS' LEADS CLASSES THROUGH AN INTERVIEW EXERCISE, WHICH YOU CAN TRY ON YOUR OWN WITH 2 OR 3 OTHER PEOPLE.

ONE PERSON IS THE INTERVIEWER, ONE PERSON IS THE INTERVIEWEE, AND ONE PERSON CAN BE A WITNESS/NOTETAKER THE QUESTION IS: WHAT IS YOUR FIRST MEMORY TIED TO YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN HOUSING JUSTICE?

ASK THE WITNESS TO THEN RETELL THE STORY THAT THEY HEARD. HAVE THEY DONE IT JUSTICE? WHAT KIND OF STORY DID THEY TELL? HOW DID THE INTERVIEWEE FEEL BEING REPRESENTED IN ANOTHER VOICE? HOW DID THE WITNESS FEEL, SHARING SOMEONE ELSE'S STORY?



COLLECTIVE REMEMBERING

How can you do radical memory work collectively, as a method of healing and care?

You've thought about your intention, and now you have some ideas about the ways in which memories and histories can be recorded. To get started on doing memory work, the next piece is to remember that radical memory work is not done alone! Memories are held collectively. Nora (1989) reminds us that "the quest for memory is the search for one's history," pointing out that the task of remembering requires everyone to be their own historian. As Omowale argues, by incorporating memory work and repositioning the archive's colonial roots, we begin to unpack the "professionalization" of the field. Omowale also cautions us to remember that aggrieved communities have always had memory-keepers and that we must do our best to refuse any attempts of incorporation that fall under the guise of neoliberalism. He states, "**Our archives have always existed and our communities have always done archival work**", stressing the notion of refusal of new institutions and collective focus on justice and sovereignty in order to continue the memory work already being done (Omowale 2018). Omowale's framing of autonomous archives can then be seen within Kelly Lytle Hernandez's rebel archive (2017), a compilation of documents that illustrate prison abolition work and illustrates eliminatory patterns of settler colonialism in Los Angeles.

We imagine the archive as a site of resistance. But another reason we record our histories is because it can be healing - healing for ourselves, our families, our neighborhoods and our communities. By centering the silenced and banished experiences that span across time and space, we also recognize the potential that archiving poses for collective care and healing intergenerational wounds. For example: Sitting with our elders and listening to the stories that they hold about our homelands or our neighborhoods can create space for us to reclaim



*"You all political appointees,
with your best intentions,
will come and go. My
vision is rooted in
community members still
being here after your
successor's successor's
successor has come and
gone!"*

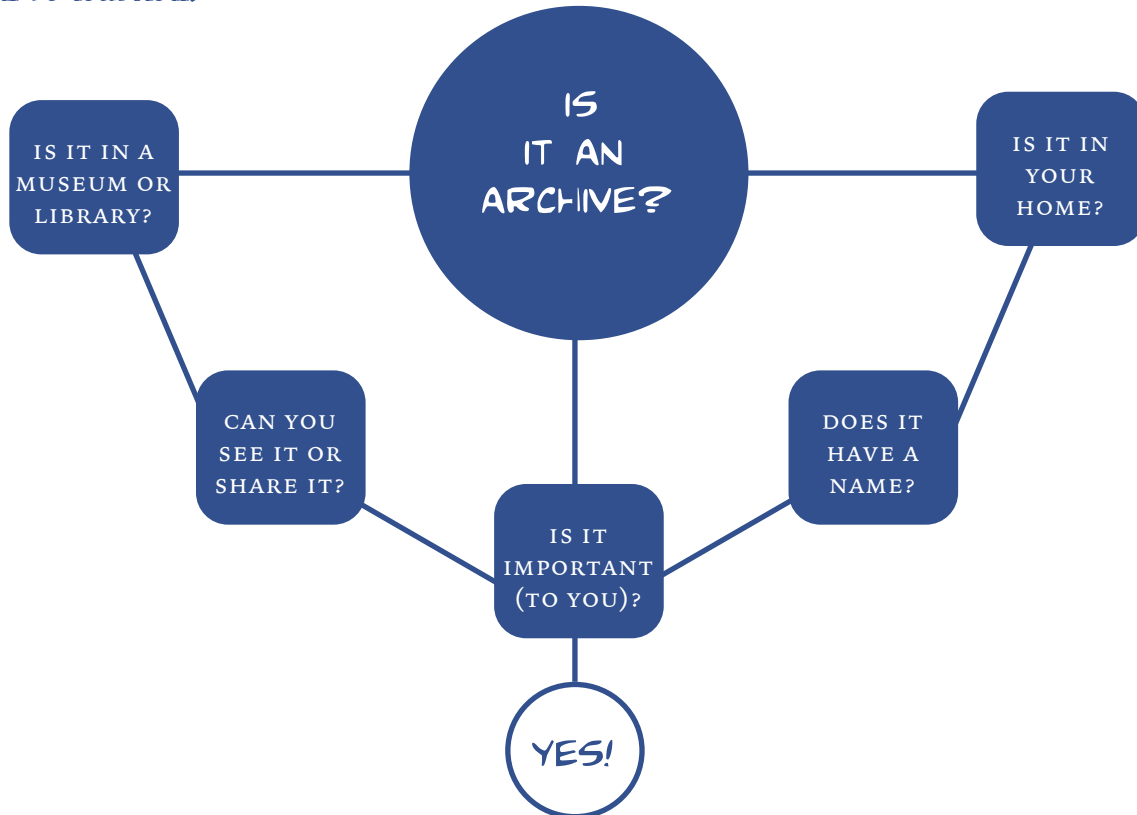
*-Eddie H.
Skid Row
neighborhood*

our identities across generations. Creating an archive of an anti-eviction movement can help us celebrate our wins or to mourn our losses. Building a community archive can be a powerful way to see ourselves reflected in histories that often erase or discount our experiences. Even the act of embarking on an archival project together can be a way of slowing down and spending time with each other outside of the stress and intensity of campaigns or direct actions.

Repurposing the archive in order to disrupt western power narratives and move towards a path of collective care incorporates elements of reflection, reciprocity, and resilience that inspire restoration and empowerment. Centering the voices and experiences of historically marginalized communities through the archive can help us both (re)member what's been lost but also decolonize and reclaim our histories, our identities, our homes, and our communities.

CONCLUSION

Now that you have some ideas about what a radical archive can be, here's a quiz to see what you've learned:



As Edward Said reminds us, “ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied (Said, 1978).” Building an understanding of history that challenges white supremacy, settler colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism demands that we center the lived experiences of those most impacted by these forms of structural violence and domination.

In this chapter, we hope we have reminded you that there are powerful lived lessons embedded in the everyday experiences of people facing threat of displacement and dispossession. And that despite consistent efforts to erase and obscure them, these lessons and moments live on in collective memories, rooting people in place even as neighborhoods change and people are forced to move. They are transmitted in so many different ways: from creative to quotidian, from subversive to familial--all of them meaningful.

If these marginalized narratives are affirmed and reclaimed, they can shatter the conventional prisms of historical construction. At the very least, they can add meaning, depth, and nuance to our understanding of ourselves and others. Archives and memory work can be one way to hold onto this wellspring of knowledge. By honoring our past and present, we can begin to imagine futures in which we can feel secure in our right to stay rooted in the communities and the places that help to define us.

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Eviction Observatories

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“The ultimate mark of power might be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots.”

– Michel-Rolph Trouillot

We wrote this section of the handbook as a way to get you excited to start an evictions observation project. We recognize that each “observatory” will thrive, challenge, and inspire differently based on available resources. Despite the local variations and regional context, all observatories show two things: that someone is watching and data are being collected on behalf of the people. So get excited. Get pumped. An eviction observatory is powerful.

What is eviction?

Eviction is forced or coerced removal of people from land and housing -- whether through physical or verbal threat, legal or extralegal process, or the inability of residents to pay or barter to remain. Eviction often makes way for those who intend to extract greater profits, including for investors. We define eviction broadly. Eviction is violence.

Places where residents may be evicted from – after establishing formal or informal tenure – include:



1 Cooper and Paton 2018.

Across the globe, evictions are fueled by the financialization of housing: the amount of speculative investment in real estate has massively increased, and the speed and scale of housing speculation is booming.¹ We see the effects in terms of massive displacement and struggles for land and housing worldwide. Given state-led divestment from social housing and the simultaneous deregulation of the housing market, housing has become a site of capitalist profit-seeking and exploitation of the working class and poor.

Who are the evicted?

While the form and mechanisms of eviction vary, the evicted share many similar qualities: often they face structural oppression (poverty, racism, xenophobia, discrimination, etc.), and belong to economically and socially marginalized populations. Where structural racism is deeply embedded in housing policies,

Figure 1: In Quezon City, Metro Manila, residents of San Roque take direct action against demolition of their homes. Macky Macaspac, Pinoy Weekly. <https://www.pinoyweekly.org/2010/09/depensa-ng-maralita-sa-north-triangle/>.

communities of color (and racially marginalized groups) are often at higher risk for eviction, their neighborhoods ripe for speculation and urban renewal programs.



2 Rolnik 2013.

3 This quotation is often attributed to Hurston, though its origins remain unknown.

Who are the evictors?


- *Speculators, Capitalists & Financial Investors*: banks, hedge funds, real estate companies; can range from public employees' pension funds to large transnational corporations. Transnational flows of capital are increasingly involved in eviction, in the Global North and South.²
- *Developers*: public, private, public-private, non-profit, for-profit.
- *State Agencies*: directly through eminent domain; indirectly through state regulations that facilitate the financialization of land.
- Landowners, slumlords, and land-grabbers
- Self-interested home-owners
- Police, private security guards, military and paramilitaries

What is an Observatory? Why “observe”?

Because they say gentrification is good, that displacement is natural. Because they say “no one” is being forced out. Because removal from “danger zones” is “for our own protection.” Because we must provide a different understanding, explanation, and alternatives. Because – in the words of Zora Neale Hurston – “if you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.”³ Because we must unveil responsibility. Because those affected have demands. Because we need to lift up insurgent knowledges that challenge the status quo. Who is your development for?

About Take Action Resources / Recusos Reports Writing

Anti-Eviction Mapping Project



Albert Russell Taplin and Alexander Riaz Taplin

The Taplins are associated with at least 555 Oakland evictions under numerous LLCs. Albert Russell Taplin is an inactive attorney who was placed on probation by the CA State Bar in 1995. His son Riaz joined him in the real estate business while in high school, and as he reports on the [website for Riaz, Inc.](#), his original focus was the “ultra-luxury San Francisco real estate market.” Later Riaz “set forth to transform the dilapidated buildings” of Oakland, and now manage over 800 apartments in the east bay, with a “core competency in multi-family re-positioning.” In addition to the eviction mill, the **Taplins are launching large market rate development projects in east Oakland.**

COMPANIES AND LLCs

- Risa Investments, LLC
- Riaz, Inc.
- Riaz Partners LLC
- Riaz Build, Inc.
- Odestates, Inc.
- Best Bay Apartments, Inc.
- Arthaus, Inc.
- Rts Investments, LLC
- Positive Real Estate LLC
- Tira Family Limited Partnership
- Ebenl Friends and Family, LLC
- 1732 & 1744 27th Avenue Oakland, LLC
- Best Bay Apartments, Inc.
- 2140 Bush Street Associates Inc. (suspended)
- 1929 26TH Ave Oakland LP
- 1929 26TH Avenue Property LLC
- 818 East 20th Street Oakland, LLC
- 1798 Bryant Street, St, LLC
- HIGH BROOKDALE LLC
- 818 EAST 20TH STREET OAKLAND LLC
- 2619 HIGH STREET LLC
- 1707 36th LLC
- 18th APARTMENTS LLC
- 1745 16TH STREET ASSOCIATES LLC
- 2531 E 16th Street LLC

EVICTIIONS PER OAKLAND RENT BOARD DATA:

• TAPLIN A RUSSELL	34
• TAPLIN A RUSSELL & RIAZ	55
• TAPLIN ALBERT R	99
• TAPLIN A R	104
• 1811 APARTMENTS LLC suspended	94
• TAPLIN ALBERT R & RIAZ	31
• HIGH BROOKDALE LLC	46
• 818 EAST 20TH STREET OAKLAND LLC suspended	49
• 2619 HIGH STREET LLC	37
• 1707 36th LLC	3
• 1745 16TH STREET ASSOCIATES LLC	1
• Positive Real Estate LLC cancelled	2

PROPERTY:

- 1929 26th Avenue
- 3700 International Blvd
- 3014 Fruitvale Ave

Take a pledge to boycott those who profit off of dispossession.

©

Figure 2: The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project presents [profiles](#) of San Francisco Bay Area evictors that list their properties and disclose the ownership of anonymous LLCs to build alliances between the tenants across buildings, in order to reinforce evictors’ culpability. Source: Anti-Eviction Mapping Project 2019, “Albert Russell Taplin and Alexander Riaz Taplin.”

We seek to show that evictions and displacement are happening – and that these processes are harmful, despite widespread denials of this violence. We do this by documenting and publicizing. By collecting and telling stories. By counting. By mapping. By recording. By showing and helping draw attention. In some cases, we are directly engaged in organizing; here, movement-building and lifting up counter-knowledges become one and the same. Most importantly, we do this by collaborating – with, and even as participants in, social movements and organizations of those directly affected, who may include some of us, too. This is because we recognize that knowledge is contested – and deeply influenced by where someone sits in relations of power. The knowledge we disseminate must be guided by, and accountable to, those most harmed by eviction, and those with the most to gain from political change.

Observing is not an end in itself. The point of “observing” is to build solidarity, create change, and fight systems of exploitation and unequal power.

Knowledges from where? Accountable to whom?

In the company of community meetings or through campaigns, solidarity can produce new knowledges, which in turn nurture solidarity, rather than feelings of shame and isolation. Through art, through the subterfuge of one-on-one conversation, “debt diaries,” texts, and anonymous phone apps, we can strive for the most accessible means of documentation.

“Observatories” can have a variety of structures and relations to those impacted by displacement (and their organizations). Some “observatories” are based in academic institutions or non-governmental organizations, while others are projects of on-the-ground “people’s organizations.” “Observers” may be professional researchers, paid staff, volunteers, and/or those directly affected. They may be

Figure 3: ANHD's Displacement Alert Project displays data through several portals geared toward different audiences: an interactive map with only four carefully chosen variables, for simplicity; a full database for in-depth research; printable reports for organizers' use; and more. Source: ANHD 2019, "Displacement Alert Project."

organizers and activists on-the-ground struggling to raise awareness. In these situations, organizing itself is the "observatory" and source of counter-knowledges. Some may be governed by mass-based organizations fighting displacement. Some might choose political independence from other parties. Some may be loose collectives or networks responding to movement needs.

Here are some examples:

- [São Paulo Evictions Observatory](#) (São Paulo, Brazil) is a network of evictions observers hosted by universities. Through close relationships with impacted residents, the Observatory was able to track and map the paths of the displaced: where people settled after their homes in so-called "Cracolândia" were violently demolished to make way for a public-private development of "affordable" housing that will exclude them (see figure 14). The Observatory has exposed the sheer scale of eviction and eviction threats in the metro, mapped their concentration, and tracked economic drivers and justifications such as removing people from "hazards," while convening plenary networks of those affected.⁴
- [Anti-Eviction Mapping Project](#) (San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and New York City, USA) are collectives of volunteers working in partnership with community groups and tenant organizations. Started in the Bay Area to map evictions caused by the conversion of rental properties to condos and other uses, AEMP has expanded to include mapping corporate landlords, evictors, and a wide variety of displacement indicators; collecting stories; and producing films, murals, and community events.⁵
- [Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development](#) (New York City, USA) is a non-profit that works in close collaboration with tenant organizers to produce maps that can be used for tenant outreach and organizing. ANHD's [Displacement Alert Project](#) pulls government data into an easy-to-understand online map that lets organizers see which buildings are losing rent-controlled units, were recently sold at a high price, have construction permits, or had evictions. The website allows viewers to print out regularly updated reports listing the addresses of affected buildings. ANHD's [Speculator Beware Watch Lists](#) track and

4 LabCidade 2019; UN Right to Housing 2014.

5 Anti-Eviction Mapping Project 2019a. See, for example, the *Tenants in Common* website, *Anti-Eviction Mapping Project 2019b*.



report which buildings are being advertised as offering investors exorbitant returns, using data from brokerage sites. This information is circulated so tenants can organize before the sale occurs.⁶

- [European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and the City](#) is a network of groups fighting for housing justice, sharing knowledge, strategies, and resources on housing financialization and eviction, while facilitating international solidarity. So far it links members in Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain and the UK.⁷
- [Los Angeles Community Action Network](#) (Los Angeles, USA) organizes houseless people and low-income tenants in Skid Row and downtown Los Angeles around housing issues and criminalization. Through its Community Watch program, roving teams of residents document and video-record the activity and abuses of police and private security guards. Additionally, LA CAN's legal clinic has amassed extensive evidence of police targeting houseless people. Data collected through these activities has been used in lawsuits and community campaigns to limit the power of police and security guards. Their [Stop LAPD Spying Coalition](#) organizes against police and state surveillance, and has mapped how “predictive policing” algorithms quarantine the Skid Row community. The coalition led the fight to dismantle LAPD's Operation LASER and Chronic Offender program, which target people for eviction.⁸



Figure 4: LA CAN's Community Watch volunteers watch the police.
Source: LA CAN 2019, “Human Rights.”

6 ANHD 2019.

7 European Action Coalition 2019.

8 Los Angeles Community Action Network 2019. See also: <https://stoplspd-spying.org>.

- [Kadamay](#) (Philippines) is a mass-based “people’s organization” of urban poor people, with chapters in major cities throughout the Philippines. In Metro Manila, residents of San Roque have waged a struggle for more than 10 years against the demolition of their community to make way for hotels and parking lots in a Quezon City central business district. They have collected and publicized stories to uncover violence against them by private security guards and demolition teams. [Save San Roque](#), a volunteer group including students and urban planners,

Figure 5: In 2017, 12,000 urban poor people launched “Occupy Bulacan,” just north of Metro Manila. They occupied more than 5,000 units of abandoned housing set aside for military and police, demanding it be redistributed to low-income households. They remain there to this day. Source: The Inquirer 2017.

is assisting with door-to-door outreach to document developer aggression, and convenings to create a Community Development Plan that backs residents’ calls for zero eviction. [SIKAD](#), a cultural organization that partners with Kadamay, conducts hip hop, theater, and arts workshops in urban poor communities - producing theater of the oppressed pieces and well as video storytelling to publicize residents’ conditions, resistance, and impacts of displacement. Media collectives like [Kodao](#), [Tudla](#), and others have worked closely with Kadamay to create videos and documentaries, including of the Occupy Bulacan campaign.⁹

- [Kilab Multimedia](#) (Mindanao, Philippines) is a volunteer media collective working closely with indigenous and peasant organizations in Mindanao to document land-grabbing, militarization, and human rights abuses against these communities. Kilab’s short media clips are designed for broad dissemination over social media, prioritizing the voices of those directly affected to expose state and paramilitary violence. Although not exclusively an observatory of eviction, Kilab’s work illustrates how in many contexts, frontline activist media provides rare and essential documentation. In the 2000s, indigenous communities started community schools in their struggle against mining and logging companies’ land-grabbing. The schools, teachers, and students are increasingly harassed and even killed by soldiers and paramilitaries, who are forcing communities to abandon their lands. [Save Our Schools Network](#) is an activist group that organizes material support for the free schools, while exposing this violence; on the ground, indigenous organizers and teachers are at the forefront of monitoring human rights conditions even while suffering repression.¹⁰

9 Kadamay 2019; Save San Roque 2019; SIKAD 2019; Kodao Productions 2019; and Tudla Productions 2019.

10 Kilab Multimedia 2019; Save Our Schools Network 2019.



- [Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca \(PAH\)](#) (Spain) is a grassroots, volunteer organization of those impacted by foreclosures and evictions, that takes direct action to stop evictions and cancel mortgage debt, while building solidarity and mutual aid. [Obra Social Barcelona](#), a collective that works along the lines of the PAH’s empty bank-owned

housing campaign, led a militant research project in collaboration with PAH Obra Social committees across Catalonia, surveying and interviewing PAH members and other respondents to produce the report, “[!La vivienda para quién la habita! Informe sobre okcupación de vivienda vacía en Catalunya.](#)” The report seeks to de-stigmatize squatting and encourage occupation as a political tool.¹¹

- [Stadt für Alle](#) (Leipzig, Germany) is a network that links groups and actors involved in tenants’ counseling, direct action and negotiations with the city council. Through partnerships, the network collects and shares observations of geographical areas threatened by evictions and political processes facilitating the financialization of the rental market. In this way, it helps develop tactics to pressure for more protective policies, like a ban on luxury renovations in areas threatened by evictions.¹²
- [Xenowatch](#) (South Africa) is a tool developed by the African Centre for Migration & Society at the University of Witwatersrand. Using crowd-sourcing, Xenowatch collects data (location, short description, and time) to track and analyze violent attacks, property damage, threats, and the displacement of foreign nationals living and working in South Africa. Reporting displacement can be done by sending a text, e-mail, or WhatsApp message, phone, or submitting an incident online.¹³

A Toolkit for Research Justice: How do we conduct research and collect data to serve movements against displacement?

Questions for “Observatories,” movement researchers, & insurgent knowledge-producers to consider...

- Who benefits from your activities?
- Who are you accountable to? What structures for accountability are in place?
- Who owns the knowledge you produce and the data you collect? Who decides what it’s used for?
- How will you intervene politically? With what political frameworks?
- What data, stories, or documentation will help advance your campaign? What assumptions, harmful narratives, systems, etc. are you trying to change?
- What audiences are you aiming to reach? How can you present the stories and data you collect in ways that are useful to organizers and easy for your audience to understand?
- What spaces will you use to publicize and share knowledge?
- How can sharing stories (or collecting data, or analyzing it, or presenting findings) help build solidarity, encourage collective reflection, bring people together, and strengthen organizing – rather than draining organizing efforts?
- Who participates in analysis? Who gets credit for analysis and knowledge?

¹¹ *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) 2019. Obra Social Barcelona 2019.*

¹² *Das Netzwerk 2019.*

¹³ *ACMS 2019.*

Figure 6: No observatory can track everything. But what should be tracked? This question is best answered by considering what data points are most important to collect and what is feasible. Ask these questions to devise a responsible and responsive data collection plan.

Starting Observation

1. What processes and factors are relevant in your local context?

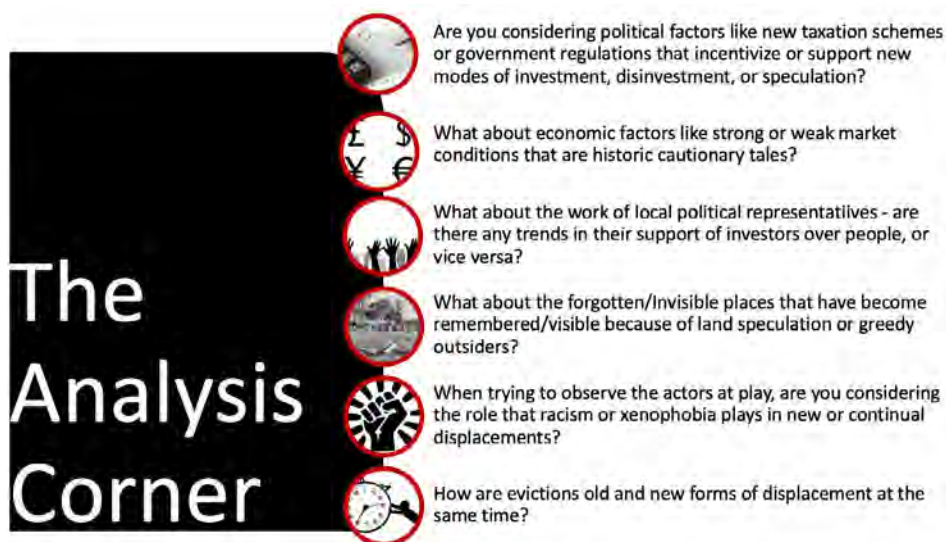
What is the history of land and housing in your area? What are current intervention processes? At what speed and with what time horizon are you working?



Whereas some places face violent mass-evictions that need to be fought with all means and partners, in others you might be looking at threats of restructuring that are less visible and require other strategies. Think about the processes you are dealing with – do they include:

- Land-grabbing
- Mortgage-foreclosures
- State-led renewal projects
- Creeping (or fast) rent rises
- Tenant harassment
- Increasing police presence or militarization
- Development projects
- Demolishing and privatization of public housing
- Displacement of landless agricultural workers
- ... or something completely different?

Understanding the history and contemporary context can help you figure out why evictions are happening and who you can work with towards what. Are you trying to prevent evictions, or forecast future threats? Depending on the relevant processes, you might focus on different political, economic, and cultural factors. Consider the following questions as one way to start.



South Africa is a country that underscores the importance of understanding historic policies and practices in order to contextualize contemporary evictions. When the Union of South Africa was founded in 1910, then Prime Minister Jan Smuts maintained that racial segregation was necessary and important to the development of the country.¹⁴ The Group Areas Act of 1950 legalized the formation of separate business and residential settlement areas for the officially recognized races (Coloured, Black, Indian/Asian, and White).¹⁵ In Cape Town, townships were created for Coloured and Black South Africans on the periphery of the all-white city center and surrounding suburbs. Residents were violently evicted from well-appointed areas and forced to leave their communities with no say and little forewarning. People were split up and moved to areas that were often far from transportation, jobs, and established communities. In addition, there was a constant threat of new evictions if the areas settled were later seen as desirable. These areas would be deemed “Whites-only” and a new round of evictions would occur.

Forceful, violent evictions were a major part of apartheid era life. Thus, with Nelson Mandela’s 1994 democratic election, revamping housing was one of the key governmental promises. In contemporary South Africa, the local municipality is responsible for providing temporary housing to evicted tenants who state that they have no place to go. However, the Temporary Relocation Areas, where many poor displaced residents are moved, are often even more isolated

¹⁴ Adjai and Lazaridis 2013: 192.

¹⁵ O’Connell 2018; Schensul and Heller 2011.



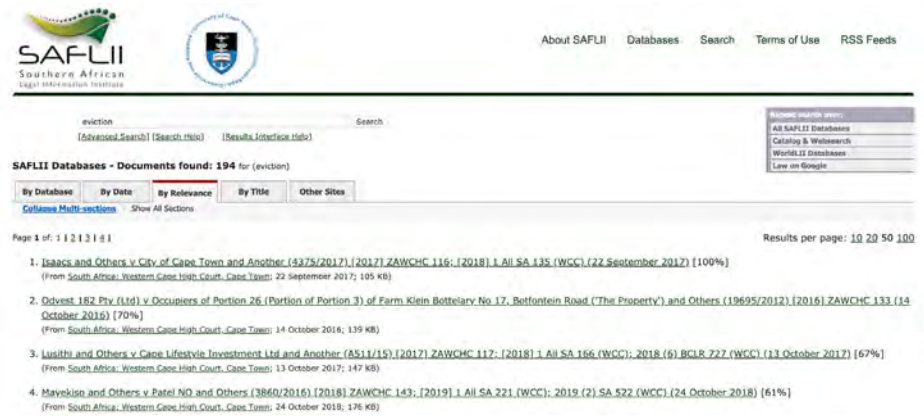
Figure 7 (bottom): Location of Delft Symphony TRA in relation to Downtown Cape Town. Source: Ndifuna Ukwazi (2017), *I Used to Live There: A Call for Transitional Housing for Evictees in Cape Town*.

Figure 8 (top): SAFLII Web Database to track Cape Town High Court evictions. Source: Southern African Legal Information Institute 2019.

Figure 9 (bottom): Screenshot from the (Dis)location / Black Exodus website. Source: Anti-Eviction Mapping Project 2019.

and under-resourced than townships. This suggests the ongoing need of an evictions observatory to map the TRAs and their distance from key amenities in the region to show that the apartheid-era spatial logic of separation and isolation still persists.

In addition to tracking where people end up to illustrate the impact of this policy, it is also important to track eviction hearings. Eviction cases are supposed to be filed in the Magistrate's Court, a lower level South Africa court. Occasionally, cases are brought initially to the Cape Town High Court in order to have a speedy judgement. This is because poor defendants will not be able to afford an attorney and court advocate; only advocates can appear before High Court judges. To identify patterns over time and see who is using this method, researchers recommend tracking the number of High Court eviction cases and frequent filers through the [Southern African Legal Information Institute](http://www.saflii.org).



16 Anti-Eviction Mapping Project 2019b.

In the San Francisco Bay Area the racist dynamics of gentrification are made visible by the Black Exodus Project, a publication out of a public workshop series by the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project.¹⁶ At its heart are the stories of Black communities in the Bay Area's history, that pinpoint racial inequalities and build community power:



In a very different context, the east of Germany, movement based observations by housing justice networks like *Stadt für Alle* (City For All) have analyzed local processes, pinpointing specific threats around luxury renovations in the old housing stock and rent increases that are unaffordable for the local population. In the picture below, tenants are being encouraged to map their rent levels through a process called community mapping. This method works as a form of organizing and information gathering.

Figure 10: Tenants participate in community mapping with *Stadt für Alle* (City For All). Photo credit: *Stadt für Alle*, “Ganz schön viele rote Flecken (So many red dots),” 2013.



2. What are the dominant narratives you are fighting? How do you fight them?

Observing evictions or threats of evictions means rendering them visible. This is a powerful tool to fight dominant practices of violent land and housing politics. You will probably be confronted with narratives that legitimize these dominant politics. Knowing and understanding them is important to tell a counter-story. What are these dominant stories? Amongst other narratives, evictions can be legitimized through:

- Stories of risk and necessary removal from “danger zones,” told as if they were protecting inhabitants that need to be displaced for their own sake
- Stories of “building or providing ‘affordable’ housing,” even though that housing will not truly be affordable for the displaced
- Stories of promoting “integration” and racial progress, because white people will be able to move into neighborhoods of color, even if this “progress” results in the displacement of long-time, low-income residents of color

- Stories of reducing blight, crime, and lack of economic opportunity, through “mixed-income” development, even though wealth will not be redistributed and jobs not targeted at local residents
- Praise of “public-private partnerships;” the story that privatization of housing and resources is more “efficient,” even though it encourages profiteering and exploitation of the poor
- The promise of upgrading through new development, hiding what is lost in the process
- The promise of beautification, renovation, and refurbishment, regardless of who will benefit, declaring inhabitants and their neighborhoods as ugly and disposable while concealing the political reasons behind decay
- Stories about the “common good” of infrastructure like highways or railways, disregarding the question of who will use or benefit from them
- The story that the deregulated market solves everything, although analysis and experience prove it only provides solutions for those who manage to extract profit
- ... and many others

Spotlighting the marginalized and ignored stories of people who do not benefit from the above narratives is crucial to fighting housing injustice.

17 *AEMP 2019b.*

In the San Francisco Bay Area, the press often boosts market-rate housing construction as the solution to the region’s rising rents – ignoring the racially disparate impacts of high-end development, and how such developments geared at wealthy in-movers are literally making the region unlivable for longtime Black residents. In their (Dis)location / Black Exodus project, AEMP created maps to highlight the loss of San Francisco’s black population and challenge the legitimacy of past and current developments. By centering racial inequality, these maps remind us of the history of how deeply racialized urban restructuring has forced out Black residents since the 1970s.¹⁷

In the case of Leipzig, investors are seen as the “saviors of the city” by many politicians, whose services are needed to renovate the decaying housing after the socialist period. This story hides the main interests of investors (making money) and its outcomes – creeping population change, excluding the poorer and marginalized tenants from the city’s development. When organized with tenants, an observatory of these processes can raise awareness and challenge this narrative.

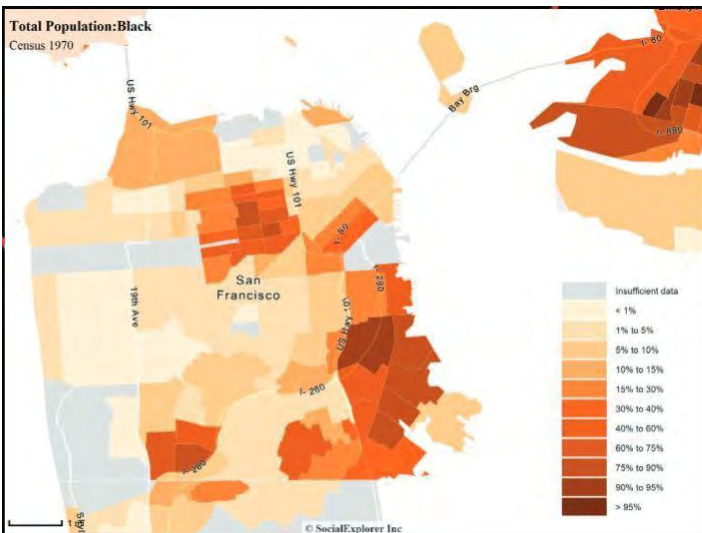


Figure 11: Total Black population in San Francisco and Oakland in 1970, compared with the total Black or African-American population in 2017. Source: (Dis)location / Black Exodus map, AEMP 2019.

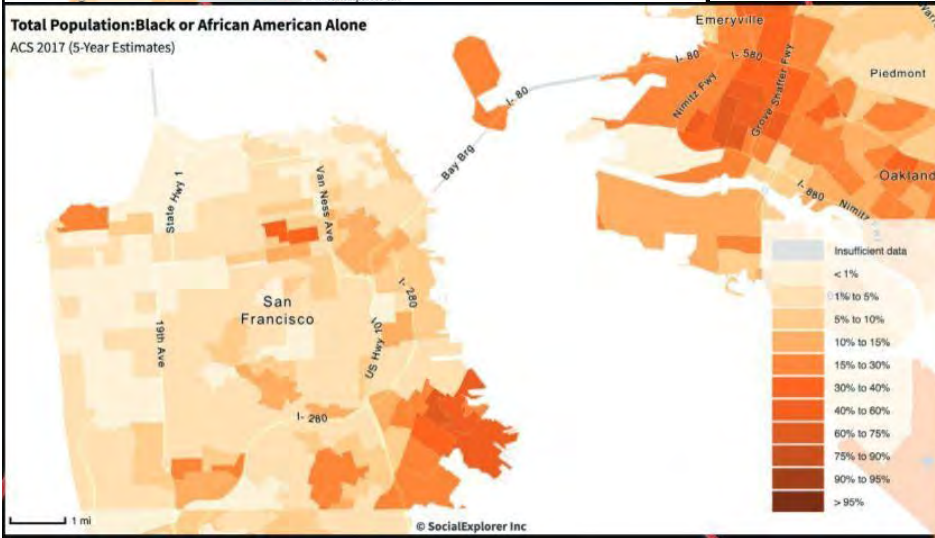


Figure 12: Sao Paulo Eviction Observatory display of evictions and threats to eviction overlaid with race to illustrate intersection and relationship between evictions and racism. Source: Rolnik 2019.

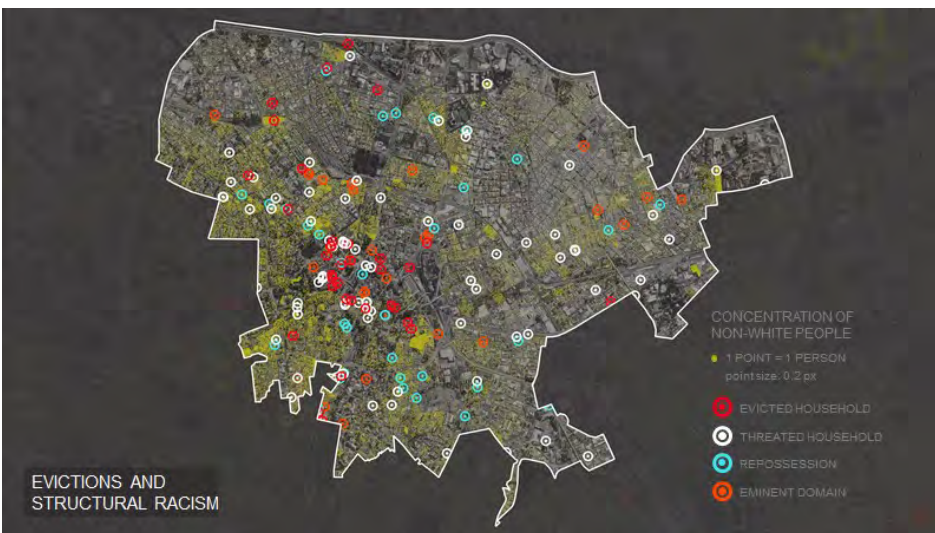
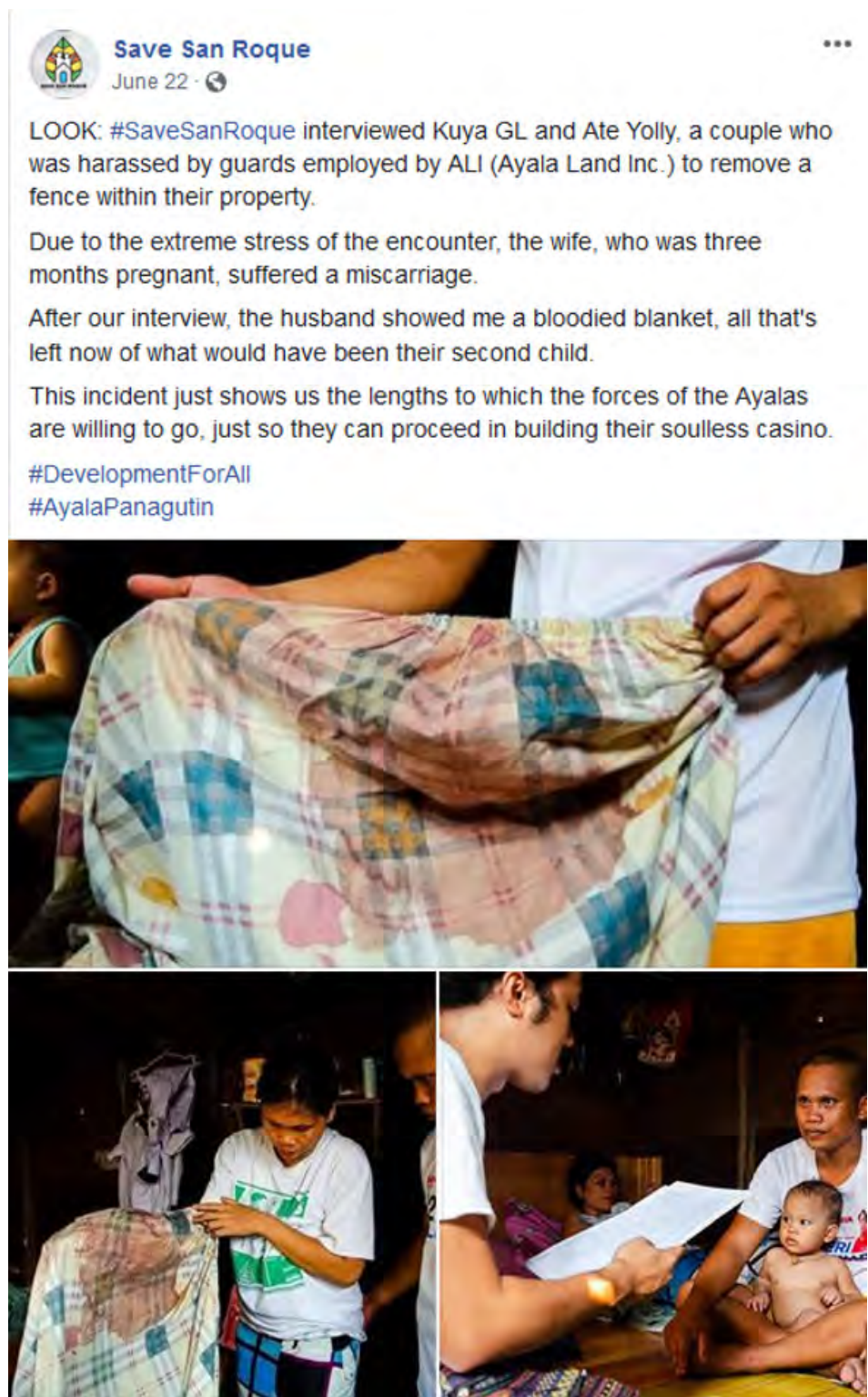


Figure 13: Using Facebook, [Save San Roque](#) publicizes stories of harassment by a developers' private security guards against urban poor residents, and the violent impact of such development aggression, in Metro Manila. Source: Save San Roque 2019.



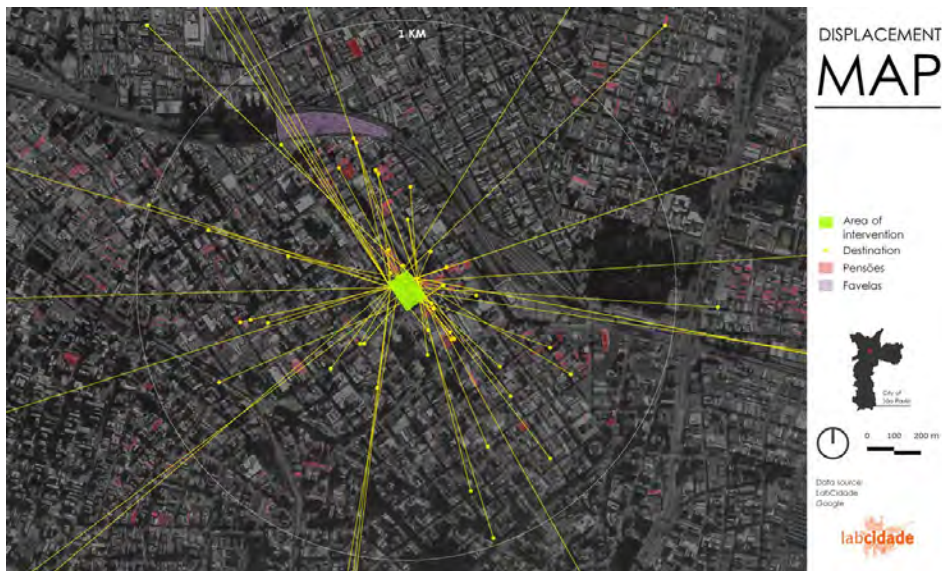
Collecting and Presenting Data

After considering which stories you want to tell, and which processes and factors to observe, think about the most useful tools. How do you collect data? How do you display it? What resources do you have and still need? Who could be your partners?

Data sources:

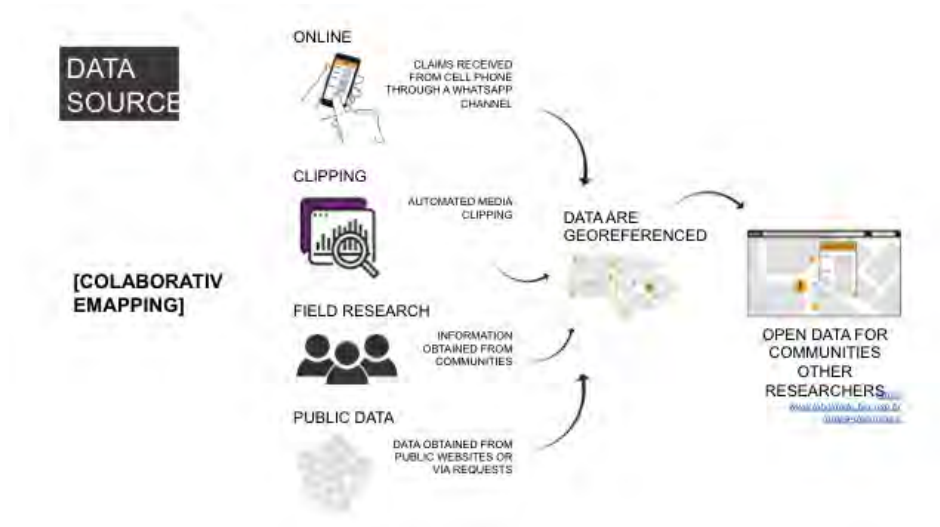
- Public data (both digital and analog; free and paid)
- Web crawling (collecting data from a variety of online sources, sometimes as batches)
- Phone apps like Whatsapp groups
- Publications
- Internal surveys
- Written documentation
- [Diaries](#)
- Collecting stories and conducting oral histories
- Photographs and videos recordings

Figure 14: This São Paulo Evictions Observatory map contains data from conversations with those who were evicted; yellow lines illustrate where the evicted were displaced to, visualizing the distance to new residences. Source: Rolnik 2019.



One dataset tells one specific story. Multiple types of data can tell a much deeper story. The São Paulo Eviction Observatory collected data from many sources. Initially, they used public data to track new developments, types of evictions, and demographics, which told an interesting story of the intersection of development, race and evictions. However, the State does not have a monopoly on data. The observatory also collected data from automated online media queries, community input from a dedicated Whatsapp channel, and qualitative field research.

Figure 15: This graphic illustrates how collaborative mapping sources are coalesced to create a final shared product of open data, which can be used by other researchers. Source: Rolnik 2019.



Having trouble gathering data? Many third-party vendors sell free public data in nice packaged datasets. However, consider the ethics of using your data sources, including how data was collected, and whether vendors you purchase from are also selling data to evictors.¹⁸

You might not be able to visit the Hall of Records in your own jurisdiction, but below are some helpful sites as examples for how to track down data:

- For a free Freedom of Information Act Request Letter generator, try: [Student Press Law Center](#).¹⁹
- A free site with linking similarly owned corporations: [Corporation Wiki](#).²⁰
- A free site that delineates relationships between some key politicians and financiers with their affiliated institutions: [Little Sis](#).²¹
- There are many free sites on land ownership and planning overlays. For example, for the City of Los Angeles, try: [assessor data for LA](#); [Los Angeles Open Data](#); and [Zimas](#).²²
- All ownership of land parcels in the U.S. can be found at the respective municipality's Hall of Records. Some cities maintain ownership data online. For New York City, try: Housing Data Coalition, [Who Owns What in NYC](#).²³
- Court records can be difficult for the general public to interpret, but most individual court docket documents are available on [PACER](#) for a small fee; however, these documents are free if you upload a download to: [Court Listener](#).²⁴

Ways to display your data:

- Mapping: Visual Maps, Interactive Maps, Relational Maps, or Power Maps
- Art: Murals, Graffiti, Sidewalk Art, or Projections
- Publications: Using Mass Media, Social Media, or (e-)Zines

18 See Aiello et al., 2018 for one critique of sourcing data from third-party vendors.

19 Student Press Law Center 2019.

20 Corporation Wiki 2019.

21 Little Sis 2019.

22 County of Los Angeles 2019; City of Los Angeles 2019a and 2019b.

23 Housing Data Coalition 2019.

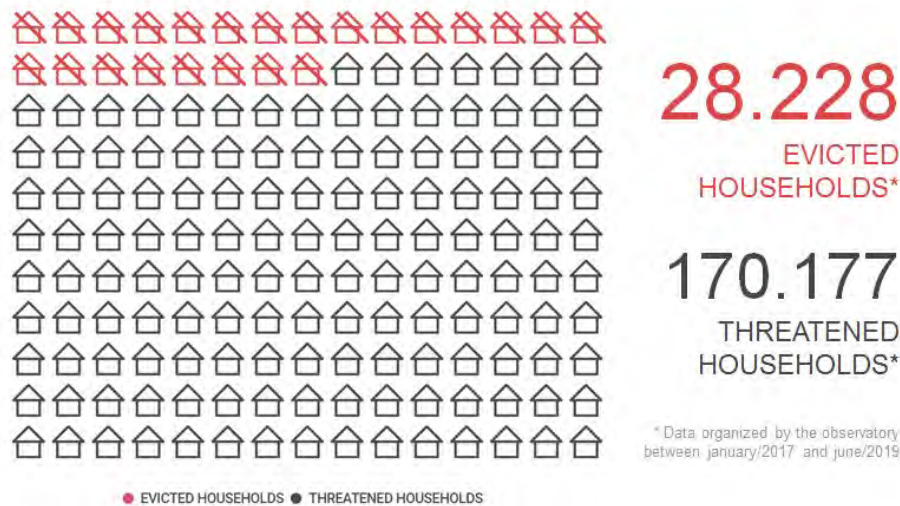
24 Public Access to Court Electronic Records 2019; Court Listener 2019.

- Public Demonstrations: Street Theater, Marches, or Leafletting
- Direct Opposition: Rent Blockades, Occupations, or Squatting

As no single eviction observatory can do everything, other questions you may consider are your resources, capacities, and needs for displaying your data and data analysis. What allies do you have? Which groups are working on similar topics and could be your partners? What other allies or partners do you need to tell your narrative?

Conclusion

We hope this brief chapter gives you some inspiration, courage, and tools to join in exposing eviction, in solidarity with those directly harmed. The examples are meant to show you that there are many ways to counter eviction and you are not alone in the struggle – we can all learn from one another! Get together, partner up, and start your observatory! ■



* Data organized by the observatory between January/2017 and June/2019

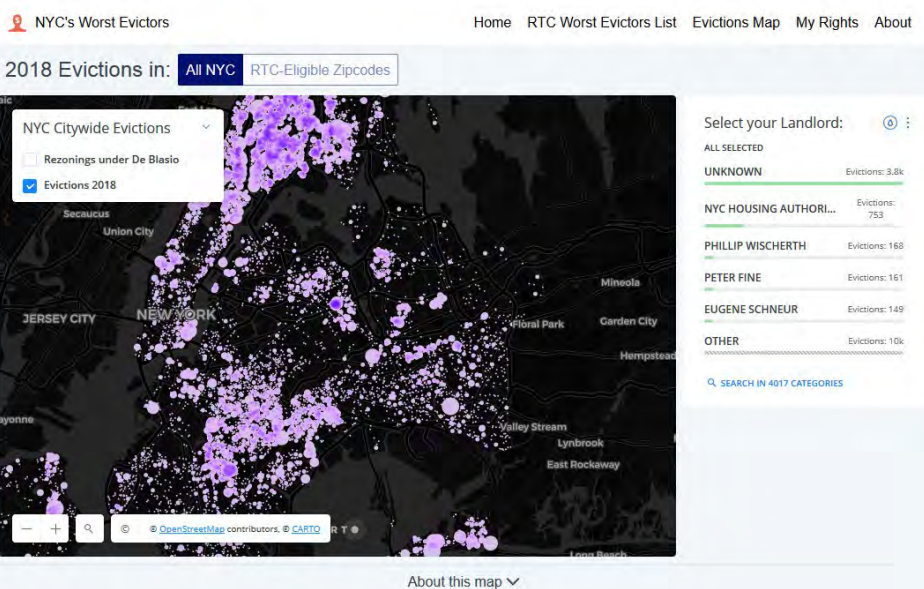


Figure 16 (top): Sao Paulo Eviction Observatory created a formula on threatened households and creatively illustrated the percentage of actual evictions in a two-year period. Besides creating multiple maps and open data for other researchers and activists to use, partnerships with supportive scholars resulted in academic articles and public documents on the context of evictions in Sao Paulo. Source: São Paulo Eviction Observatory 2019.

Figure 17 (bottom): The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project created an interactive map of NYC's "worst evictors." Source: AEMP 2019.

Figure 18 (top): SIKAD videotaped oral histories with San Roque residents under threat of eviction. Source: SIKAD 2016.



Figure 19 (three at bottom): *Kilab Multimedia* creates short, subtitled videos featuring indigenous leaders' stories of military harassment, which can be shared on social media. *Save Our Schools Network* and *The Breakaway Media* also publicize on-the-ground alerts, keeping allies updated on incidents with no mainstream media coverage. Sources: *Kilab Multimedia* 2018; *Save Our Schools Network* 2018; *The Breakaway Media* 2018.

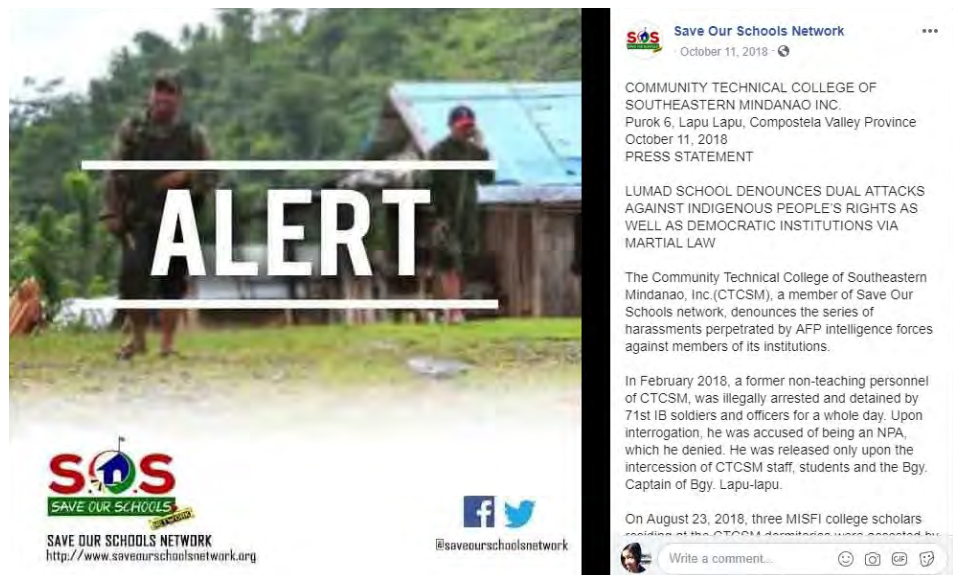




Figure 20 (top): “*Gapok*,” a production about demolition created by SIKAD, is designed for a tiny cast; this allows the play to be mobile and be performed in various urban poor communities, to generate discussion about resisting evictions. Source: *Gapok* 2016.



Figure 21 (bottom): And of course, there’s bringing it to the streets! Street theater in São Paulo depicts a counter-narrative on evictions. Source: Rolnik 2019.

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Reparative Records

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“I am given no chance. I am over-determined from without.”

Frantz Fanon

We write this chapter as housing justice scholars and activists, situated in different parts of the world, embodying different identities, and occupying differential positions of social privilege and/or disadvantage. While all currently affiliated with a university, we claim varying degrees of identification with and commitment to university-based scholarship. Despite our many differences, however, we write this chapter from our unified position in pursuit of housing justice globally. In this chapter, we explore “records” as one tool that has been used to harm communities and consider how scholar-activists can alternatively use records to repair for this harm.

I. What are records?

For the purposes of this guidebook, we will limit our discussion of “records” to publicly collected and archived records such as court records, eviction records, and criminal records. Too often, public agencies use such data to track, criminalize, and dispossess the most marginalized in our societies. However, records can also comprise a useful and informative data source and even an empowering tool for those in the housing justice movement.

For scholars, records can tell a story that other forms of data cannot; for example, illustrating an “official” state perspective. However, like other forms of data, records and the stories they tell always remain partial, so academic researchers in particular must be careful in selecting and framing research questions, considering what information can and cannot be located in the public record and what forms of research are helpful versus potentially damaging to movement-based work.¹ Mining and analyzing public records should not be used to reinforce a narrative of state legitimacy or the supremacy of academic forms of knowledge, but rather should be critically interrogated and situated in the context of the records’ production.

¹ See Hartman 2008; Kurtz 2001.

Additionally, use of public records by both university- and movement-based scholars raises questions of privacy and access, as we will explore further in the pages that follow. After a researcher collects data from public agencies, that researcher, their organization, or their institution often becomes the “gatekeeper” of that data—a powerful responsibility. In some cases, third parties – including organizing partners – will request access to the data, putting the researcher in the position of balancing commitments to data sharing and transparency with political considerations and privacy concerns. Overall, records are a powerful tool for researchers in the housing justice movement, but accessing, analyzing, and storing records also comes with a responsibility to dismantle how those same records have too often been used to oppress, criminalize, and dispossess.

II. How can records be damaging?

In the housing context, public records are too often used against those seeking to access or maintain housing. To give just a few examples, criminal records – particularly in the US context – can act as an enduring form of discrimination against individuals who have had contact with the “justice” system, whatever the nature of that contact. Landlords regularly screen potential tenants based on

criminal records and, in most jurisdictions, can legally deny an applicant based on the presence of some criminal history. This subjective process furthers not only the stigma associated with incarceration – which disparately impacts lower-income individuals of color – but also perpetuates the punishment of those individuals by locking them out of housing or pushing them into more precarious forms of housing. In the 1990s, President Clinton's One Strike ruling – that anyone living in publicly subsidized housing *and their family* could be evicted if they were discovered to have a criminal record – has largely determined the ethos of public housing ever since. Some housing authorities have adjusted their policies in recent years to be more permissive, but most still run criminal background checks on potential tenants.²

Similarly, depending on the jurisdiction, past eviction records can impose significant barriers for tenants trying to rent a new home, no matter the reason for the eviction. In some places, eviction records follow tenants for many years. Again, landlords can legally screen out based upon eviction history, leaving tenants with little recourse. These are just two examples of how records can be used in damaging ways that harm the housing insecure and perpetuate cycles of criminalization and dispossession. Particularly in today's highly financialized housing context, weaponizing public records in this way, while part of the status quo, only furthers the disenfranchisement, precarity, and injustice baked into our housing system.

However, a tenant movement can reclaim these “official” records to build power and expose predatory landlords. We begin by understanding the importance of demanding public records and how to navigate the bureaucratic-legal system.

III. Obtaining public records

² *Tran-Leung 2015.*

In the United States, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requires federal agencies to provide citizens with access to official records and information. Similarly, additional public records laws enacted in all 50 states require state agencies to do the same. While the law is explicit in its requirement that agencies make available to the public information requested of them, the process to obtain these records is anything but obvious. Often, the desired information can be obtained by sending an email to the appropriate public records officer. A good first step is to look up the agency online and search for the public records officer. Often, this will lead to the right person or to someone that can direct you to the right person. Once the contact information is obtained, the request can be filled out electronically, via fax, or through snail mail. In order to help individuals interested in filing a public records request, organizations like the National Freedom of Information Coalition (NFOIC) and the Reporters Committee have made FOIA request letter templates and open government guides available to the public (Figure 1). A public records request letter should include 3 things: 1) a statement that you are requesting information under FOIA or other pertinent public records law, 2) the information requested and why with a statement that you will not use the information for commercial purposes, and 3) a statement regarding fees (e.g. maximum amount you are willing to pay, request for fee waiver).

The process to request state records can vary slightly from state to state. The Reporters Committee has a useful state-by-state guide with information on open records and open meetings laws for every state. The time for response varies based upon the request and what agency you are requesting the information from. Federal agencies are required to respond within 20 days. States can vary in response times: California requires agencies to respond within 10 days, while other states like Arizona have no statutorily-specified number of days to

respond to public records requests. If your request is denied, you are able to appeal the denial.

Public Records Request Template

Eviction Court Records

FOIA Officer
Agency
Address
City, State, Zip

Re: [identify act: Freedom of Information Act Request/California Public Records Act] Request

Dear _____,

Under the [Identify Act: Freedom of Information Act/California Public Records Act], I hereby request the following records [Identify Information].

As a [identify yourself and affiliation: a private citizen requesting information for personal use/a reporter for a local newspaper/graduate student affiliated with a university] and not for commercial use.

[Statement Regarding Fees: I am willing to pay fees for this request up to a maximum of \$[insert amount]. If you estimate that the fees will exceed this limit, please inform me before processing my request/I request a waiver of all fees for this request (include explanation)].

If you have any questions regarding this legal public records request, please contact me at [insert contact information]. I look forward to receiving your response within the [insert days] day statutory time period.

Thank you,
 Name

Many jurisdictions across the United States grant public access to eviction court records. Nonetheless, some states like Illinois and California seal some of these documents.³ In California, the Assembly Bill 2819, signed in 2016, seals eviction court records as soon as they are filed. Courts publish the documents only if landlords prevail in the first 60 days or win at trial. The purpose of laws that seal eviction records is to prevent more tenants from being placed on rental “blacklists.” In the past in California, in cases in which landlords abandoned the lawsuit or there was no ruling, the names of tenants involved were made public, and tenant-screening companies could collect and send this list to subscriber landlords. However, by participating in an eviction case rather than leaving the property, tenants still open themselves to formal proceedings and, if they lose, the eviction will stay on their record, threatening their eligibility for subsidized housing or their chances of getting approved by other landlords.

In other countries, especially those that have a long tradition of fighting for housing justice, eviction court records are generally much easier to access than in the US. For example, in South Africa, each level of courts has a specified procedure for accessing eviction records. In Brazil, all eviction court records are available to the public, except those involving a minor or a survivor of sexual assault. In practice, however, records are not always easy to access: researchers must know the assigned record number or name of a participant in the case.

³ See Caramello and Mahlberg, 2017.

Figure 1: Public Record Request Template made by Deyanira Nevarez Martinez.

Researching judicial decisions from courts of appeals provides one workaround, as these verdicts are widely available online. These documents, nevertheless, are not usually used against tenants because landlords can turn to guarantors, who must own a real estate property in the same city in which the property being rented is located, if leasing agreements are broken.

Finally, on the one hand, sealing eviction court records might result in a greater number of tenants willing to go to court to fight displacement. Sealed records also protect tenants' privacy. In Brazil, for example, addresses of properties being contested in eviction cases occasionally can be found online. This raises serious concerns. Because most of them still live in the addresses listed in the court records, even tenants who end up not getting evicted can be easily traceable. On the other hand, however, sealing eviction records also means that community and university-based scholars don't have access to crucial data to inform their research on housing justice in cities like Los Angeles. Because they usually do not have access to court records, scholars still have trouble understanding not only the scale of the renters' crisis in LA, but also the biggest evictors operating in the city.

Tenants reclaiming their records can help expose predatory landlords and the broader eviction crisis. Working in partnership with organizers and advocates on the ground, tenants have the opportunity to build power for change by producing their own records.

IV. Reclaiming our records to build tenant power

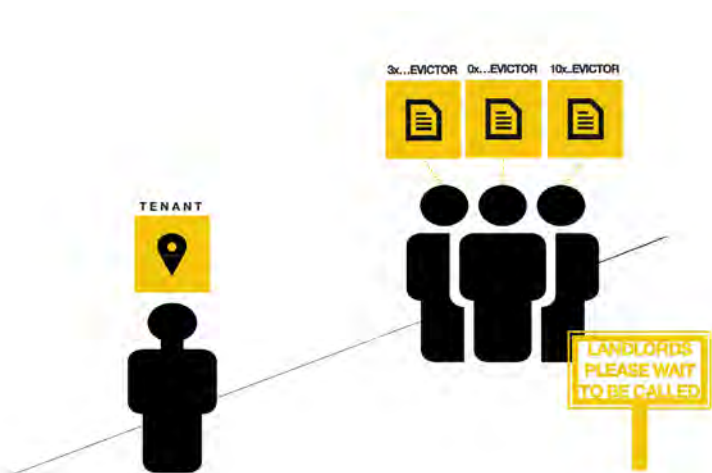
One strategy for reclaiming the power of documents that have been weaponized against tenants is by creating an online community database that captures the activities of landlords. A Community Evictor Database could allow a collective of tenants, community researchers, and community organizers to gather data on landlords. For example, the website Rental Renter (based in the UK) publishes reviews by former renters on properties in London, allowing new tenants to make better informed decisions before moving into a rental property. We suggest building a similar platform, but with a focus on rating landlords and reporting bad practices in addition to assessing the rental units themselves. The data can be collected by a simple website that is accessible on a mobile device. The application will gather information on the evictor, while sealing the tenants' personal information (Figure 2). Each stakeholder could provide eviction and grievance documentation against landlords using their unique expertise and positionality. Housing rights and tenant organizers can mobilize and canvass their communities, making sure residents are aware of the database while also helping residents document their evictors. Community-based researchers can use their skill sets to gain access to documents through public record requests and open data sources. Tenants will have the opportunity to cite their eviction and housing grievances directly on the application. The application can allow tenants the opportunity to share their narratives, while also remaining anonymous.

Leveraging a Database Against Evictors

Once a database is robust in a community, researchers, organizers, and tenants can leverage the data against evictors and financial institutions that are harming their communities. Community researchers can analyze the eviction documents to identify chronic evictors, especially corporate landlords, and map areas where individuals and families are being displaced through evictions. Community organizers can mobilize tenants and put pressure on banks, potential housing investors, and the local government to address increase displacement of children,

families, and adults. Renters can use the data to make informed decisions on who they decide to enter a housing agreement with.

V. Reflections and Critiques



When doing work that requires the use of records, it is important to ask critical questions about these records in order to give fuller context and tell more complete stories. One place to begin is to examine where these records come from, who compiled them, and for what purpose. Many times, even the most critical researchers and activists take records provided to them from “official” sources as absolute without stopping to think what these records were intended to do or who they were intended to serve. By doing this, we reproduce biases reflected in the data. Often, “official” records come from government agencies or nonprofits funded by the government, who often collect data that can help them figure out cost efficiency for a program or outcomes measured by monetary metrics, rather than anything related to how useful something is to people.

This begs the question: what stories are we interested in telling and from what perspective? Who is our record-keeping accountable to? This is not to say that this information is completely useless, but it is to say that it is not the only information that is important. As researchers and activists, we need to reflect on what is obscured in the records and data we rely on. This requires that we reflect on what is included and therefore what is missing in the record or data sets and be completely upfront about these shortcomings, because we have a responsibility to provide context in order to advance the causes we care about.

For example, one of the biggest problems of relying solely on court records to tell stories of housing (in)justice is that this leaves out many other types of evictions. Court evictions comprise only one category of displacement. In addition to evictions targeting informal tenants, many evictions never touch the legal sphere as many tenants preemptively leave afraid of getting a “record”. As a result, eviction court records do not represent the whole picture; in fact, they might obscure much more violent removal processes taking place in cities around the world. If we take the numbers represented by court records as the whole story, we fall into the trap of legitimizing inaccurate “deliberations on important policy decisions for tenant protections.”⁴ In sum, the numbers reported by courts cannot set the terms used to talk about housing rights. We must address this

Figure 2: Community Evictor Database-Inspired Cartoon made by Fernanda Jahn-Verri.

by looking to other sources, such as newspapers, other media, housing rights movements, and organizations like tenants' unions.

Finally, relying on public records to tell a story can also dehumanize the individual people and stories represented in the data, even if this data is being used by activists and scholars fighting for housing rights through the legal system. Court records commonly reduce people and their struggles to brief, formal, and impersonal documents. Evicted tenants become just another number, violent evictions get sanitized, and sensitive and complex forms of resistance are translated to judicial jargon, eliminating all meaning attached to these practices of contestation. The legal vocabulary filling these records often makes these documents illegible for those who do not have a law degree. The alienating nature of court records becomes even more evident when one attends court hearings and is able to witness the physical and mental distress tenants impacted with eviction notices are experiencing throughout the proceedings, not to mention the unsettling scenes of people being displaced. So, while methodologies building on people's diaries (discussed in this Resource Guide) might face criticism for exploiting someone's suffering, on the other hand, court records may desensitize their pain. We are not suggesting that court records should not be used when studying displacement and housing precarity. In fact, many have already made the case for it, particularly when discussing the rising relevance of the judiciary in practices of dispossession.⁵ Nevertheless, they must be used together with other methods that allow us to read evictions in a more comprehensive and committed way. One example is the work done by Gautam Bhan.⁶ While exploring why evictions became commonplace in Delhi, in addition to looking at court records, he also relied on counter-mapping and collective memory (methodologies also reviewed in this Guide) to search for erased settlements.

4 *Aiello et. al., 2018.*

5 *Ghertner 2015.*

6 *Bhan 2016.*

VI. Conclusion

When working with records and other data, it is important to reflect on what your work will mean for individuals on the ground and for the struggle at-large. Many researchers believe that their role is to publish their research regardless of what it could mean for individual and movement struggles. However, it is important to reflect on the ethics of using records for research. Researchers must critically analyze where records come from, how and by whom they were intended to be used, and what information they may not include. Academics have immense privilege in that the information they put out is legitimized by their training and the institutions they are affiliated with. As academics and activists, we should strive to use records and data that comes directly from people. For example, by using data like an online community database that captures the activities of landlords, we can help elevate and legitimize it to help change harmful narratives. Collectively we must push for public data mandates at all levels of government because records and data about the most vulnerable among us is often not available to us. ■

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People's Diaries

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“The victim who is able to articulate the situation of the victim has ceased to be a victim: he or she has become a threat.”

– James Baldwin

During the Methodologies for Housing Justice Summer Institute, participants were introduced to Melissa García-Lamarca and Maria Kaika's use of debt diaries as a way to study the impact of mortgage debt on people's lives in Greece and Spain.¹ García-Lamarca and Kaika distributed diaries to participants with prompts asking them to share their thoughts and reflections on their interactions with financial products and processes like mortgages, indebtedness, and bankruptcy. The research powerfully portrays the financialization of housing as a lived experience, affecting not only people's housing and financial situations but also their well-being and personal relationships. The use of diaries is a novel approach, but what does it mean to use "people's diaries" as a methodology for housing justice? As the authors of this chapter, this was the question before us.

Who are we? We came to the institute as strangers from different places both geographically (Colombia, South Africa, and North America) and professionally (we are academics, a strategic researcher, a community organizer, and an economist in city government). What ties us together, however, is a shared desire to understand housing injustices more deeply and to respond meaningfully to these injustices through the work that we do.

As we approached writing this chapter, we found that the topic of diaries was emotive. We had all kinds of feelings and it raised many ethical questions for us. To explore these questions, we decided to engage in some diary writing of our own. We asked ourselves: What is a diary? How do we feel about diaries and using them in research? What questions come up for us?

¹ See: Kaika et al, 2020.

This chapter begins with our collective reflections that emerged from this exercise. In section two, we explore briefly how diaries have been used in research. Together, these sections highlight some of the possible uses of diaries as well as the challenges that seem to be inherent in this method. Section three offers two examples—drawn from our own work—that seek to re-imagine the use of diaries in housing justice research. Finally, we conclude with a set of reflective questions for those interested in using diaries in their housing justice work.

1. A diary about people's diaries

Note: italicized text in this section references quotes from our diaries about "people's diaries."

Diaries are a place to store personal things—memories, experiences, thoughts, feelings, reflections, or desires—over a period of time. Diaries are a record of life happening, but they also represent a way to *express* oneself, to find a *voice*, to *process experiences* and *realize deeper meaning*, or to *untangle a thought, an idea, or a feeling*. Diaries help us to work through things, to find clarity.

Asking someone to keep a diary for research purposes—and thus to share their innermost thoughts and feelings—seems to *betray our understanding of what a diary is*. Sharing a diary means it is no longer secret. How will this change what is shared? If you were writing a diary knowing someone would read it, would you *always write with them, the reader, in mind*? Would you know *how to write*

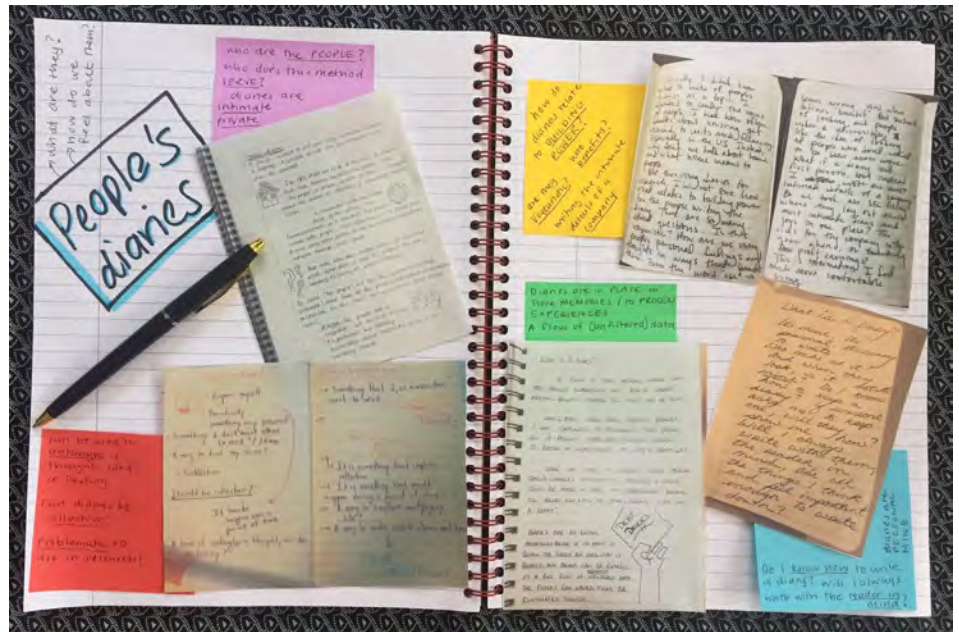
Figure 1: Our diaries reflecting on the meaning of “people’s diaries.”

it? Would you worry that you don’t have anything *important to say*? As activists and researchers, we feel conflicted by the idea *that I want to read* someone’s diary. *Is it problematic? Voyeuristic?*

During the Summer Institute we learned that *a diary can be many things*, including a tool to *make visible others’ realities*. It can take abstract concepts and global processes that we often discuss in reference to housing injustice (such as financialization), and demonstrate *people’s lived experiences* of these processes. This is potentially useful in lobbying for progressive policy. Diaries, as opposed to interviews, may also allow people to be *unfiltered, more open and reflective* and may give participants some *control over what is produced*. The nature of diaries means they may capture greater depth as well as *change over time*. They may provide an opportunity to let *the insights* of those experiencing housing injustices lead our theorizing.

Still, we have questions. First, **who benefits from diary research?** If we are concerned with disrupting the status quo, how does such research *relate to building power for the people writing the diary*? We feel discomfort with methods that seem to trade in people’s stories of pain and suffering.² Even if we can *use these stories to benefit* those experiencing housing precarity, *who defines benefit*? Second, **whose diaries should we solicit?** *Are “the people” in people’s diaries always the unhoused, the evicted, the indebted?* Let’s shift our gaze and scrutinize *people who don’t want to be seen*: the people, institutions, and corporations that are the engine of housing injustice. What are their most sensitive documents that *lay out their most intimate fears and joys*? Finally, **are diaries always individual?** As we work to resist racial capitalism and the ways it isolates us and seeks to destroy collective life can we envision collective diaries as a method to think, feel, and dream together and – most importantly – as a tool to build our collective power to act against injustice?

2 Tuck 2009.



2. The use of diaries in research: Whose diaries and for what?

How have diaries been used in research? Our brief exploration into this question highlights both the particular strengths of the method and important questions for housing justice.

Research diaries are recorded in different forms, but many share key features: 1) the diary is a personal account that offers a way to hear from people in their own space and time; 2) the diary is recorded over time in a person's own voice rather than mediated by an interview or survey; 3) the diary format allows those that take part in research to define what knowledge is and how to share it; 4) the diary is requested and then analyzed by the researcher, so cannot be considered a truly private account.

Diaries have been used to record deeply personal experiences, as in geographer Paula Meth's study, which asked South African women living in poverty to record their experiences of violence over one month.³ The goal of the study was to understand women's fears and experiences of crime and violence, as well as how they managed these fears and experiences.

This study shows some limitations of the diary form. First, this study (like many that use diaries) offered payment to compensate for the time-consuming practice of writing. Compensation is important to acknowledge the effort and time involved in diary-keeping, but the result in this study was that poor women were paid to record deeply traumatic experiences of violence. Diaries are seen as a way to allow individuals to take part in research and define knowledge themselves. But the offer of payment, especially to women in poverty, creates a trade in people's personal stories that may be coercive, exacerbating the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched. Furthermore, seeking stories of pain and suffering may amount to what Indigenous studies scholar Eve Tuck has called "damage-centered" research: "research that operates, even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation."⁴ Such research, she argues, is often "tolerated" by Native, poor, or disenfranchised communities because of the implicit (and sometimes explicit) promise that such stories will help to make change, but do they?⁵

Diaries have also been used as a method of recording more practical daily activities like health, stress, and household finance. For example, in *Portfolios of the Poor*, microfinance researchers Collins, Morduch, Rutherford, and Ruthven asked 250 residents of villages and informal settlements in India and South Africa to write detailed yearlong "financial diaries" to record how they lived on less than two dollars a day per person. In what is considered a classic study of microfinance, the researchers noted their surprise to find that people living in extreme poverty used complex financial strategies, like savings clubs, informal insurance policies, and borrowing through extended networks.⁶

This study shows how diaries are useful for researchers, who can learn "surprising" things from the daily record of everyday people trying to make ends meet. But the usefulness for the communities studied is unclear and the knowledge produced may even create harm. For example, the *U.S. Financial Diaries* project recently used diaries to track 235 low- and moderate-income households over the course of a year to detail cash flows in and out of the households, their employment, investments, and financial goals. The project claims that this method "reveals hard-to-see aspects of the financial lives of working Americans, providing new insight for the design of financial services policies, programs and products for a broad range of Americans."⁷ However, this university-based research was conducted in partnership with the Ford Foundation and the Citi Foundation, who have a financial, potentially exploitative, interest in understanding low and moderate-income households' personal experience with their money.

In the examples above, diaries are a method used to harvest people's stories to generate useful findings for research. As a methodology for housing justice,

3 Meth 2003.

4 Tuck 2009: 413.

5 Ibid p. 414.

6 Collins et al, 2009.

7 Morduch et al, 2020.

“people’s diaries” should produce knowledge rooted in everyday experience that serves the self-identified needs of those people. How can examples from current organizing and movement-groups show us the potential of this method?

3. People’s Diaries in Action

In this section, we offer two examples to re-imagine the use of diaries as a research methodology for advancing housing justice. Our examples are rooted in the work of movements and community, and begin to answer the question of how diaries as a research methodology can actively move us towards self-identified housing justice goals.

Diaries of Power

One avenue to challenge the potentially extractive nature of diaries as a research method is through diaries and exposure of the unduly powerful. Rather than exposing and centering past traumas and viewing the lives of people living with housing insecurity under a magnifying glass, let us instead turn our scrutiny on the inner lives of the unduly powerful.

Strategic research is a type of research that is based in movements. It seeks to analyze power and vulnerabilities in order to inform organizing campaigns. Diaries of corporate power expose the most intimate secrets, both the fears and joys, of people and corporations who would rather these secrets remain hidden. Citizens United, the 2010 U.S. Supreme Court case that protects political spending as free speech, has meant these diaries of power actually tell the story of corporate people with all the same free speech protections afforded to individuals.⁸ As utterly horrendous as this framing is, this is the landscape researchers and movements must contend with in pursuing housing justice.

8 *Federal Elections Commission United States of America 2010.*

9 *Essex Property Trust 2018.*

These diaries can take several forms. In the United States, publicly traded companies are required to submit first person narratives in the form of periodic filings to the Securities and Exchange Commission. These filings, a 10-K, can illuminate profit centers and illustrate the risks facing a company, as well as highlighting potential growth strategies. Though they are inherently public, this is still a company’s sensitive information.

As an example, Essex Property Trust, a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) based in Southern California, lists some of the risk factors that most concern them, on pages 7 - 27 of their 2018 10-K filing. Among others:

Rent control, or other changes in applicable laws, or noncompliance with applicable laws, could adversely affect the Company’s operations or expose us to liability.

Climate change may adversely affect our business.

Expanding social media vehicles present new risks. The use of social media could cause us to suffer brand damage or information leakage. Negative posts or comments about us on any social networking website could damage our reputation.

The tax imposed on REITs engaging in “prohibited transactions” may limit the Company’s ability to engage in transactions which would be treated as sales for federal income tax purposes.⁹

Essex Property Trust worries about how high (or low) rent is, climate change, what people might say about them on social media, and their taxes. While these

are the concerns that most resemble what individuals and households may worry about, it is useful to bear in mind that within these 20 pages, Essex Property Trust reveals their motivations and interests, and helps us understand how a particularly large real estate corporation shapes and is shaped by government.

The research methodology of a corporate diary opens many additional avenues for possible research. From the 10-K we can examine who the individuals behind the corporation are, both its leadership and shareholders. We can then investigate their lives and relationships to better understand their hopes, dreams, and motivations. Tools like the online wiki LittleSis help make these relationships visible.¹⁰ We can use financial disclosure information to investigate: Which candidates do these corporations and their leaders donate to? What causes are they most active in?



Figure 2: Stephen Schwarzman profile page, LittleSis.

10 LittleSis 2020.

The largest REITs in the U.S. are also active in other parts of the world. Understanding their vulnerabilities in the U.S. offers an opportunity to build solidarity between movements across borders in parallel with capital that seamlessly crosses borders to exploit the financialized and racialized nature of housing across the globe.

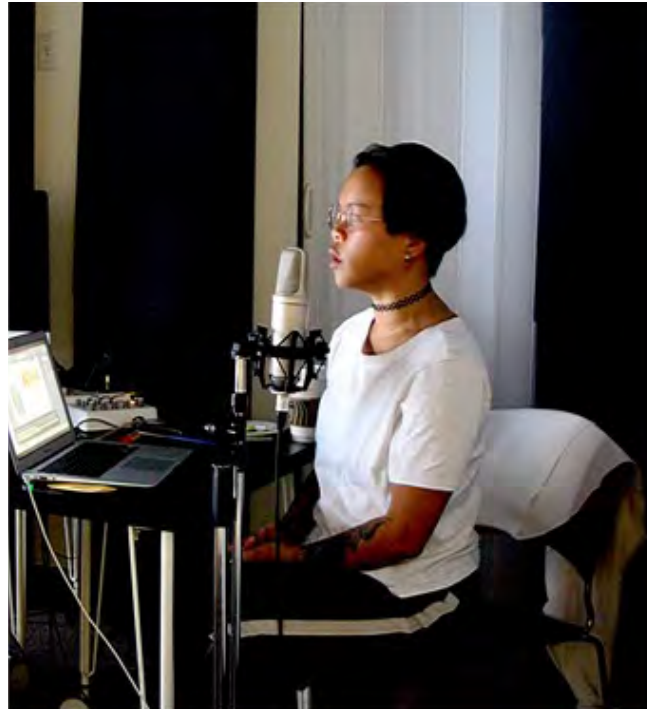
Collective Diaries

Community groups collect and share their stories in formats that resemble people's diaries. For example, the Vancouver Tenants Union (VTU) in Canada organized a project with the VIVO Media Arts Centre through a British Columbia Arts Council Grant. Helena Krobath and her team worked to create an audio mentorship program. The purpose of this program was to train community storytellers to use audio editing equipment to document the experiences of renters living in the City of Vancouver. Participants were introduced to mentors that helped them learn new abilities to tell the stories that VTU volunteers had collected. Since they would be producing what the mentors considered a piece of art, they were offered compensation for their final audio products, which would then be compiled into a podcast and displayed in an exhibit.

VIVO, Helena, and the other mentors had to balance the responsibilities of being trusted with the tenant stories they had collected and the realities of producing

Figure 3: Tenants practice recording their stories. www.vancouvertenantsunion.ca.

a product for public display. Renting in expensive and hyperpolarized cities like Vancouver is an isolating and stigmatizing experience. This is why the project focused on producing podcasts as the final product. Podcasts can help share stories faster and let more folks experiencing similar struggle know they aren't alone.



A mix of participants shared their stories and engaged in the audio editing training. While many participants were not members of the VTU, most of the community members and artists had their own experiences renting, and some became members through their participation in this project. Tenant movements have a strong tradition of storytelling that lends itself to methodologies like diary-keeping. Sharing common experiences can break down dominant false narratives of individual responsibility, personal inadequacy, and utter aloneness.

Through these podcasts and the exhibit, the tenant movement in British Columbia is doing the work of building a collective identity. Tenants are coming to the realization of their shared struggle and the identification of themselves as a class to which all renters belong. Research methodologies that include personal accounts and storytelling, such as people's diaries, complement the work that movements are already doing on the ground.

The personal stories contained in diaries are unique to each individual; but when put together, they are not separate. The themes and motivations, the struggles and victories, all become familiar. While each person is recording a diary of their own story, they are collectively telling a larger story together. That story needs to be told, but we don't know what it is until we begin by recording and articulating our own story. When done right, people's diaries can be a great methodology for supporting this work.

4. Conclusion: Toward accountability in diary research

The use of diaries as a methodology for housing justice gives activists and researchers the opportunity to deepen their understanding of how unfair housing

conditions affect the lives of the actors in the process, e.g., vulnerable households, institutions, and corporations. Indeed, not only is the information collected periodically, but the process of doing a diary implies profound reflection. As we saw in this chapter, there is no one way of doing a diary. This tool could be adapted to the purpose and the context of each type of research, as in our examples: diaries of power or collective audio diaries. Regardless of whether an unduly powerful corporation or members of a vulnerable household are the authors, researchers must be aware of the potential ethical implications of asking someone to keep a diary for research purposes. Consequently, we would like to end this chapter with a few accountability questions for activists and researchers who are considering the use of diaries in their work. For example, it is important to ask: How are the “data” going to be used? Could soliciting a diary be harmful or traumatizing? Who will benefit from this information?

In addition, it is worth exploring how a diary could be modified for the purpose of each kind of research, and how it allows us to ask new research questions: Are diaries only individual records, or can they collectively record the experience of groups? As the financialization of housing creates a fast-moving global interconnected world of investment, what does it mean to have a method that is slow, deliberate, and rooted in one place? How does technology allow for new diary formats, such as Whatsapp messaging, Twitter posts, or photos taken on a personal device over time?

We pose these questions in hopes that they will inform the work of researchers considering using diaries as a research methodology to advance housing justice. ■

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Planos Populares / Plans From Below

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“I think we’re not looking sufficiently at what is happening at the grassroots in the country. We have not emphasized sufficiently the cultural revolution that we have to make among ourselves in order to force the government to do differently. Things do not start with governments.”

– Grace Lee Boggs

Introduction

Resistance and insurgent territories are an indelible mark of Latin American housing struggles, a deeply unequal region where the State has systematically increased social disparities and violated the rights of vulnerable residents in order to favor a highly lucrative urban development. Against these disparities and violations, urban communities have organized throughout the twentieth century to imagine and build the territories disregarded and marginalized by public policies. Moreover, as governments impose projects as a form of conquest and control, planning from below has emerged as an instrument of resistance to hegemonic power.

Planos Populares (“popular plans”) is the name of one of the many forms of planning from below that emerged in Brazil. Throughout Latin America, *popular* refers to that which belongs or emerges from lower classes, the masses. In this sense, the development of popular planning constitutes a methodology of challenging institutional urban planning agendas. Planos Populares offer a way to talk about insurgent plans, projects, policies, legislations and urban initiatives. Arising from communities living in favelas, and from poor, Black, dissident populations looking for better housing conditions, Planos Populares connects to every community around the Global South struggling for spaces that represent their history and desires. Going further, this category can embrace different experiences of planning from below all around the world.

Unlike institutionalized processes of participatory planning, it is communities who develop Planos Populares, directly contesting official urban planning regimes. These communities, often in collaboration and consultation with planners and students from local universities, develop plans that center those often neglected by formal planning practices. Planos Populares rely on the same tools that have been institutionalized to organize the city, but transform the scope and social roles of these tools to construct a new methodology based on principles of social justice. Some of these Planos Populares are countervisions, some are audits, some are moratoriums. Far and wide different experiences illuminate varying iterations of Planos Populares and how this planning practice can thrive in the struggle for housing justice.

A similar and parallel process, which we call “plans from below,” also thrives in the US context. Across US cities, subaltern groups have worked and are working to subvert and coopt hegemonic and destructive municipal planning processes to ensure subaltern survival. Alongside Latin American Planos Populares, this chapter explores planning from below in the United States to illustrate the myriad of ways in which marginalized groups resist, challenge, and ultimately transform state power.

Figure 1: Plano Popular process in Fortaleza. Source: Lucas Lessa.

Planos Populares in Action

A Plano Popular can be used as a way to pressure the State to implement public policies.

(Plano Popular of the ZEIS Bom Jardim: Fortaleza, Brazil)

Bom Jardim is a favela in Fortaleza designated by the city's Master Plan as a Special Zone of Social Interest (ZEIS, acronym in Portuguese). Brazil's 2001 City Statute established the ZEIS framework to identify areas for public investment, upgrading and regularization, often characterized by higher rates of poverty and housing precarity. Despite the community's recognition as a ZEIS since 2009, Bom Jardim never received proper investment from the government. But even in the face of this neglect, Bom Jardim's residents emerged as a well-organized community, as a member of the Rede DLIS. Through this coalition, multiple non-profit organizations and community associations fight for human rights, such as the right to housing and to the city.



Tired of waiting for the government, residents wanted to make their own plan, and Rede DLIS reached out to the Architecture and Urbanism Department of the Federal University of Ceará, in Fortaleza, to help residents build this plan. Since 2014, Professor Clarissa Freitas, has been working in Bom Jardim, and in 2016 she began working with residents on the “Plano Popular da ZEIS Bom Jardim.” In collaboration with undergraduate students, graduate students, and community organizers, the process of developing the Plano Popular was organized into three main phases: mobilization, diagnosis, and proposals, with the final Plano Popular presented to the community in June 2018.

This Plano Popular did not cover whole ZEIS of Bom Jardim, which includes more than 11 different communities. Rather, this plano was made for the 4 communities which were the most precarious or the most organized. In each phase of the Plano Popular the organizers promoted open workshops with the communities to discuss the plan.

The first step was mobilization. For each community, there was a first encounter to talk about the plan and basic concepts of planning. To facilitate the dialogue, a glossary was built so the dwellers could better understand some key subjects.



Figure 2 (top): Presenting the Plano Popular with community members. Source: Lucas Lessa.

Figure 3 (bottom): A counterplan developed through the Plano Popular in Fortaleza. Source: Lucas Lessa.

The second part of this Plano Popular, the diagnosis, was divided into two parts. In the first part, students presented the available official data about the territory to the community, which, as with other irregular settlements, was very incomplete. To fill in these gaps, residents produced their own data. By using tools like maps, stickers, and markers, residents could show points of flooding, accumulation of garbage, and other problems in the area. The second part was a technical diagnosis, where students conducted surveys, field observation and mapping. The workshop concluded with the presentation of both the community and technical data on the neighborhood in an event where the dwellers could analyze, critique, and modify the results.

By the end of the process, dwellers had identified three issues that needed to be treated urgently and three long-term problems to be solved. The urgent problems were sewage, street paving and security, and land regularization. The long-term problems to be solved were a lack of leisure and public spaces, resizing of



Figure 4: A Lunar New Year Lion Dance celebration in historic Los Angeles Chinatown. Source: Lillian Louie Collection, El Pueblo Monument Photo Collection, 1930.

streets and urban equipment, and a lack of health and education centers. To resolve these issues, students created preliminary proposals to be presented to the community. In a workshop, the proposals were discussed and the inhabitants critiqued and modified the proposals. A final edition of the Plano Popular was presented and approved by the community on June 23rd, 2018.

This Plano Popular did not intend to be a final proposal. On the contrary, it remains open to changes and especially to the dialogue with the inhabitants, a concept majorly different than that of typical hegemonic planning practice. Additionally, efforts were made to include the residents' voices as most as possible throughout each phase of the process. To that end, some interfaces, such as physical maps and models, stickers, and post-it notes were used. These methodologies aimed to amplify the inhabitants' capacity to directly interfere in the design of urban planning, and ultimately pressure the government to take responsibility for planning for the whole ZEIS, as it should have been doing long before.

A plan from below can be a survival strategy in the face of state-led displacement.

(The Development of "New" Chinatown: Los Angeles, California)

In 1909, a group of wealthy Los Angeles elites (primarily white businesspeople and real estate developers) formed the Los Angeles Union Station Association to push for the creation of Union Station, a central train station in Los Angeles. After decades of lobbying city government and railroad companies, this group succeeded in convincing railroad companies to build the station in 1933. The City of Los Angeles chose historic Chinatown as the site for the station because it was imagined as a neighborhood of dirty Chinese vice and slums that had to be destroyed to make room for LA's grand gateway. Marked as forever foreign, Chinese-Americans constituted the "alien" slot of the US West's racial trinity of native-settler-alien that had to be defined and contained in order to make room



for the settler. In this way, the city could kill two birds with one stone: accomplish “urban renewal” by destroying Chinatown, and build a massive new settler colonial monument to Los Angeles.

But low-income communities of color are not passive victims of state-led displacement. In this case, the planos populares were rooted in particular histories of North American settler colonialism (US annexation of Mexican territory in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the ensuing massive build-out of railroads); racialized labor (Chinese construction of the transcontinental railroad in 1869); and, racial violence and exclusion (the Chinese Massacre of 1871 in LA Chinatown and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882). Chinese-American communities were able to move, adapt, and survive through all of this, and our communities became adept at surviving attempts at extermination. The construction of Union Station and the demolition of historic Chinatown in the 1930s was simply the latest in a longer historical trajectory of racist violence in the US West.

Chinese migrants – mostly men – formed Chinatowns around the US West Coast in the mid-late 19th century as places of safety and familiarity in the face of widespread anti-Chinese racism and violence. Anxious not to lose such vital survival spaces, Chinatown neighborhood elites like Peter SooHoo quickly organized in the face of their neighborhood’s destruction. Fluent in Cantonese and English, these local elites lobbied the railroad companies to delay demolition by one year, fundraised enough capital to buy and build a new “Chinatown Central Plaza,” and moved everyone to the new Chinatown. This new LA Chinatown was the first US Chinatown in which the property was Chinese-American owned.



Designed with a fantasy Spanish-colonial-inspired “California” architecture, Union Station was completed in 1939 and opened to great fanfare. The station is still open today, serving around 110,000 passengers a day.

Figure 5: Entrance gate to New Chinatown. Source: Herman J. Schultheis Collection, Los Angeles Public Library 1939.

Figure 6: Panorama of Union Station, Los Angeles. Source: Pomona Public Library, 1939.



Although Union Station was ultimately constructed, this example illustrates that plans from below can differ from other forms of resistance, like protests and direct actions, because they require particular forms of fluency and action by a local elite class. In this case, the survival of LA Chinatown was only possible because Peter SooHoo and his colleagues were fluent in the technical machinery of state planning and governance, in English, as well as in the language of property ownership. As such, this history complicates a simple binary and vertical conception of power, where the state is on top and everybody else is below. Instead, the history of Union Station encourages us to understand how power is mediated and fragmented through multiple axes (including race, gender, and class) and scales (the block, the neighborhood, the city, the nation, the continent, and the globe).

A plan from below can be an experimentation with collective governance that centers the needs and voices of impacted communities.

(The “Monster in the Mission”: San Francisco, California)

A Plano Popular can be a powerful organizing tool for housing justice, as well as an opportunity to build processes and structures that allow for collective self-determination and the redistribution of resources and decision-making power to communities excluded from profit-driven development.

Participatory planning processes have been central to the organizing strategy of the Plaza 16 Coalition in the Mission District of San Francisco, California. The coalition, made up of residents and over 100 businesses and community organizations, was formed in opposition to a proposed 350-unit luxury development at 1979 Mission Street - dubbed the “Monster in the Mission.” With units expected to be rented out at \$3,500-5,000 a month, the development is unaffordable to long-term residents in a formerly Latinx majority neighborhood where 57% of families earn less than \$24,999 a year. The development would accelerate the already rapid gentrification of the neighborhood, which lost over 8,000 Latinx residents between 2000-2013. To stop displacement and counter the narrative that unchecked market-rate development will lower rising rents, the coalition has put forth a counter-proposal: the Marvel in the Mission. The Marvel would include 100% affordable housing, a community center, on-site social services, and green space.

The initial proposal for the Marvel was envisioned and created with input from over 300 community members through a year-long grassroots process anchored by the Plaza 16 Coalition. It was then taken to a designer who created draft renderings of the proposal, which were brought back to community members for feedback. The fight against the Monster and the process of designing the Marvel is ongoing. There are four more planned meetings, during which community members will learn about affordable housing funding processes, collectively make decisions around funding sources, discuss the size and number of units possible for the site, and determine how to make the greatest number of units affordable for extremely low income residents.

Plaza 16's inspiration for creating a counter-proposal is rooted in Latin American leftist traditions, particularly Venezuelan communal councils. The goal of the Marvel is twofold: securing 100% affordable housing, and de-professionalizing planning processes to increase community control over decision making. The coalition's slogan is "we are the planners." According to organizer Maria Zamudio, the group aims for a process that, whatever the Marvel ultimately looks like, allows Mission residents to say, "this is what we decided."

The Marvel's planning process sees itself as a continuation of an earlier participatory planning process, the 2006 Plan Popular/People's Plan, organized by the Mission Anti-displacement Coalition, a group to which many Plaza 16 Coalition members once belonged. This plan lays out a long-term vision for health, sustainability, and equity in the neighborhood, as well as extensive policy suggestions around land use, housing, economic development, transportation, parks, open space, and arts and culture promotion. It reflects the needs and visions of hundreds of residents and workers captured via focus groups, surveys, workshops, and small and large-scale community meetings over the course of seven years.

The Marvel is also a rejection of attempts by the San Francisco Planning Department to co-opt participatory planning. Rather than allowing the city to host one community meeting, or even to selectively adopt policy recommendations generated from older participatory processes in 2006 (an entirely different political moment), the coalition is creating a counter model that demands the right for continuous community engagement and control over decision making. The primary demand from the Plano Popular that the coalition adopts is that all future developments in the Mission require community planning and that these processes center "people not profit."

The inclusion of elements of two Planos Populares in the organizing strategy of the Plaza 16 Coalition has supported the coalition in working on multiple scales, alternating between calling for the abandonment of the Maximus project and for the democratization of all future planning in the neighborhood. Drawing on the legitimacy and popular momentum generated through the creation of these two processes, the coalition's demands have become mutually reinforcing; they are advocating for 100% deeply affordable housing at 1979 Mission St. and for a moratorium on all market-rate housing developments in the neighborhood until housing is accessible for poor and working-class residents. They have supported residents in rejecting concessions from Maximus and in mounting opposition to other projects throughout the city. The demand for a moratorium is more radical than the affordability requirements outlined in the 2006 Plano Popular. It reflects both the increased severity of the housing affordability crisis, and how the housing justice movement has helped to change the political terrain to make more radical demands possible.

Figures 7, 8, and 9: Posters and protests against the Monster in the Mission. Sources: Rick Gerharter; SF Poster Syndicate Figure; Joe Fitzgerald Rodriguez, The S.F. Examiner.



Conclusion

Contending with traditional, top-down approaches to planning, Planos Populares are acts of “planning from below” that create platforms from which new visions of urban space can be imagined and enacted. Planos Populares are experiments that challenge established power dynamics and shift the focus of planning away from technocratic expertise, towards the grassroots efforts of communities fighting to develop and control their own futures. This approach centers the experiences of those who are often left behind in conventional planning practices and pushes forward methodologies that investigate planning practices from the margins. Through these investigations, the status quo can be disrupted, and new forms of empowerment can be legitimized. ■

With an Eye on Global Finance: Organizing Against Housing Speculation Through Community-led Tactics

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“Having secured the home market, the further expansion of capitalism required of the state that it assume new forms and additional functions.”

– Cedric Robinson



Figure 1: Los Angeles based and Oakland born Recording Artist, Performance Artist, Educator, Author, Justice Advocate, and Actor Ise Lyfe performing *Flag in the Mud*, accompanied by master cellist Michael Fecskes, addressing gentrification and displacement driven by the current Tech boom in the Silicon Valley. https://www.ted.com/talks/ise_lyfe_we_are_not_mud

Flag in the Mud (excerpts) by Ise Lyfe¹

*Dig if you will a picture
Mud*

*A mound of mud
They always addressed us as mud
The mud pile where you found the scary Black Brown
Whites, they never really came around*

*Unless it was the cops in white or the white cop who was coming to take someone Brown from the mud pile to downtown
This is 1986*

*West Oakland, Hunters Point, East Palo Alto, no different from Brooklyn and South LA.
These were the mud shows.*

*Where grandmama taking on the role of your mama was the norm
Where you might get shot going to the store for the color that you wore*

*That's hip hop
Survival in the concrete jungle in rag tops
Beautiful men and women in love*

*I was a boy in that
I had my family's love, we survived pain
We knew we weren't mud
We were fertile soil waiting on rain
Dolores Park in the Mission
Tamales and sunshine*

¹ Lyfe 2016.

*Nobody cared about the mud piles
We were invisible most of the time*

But now there's a flag in the mud

*With the microchip as an emblem
Hipsters are cliches on purpose
Dirty shoes and ripped denim
Trampling our holy grounds
Treating our bodies and storefronts as fossil bones they newly found*

*The flag is in the mud
Claiming territories and families*

If it's \$2300 a month to rent, tell me who gets a home?

What's the square root of racism?

*How do you quantify and qualify the communities we're destroying?
Where's our conscience on a google map?
How many likes does decency have?
How many followers does courage render?
Are you humanity's defender or the digital offender?
Tweet
How will you be remembered?
What side of history do we stand on as a people, as an industry?*

*I believe in the power of today
I see the power in today
The joy that drives us
The ambition that thrusts us forward
I reject the notion of your flag in our mud
Let us be the spark to convey*

*We're not mud
We're fertile ground waiting on the rain*

The inhumane housing systems causing racial banishment in Oakland, as profoundly articulated by artist and humanitarian Ise Lyfe, are playing out around the world, and more and more people are asking...

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Real estate is by far the most significant store of wealth representing more than 3.5 times the total global GDP, with residential real estate accounting for more than two-thirds of real estate world wide.² More than ever, the “home” has become a source of corporate wealth accumulation, managed by profit seeking investors and speculators, and eased by government action and inaction at different scales. The process of financialization, “the increasing dominance of financial actors, markets, practices, measurements and narratives, at various scales, resulting in a structural transformation of economies, firms (including financial institutions), states, and households,” makes financial transactions on housing more profitable today than in any other time in history.³

Beginning approximately in the early 2000s, banks and other lending institutions moved away from their traditional models of lending and began providing loans to purchase homes bundled into mortgaged-backed securities (namely packaging individual homeowners’ mortgages into investment products to be bought and sold numerous times). Through this process, known as securitization, risky lending practices were rewarded with instant returns. Selling people’s debt across various institutional transactions was at the core of the subprime crisis and the loss of homes worldwide – a phenomenon that disproportionately affected low-income, women and racialized homebuyers.⁴

The financialization of homes expanded not only in the homeownership markets but also in the rental sector. Before the global financial crisis, the financialization of rental housing utilized highly leveraged, short-term (3-5 years) investment strategies.⁵ After 2008, new financial investors, REITs and listed real estate companies, switched over to a long-term investment model, based on a financial pro forma relying on renovation raising rents and removing lower income tenants—also known as “renoviction.”⁶ Multiple investment strategies are deployed including the purchase of large “undervalued stocks” (foreclosed, defaulted mortgages otherwise called toxic assets) directly from banks, as well as the purchase of rent regulated housing units, social housing units, and public housing units in low or high market areas.

Increasingly short-term rental (STR) platforms are providing a new entry point of speculative finance into housing systems. Airbnb and other STR platforms, such as VRBO and Homeaway, allow property owners to avoid the responsibilities and tenant rights associated with long-term rentals, increase cash flow of units through higher profit potential, and allow higher degrees of control of residential units and greater flexibility of rental durations.⁷ All of these features make replacing long-term tenants with short-term guests attractive for property owners, while displacing residents from their homes and orienting their neighborhoods toward catering to tourists.

The diffusion of speculation throughout housing systems, be it through “Golden Visas,” sales of foreclosed or public housing units, tax breaks for real estate investors, or conversion of long-term rentals to Airbnbs all speak to one major trend: the further commodification of housing.⁸ This commodification makes it more challenging for people across the globe to get what they need most—a place to live.

2 Barnes 2018.

3 Aalbers 2019.

4 Wyly and Ponder 2011.

5 Wijburg et al 2018.

6 Ärlemalm 2013; Polanska 2017.

7 Wachsmuth and Weisler 2018.

8 A Golden Visa is a permanent residency visa issued to individuals who trade property investment for citizenship. For more information, visit <https://www.ft.com/content/22b887b8-5123-11e7-af2-d819572361bb>.

Keywords

Speculation is a process that relies upon being non-transparent, hiding the flow of money and beneficiaries of global transactions. To better understand the actions of groups who have designed successful methodologies, we advocate understanding the following terms:

Financialization (aka “the Stock-ification of Housing”)

when housing, including single family homes and multi-family apartment units, is viewed as a financial asset that can be bought, sold and traded en masse.⁹ From this vantage point, our homes are valued not as places of stability and community, but as cash machines for financial traders.

Speculation (aka “Price Inflation”)

the driving force behind the financialization of housing. Speculation can be defined as an assumption of an asset’s increasing value. If the asset is housing, that assumption is based on the history of recent sales in houses or apartment buildings, or of the prices of rental units. In an unregulated housing market, speculation is the driving force behind increasing prices. For example, if a nearby building or house was purchased at a certain value, then the next seller can speculate (or assume) to sell their property at a higher price. If you are an entity with a large influence, then you can manipulate and/or exploit the market to instigate speculation for your financial benefit.

Securitization (aka “Debt-Selling”)

when banks (and other financial institutions) that give out loans for the purchase of a home then pool these loans together into a security that can be sold to other entities. Also known as the process of “debt-selling.” You’ll often hear the term mortgage-backed security pools; “mortgage-backed” is the reason people buy these securities. They are “backed” by the promise that the person who took out the loan initially will eventually pay it back.¹⁰

Titularization (aka “Capital Capture”)

the process by which something that is “spatially-fixed” (i.e. single-family homes, apartment buildings, short-term rentals, etc.) acts as a receptacle for fluid capital. Titularization describes how the built environment can act as sites for global capital’s temporary housing. To “enter the fixed material structure without being part of the enterprise that maintains the built space.” It facilitates the landing and movement of global-capital around the world.¹¹

PPP - Private-Public Partnerships (aka “the Market-State”)

a contract between the government and private companies. It can be central to the acceleration of housing financialization when public good and assets are used to leverage profit for private entities.¹² Examples of PPP strategies include HOPE VI projects which allocated federal dollars to housing authorities in different cities across the US to demolish public housing in favor of “mixed-income developments,” section 8 housing vouchers, government guarantees of private projects, and the creation of Business Improvement Districts (BID) which utilize policing to clear encampments of unhoused communities. In order to secure the success of PPPs, often violent and inhumane tactics are deployed by the state to advance private interests. This form of private-public contracting employs

9 *Tenants Together 2015; ACCE Institute et al 2018.*

10 *According to the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, securitization “refers to the process by which a mortgage lender sells a mortgage to an underwriter, usually an investment bank, that bundles together a large group of mortgages and sells certificates in that group of mortgages to investors.” For more information see <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/d/debt-buyer.asp>.*

11 *Rolnik 2019a.*

12 *“PPPs work on a “buy now-pay later” basis and lock governments into long term debt commitments which are “off the books” and is not recorded as public sector borrowing. The public body enters into a long term commitment with the private provider often based on expected revenue generation during the life of the project. Incorrect demand forecasting, common in PPP projects, ties governments to underperforming infrastructure and thus a debt is created.” For more information see: https://odg.cat/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/financialization_of_infrastructure_eng.pdf.*

the police, the judicial system, and other public authorities to advance private interests.

Government Facilitated Speculation

Global capitalists will always strive to do what they see as their overriding interest—maximize their short-term profits regardless of the impact on humanity or the environment. To do this, they rely on the formation of new markets to extract from. Government can either serve to facilitate this speculation within housing systems or provide an avenue of resistance. While we call on governments at the international, national, state, or local levels to protect their citizens from the harms inflicted by global corporate landlords, predatory equity, and other speculative housing schemes, too often governments serve as a tool for corporate agendas rather than the public good. As articulated by Raquel Rolnik and echoed by Sam Stein, “...the financialization of housing has been a result of public policies.”¹³ At its core, the mindset valorizes a limited conception of the “highest and best use” of land: providing the greatest economic return to investors, while occasionally boosting the city’s tax base or its reputation. These priorities fuel the explosive fire of speculative housing schemes.

Examples of governmental policies that have enabled the rise and spread of the financialization and speculation include:

	<p>Rent control policies that fail to prevent rents from being reset to market rate when tenants move out—vacancy decontrol.</p>
	<p>The selling off of public or social housing to private developers.</p>
	<p>Using powers of expropriation to assemble land for private development.</p>
	<p>Advancing Transit Oriented Development projects with anemic affordable housing requirements.</p>
	<p>Providing permits to private market rate housing projects without an analysis of the project’s socio-economic impacts and/or without requiring significant inclusionary housing units.</p>
	<p>The US Opportunity Zones that provide federal tax credits to speculators investing in low-income communities.</p>

¹³ Stein 2019; Rolnik 2019b: 11.

These types of policies are occurring in cities of both the global north and the global south from London to Sao Paulo to Jakarta to Oakland.¹⁴ Cities have a vested interest in increasing their revenues and because of a reliance on property taxes in much of the world, as well as political capture by local place-based elites, which most often serve the interests of speculative developers.

Strategy for Resistance: Speculator Watchlists

The following analyses of anti-speculative efforts by communities in Berlin, Montreal, Sao Paulo, New York, and the San Francisco Bay Area showcase a few methods by which organizers and government leaders can push back and fight to preserve housing as a community resource. Oftentimes, speculative finance thrives on its actors operating in the shadows, purposefully trying to render themselves invisible—not only tenants and grassroots organizers but to policy makers and regulators as well. By understanding speculation’s language and tools, and identifying them in our own neighborhoods, we can organize to take back the neighborhood.

Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development (ANHD)

In New York City, the Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development (ANHD) has sought to build equity and justice at the neighborhood level, focusing particularly on predatory equity and the financialization of housing. In the lead up to the 2008 financial crisis, private equity-backed developers purchased an estimated 100,000 units of affordable, rent-regulated housing—about 10 percent of New York City’s rent-regulated housing. This overly aggressive private equity investment has become known as **predatory equity**—a financial model that considers harassment and displacement of current tenants as a necessary element in their financial model.¹⁵

14 Beswick and Penny 2018; Wijburg et al., 2018; Aalbers et al., 2017; Bernt et al., 2017; Aalbers and Holm 2008; Chapple and Loukaitou-Sideris 2019.

15 ANHD 2009.

16 Ibid.

By examining investment strategy that underpins predatory equity, ANHD has been able to identify high risk loans likely to put tenants at risk of displacement. In particular, loans that have a high ratio of debt to income—more debt owed than rental income generated—are typically indicative of an owner who intends to push out current tenants in order to raise rents. Mortgage-backed securities then bundle together such loans, which magnifies pressure on low-rent paying tenants in the name of driving increased commercial returns for institutional investors.¹⁶

As part of its Displacement Alert Project, ANHD created a host of tools to help organizers know which buildings to target for outreach and organization **before speculation has put tenants at risk of harassment and displacement**. Their [displacement watch list](#) uses asking sales prices, and compares them to rental prices to identify rent-stabilized buildings that are likely the subject of speculation. Their [Portal](#) and [Map](#) aggregate information over

Figure 2: A Map from the Displacement Alert Project demonstrating tenants’ vulnerability to displacement block by block. Source Displacement Alert Project (www.displacementalert.org).



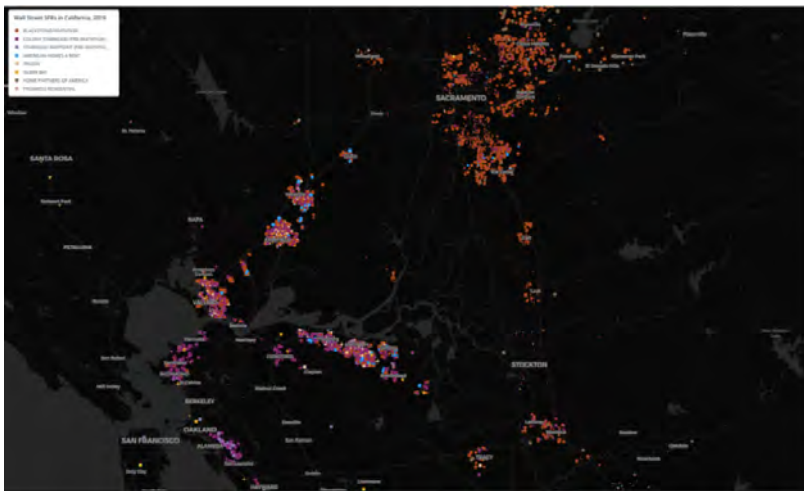
time, such as building permits received or number of rent stabilized units from 2007 to present, to identify buildings that might be nearing a tipping point towards speculation.

Importantly, **many of ANHD's tools are low-tech**; they include looking at sale listings and using a basic calculation to identify speculation, and evaluating underwriting standards from Securities and Exchange Commission filings to look for high debt to income ratios.

Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP)

The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP) offers another hopeful path and toolkit to counter real estate speculation. Their approach, begun in San Francisco and now in Los Angeles and New York, builds on a foundation of **using data for justice**.¹⁷ Central to their work is this question: **who gets to narrate displacement?**

With a local lens, AEMP has acted as a watchdog on serial evictors and real estate speculators. **Using tools like [corporationwiki](#)**, AEMP matches the registered addresses of property owners' "Limited Liability Corporations" (LLCs) to specific individual actors whose evictions drive displacement and speculation. Through the same methods, AEMP created a [map of Wall Street Landlords](#) across the state, again serving to co-opt tools of the establishment to build community power.



17 Graziani and Shi (forthcoming).



Figure 3 (top): A map of residential properties in California acquired by Wall Street corporations. Source: <https://www.anti-evictionmap.com/blog/2019/3/30/wall-street-landlords-california?rq=wall%20street>.

Figure 4 (bottom): AEMP campaign material highlighting William Rosetti as a serial evictor in the Bay Area. Through his many company partnerships, he has evicted close to 5,000 housing units. Source: <https://www.anti-evictionmap.com/evictors/#/rosetti/>.

Figure 5: Who Owns Berlin: demonstrations against the non-transparent practices of the real estate market in Berlin. Source: Who Owns Berlin? (<https://wem-gehoert.berlin/>)

Wem Gehört Berlin? (Who owns Berlin?)

More than 85% of Berlin's 3.4 million residents live in rental housing. After the fall of the Wall, the city fell into debt and sold off 220,000 of its 360,000 rent-subsidized social housing units—including 64,000 in 2004 alone—to private investors as a low price.¹⁸ During the last year, the residential sector has boomed with the cost of housing peaking in 2017 21% higher than in the previous year; the same year, rental prices were 8.8% higher than in the previous year.¹⁹ Among the most prominent investors in the Berlin real estate market are Vonovia (40,000 units) and Deutsche Wohnen (over 110,000 units), and they optimize their investments by raising rents. In April of 2019, social movements in Berlin brought 40,000 people to the streets to argue for remunicipalization of housing and fair rents.²⁰ The movements put forth various tactics to identify speculative investments in housing and how to organize to stop them; two initiatives relevant here include the initiative of mapping speculators under the name “Wem Gehört Berlin?” (Who Owns Berlin?) and the popular referendum “Deutsche Wohnen & Co enteignen” (Expropriate DW & Co).

The Wem Gehört are mapping portals dedicated to making the real estate market transparent in a growing number of German cities.²¹ In Berlin, there are several initiatives of this kind, with the first started in 2010 at the neighborhood level. Wem Gehört Moabit, a citizens-led action of regular meetings (now called round table about gentrification) began convening to share information about ownership, increasing rents, and neighborhood investors, as well as to crowd source and map this information at <https://moabit.crowdmap.com>.²² In 2018, a city-wide Wem Gehört Berlin? crowdmap (<https://wem-gehoert.berlin/>) was launched to provide information about the location of investment, information about the investors, local histories, and other relevant pieces of information. A few months later, with the support of the newspaper Tagespiegel and an independent journalist collective named *correctiv!*, a new portal was launched under the name Wem gehöert Berlin? to interactively document speculation in the city via maps, videos, articles, crowdsourcing and systematizing information.²³

18 In the mid-2000s, US- and UK-based private equity firms entered the German real estate market. They bought low with the intent of reselling the housing stocks. Among the most active was Cerberus, backed by Goldman Sachs. “Most housing portfolios were not sold directly to other new investors [...] This led to the shift from private equity and hedge funds to REIT, among which were Vonovia and Deutsche Wohnen” (Wijburg et al. 2018). See also: Aalbers and Holm 2008; Fields and Uffer 2016.

19 Bailey and Everett-Allen 2018; Berlin Hyp and CBRE 2019.

20 BBC News 2019.

21 E.g. Wem gehört Hamburg? [Who owns Hamburg?] <https://correctiv.org/top-stories/2018/11/23/wem-gehoert-hamburg/>.

Wem Wem gehört Lüneburg? [Who owns Lüneburg?] <https://www2.leuphana.de/univativ/wem-gehoert-lueneburg-transparenz-fuer-den-wohnungsmarkt/>.

22 Wem gehört Moabit?, 2012.

23 For more information see their website: <https://correctiv.org/>. See also this interactive documentation of speculation in Berlin: <https://interaktiv.tagesspiegel.de/wem-gehoert-berlin/>.



Beside the *Tagespiegel*, the tenants association is campaigning for the creation of a nationwide Real Estate register (*Immobilienregister*), in order to track down the names of large property owners, the locations of their companies, their affiliated entities, and other relevant information.²⁴ Simultaneously, tenants initiatives launched a *Volksbegehren* (popular referendum) in 2019 named “Deutsche Wohnen & Co Enteignen” (Expropriate DW & CO) to ban large investors owning more than 3,000 properties.²⁵ This would allow the re-municipalization of approximately 200,000 housing units previously sold to the private market.²⁶ According to the German law, the *Volksbegehren* requires the collection of 20,000 signatures in order for the proposal to be considered for an actual referendum; it would then need 170,000 signatures to pass and set a legal precedent. Currently the first phase is more than promising: three times the minimum amount of signatures have been collected.

Resisting Commercial Short-term Rentals (STRs) in Montreal

As argued above, STRs have become one of the many entry points of speculative finance into housing systems, and serve as a method to dispossess long-term residents’ of their housing, and even their entire neighborhoods. Data sources such as Inside Airbnb and municipal open data on local 311 complaints can help identify local STR hotspots, as can talking to community housing organizations, residents, and local business workers.²⁷ Other potential signs of STR activity include local businesses with key exchanges, visible signs of tourism such as rolling bags in residential neighborhoods, and homes that are not for sale with lockboxes or digital locks installed.

Montreal is at the forefront of this phenomenon in Canada, having the most commercialized STR market of any major city in the country.²⁸ But community organizations across the city have long been pushing back.²⁹ One such organization, the Comité logement du Plateau-Mont-Royal (CLPMR), has called for a complete ban on STRs and Airbnb, lobbied politicians, organized forums, led protests, occupied individual STR units, and published reports.³⁰ The data collected in the reports showcase both quality of life issues like noise, crime, and garbage, as well as the impacts that STRs have on the supply of housing vis-à-vis the conversion of long-term rental apartments to commercial short-term rentals. Making the argument in public that Airbnb and other STR platforms are tools for gentrification that threaten residents’ rights to housing, their work—in concert with both other local community organizations (including the Comité Logement du Ville-Marie and Front d’action populaire en réaménagement urbain) and research groups (notably McGill University’s Urban Politics and Governance research group (UPGo)—appears to be having a significant impact.³¹ In the summer of 2019, the Province of Quebec announced plans to introduce new legislation to increase data transparency later that year.³² The province’s new legislation will likely enable increased scrutiny of STR platforms and improve the ease with which existing regulations can be enforced.

Partnering with academic research groups such as UPGo can provide community groups with resources and expertise, thereby allowing them to benefit from policy makers’ valorization of academic legitimacy. McGill’s UPGo has introduced new methodologies to help others better monitor STRs commercial and speculative activities. The interventions include showcasing where STR led gentrification is likely to occur and enabling scrapped data from sites like Inside-Airbnb and AirDNA to be matched with publicly available census and housing data, which enhances the accuracy and responsiveness of spatial analysis.³³ The code for these projects has been made publicly available on the group’s GitHub page.³⁴ While not speculation watchlists as utilized by groups such as ANHD,

24 See: <https://interaktiv.tagesspiegel.de/lab/eigentuemersuche/>.

25 For the group’s website, see <https://mietenvolksentscheidberlin.de/>. City-states like Berlin are entitled to launch popular referenda resulting in nonbinding resolution, which the State parliament of Berlin would translate into legislation. According to the article 15 of the German constitution, created after World War II, state or local governments are allowed to turn land, natural resources, and means of production into collective ownership “for the purposes of socialisation” (Senatsverwaltung für Inneres und Sport 2019). See also: *Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen* 2019.

26 The initiative also collects further information about speculations and organizes information workshops for tenants.

27 See: <http://insideairbnb.com/>.

28 Combs et al., (forthcoming).

29 Comité logement de la Petite Patrie 2016; Desmarais 2016.

30 CLPMR 2019.

31 Renaud and Roberge 2019.

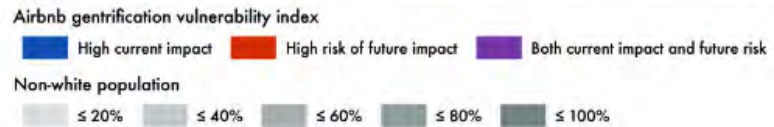
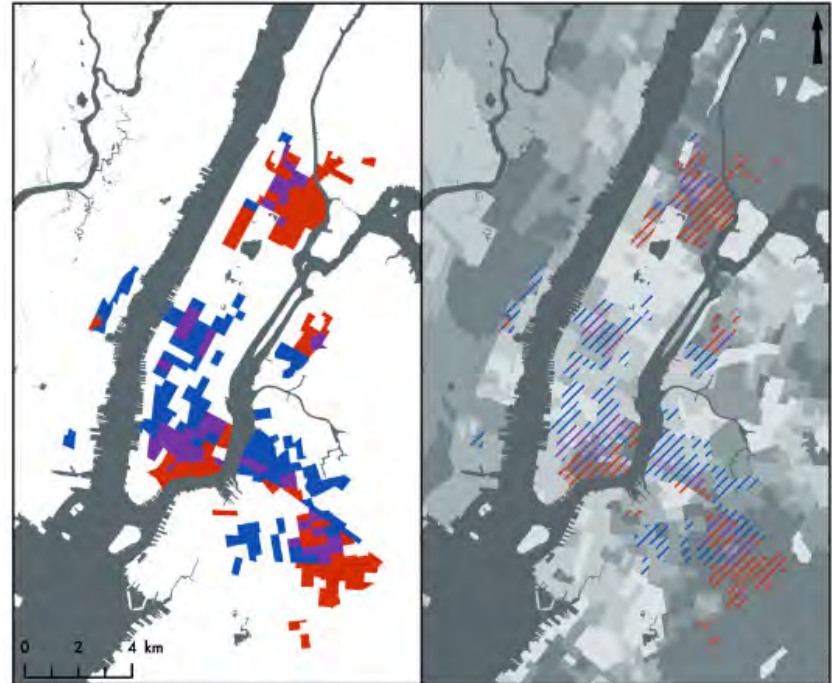
32 CBC News 2019.

33 Wachsmuth and Weisler 2018; Combs et al. (forthcoming).

34 UPGo’s Github repository: <https://github.com/UPGo-McGill>. Designed to be used in R Studio, available for free online.

Figure 6: Map showing the gentrification vulnerability of certain New York City neighborhoods. For more details including how to reproduce see Wachsmuth and Weisler, 2018.

the tactics of groups such as the CLPMR and spatial analysis methods can be used concurrently by activists to better analyze where STR-driven housing speculation is occurring and better understand which areas are most under threat. This understanding enables organizers to preemptively respond, facilitating the mitigation of negative impacts of STRs on their neighborhoods.



35 Villela de Miranda et al 2019.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Mendonça et al 2017.

Monitoring Public Private Partnerships in the Evictions Observatory in São Paulo, Brazil

Speculation is not only being resisted in the cities of the global north. In São Paulo, Brazil, the Observatório de Remoções (Evictions Observatory) has become a major organizer of resistance to evictions and speculation in housing. The Evictions Observatory, formed by the LabCidade of the University and the LabJuta of the ABC Federal University, partners with a wide variety of community organizations, members, and academic groups to monitor evictions and identify those behind speculative investments in São Paulo's housing.³⁵

The São Paulo Evictions Observatory engages in many tactics to push back against evictions and identify the individuals and policies driving speculation. In the case of São Paulo, much of the speculation has been government-led, through policies and partnerships. Through the increasing use of PPPs in particular, the government has funneled investment into lower-income areas, leading to the displacement of current residents.³⁶ Importantly, the São Paulo Evictions Observatory has traced how policy tools like PPPs, which are often designed with clear social justice objectives, have been utilized to facilitate speculation and justify the displacement of the city's most marginalized residents.³⁷ To do this, the São Paulo Evictions Observatory historicizes development and policy use in the neighborhoods most impacted.³⁸ Furthermore, once the São Paulo

Evictions Observatory identifies the mechanisms and individuals behind speculation, they look for ways to utilize policies (often the same ones employed to facilitate speculation) to halt its worst impacts and fight for residents. The group has also resorted to litigation, both to demand enforcement of existing policies and to delay speculative action while residents organize.³⁹



Figure 7 (top left): Partial map showing center of Sao Paulo, includes data on evictions, areas at risk of eviction, and government policies. Image and translations courtesy of Raquel Rolnik, 2019.

Figure 8 (top right): Image from a protest against evictions in Sao Paulo. Image courtesy of Raquel Rolnik, 2019.

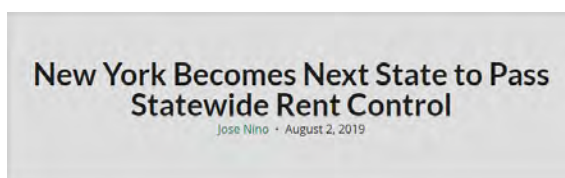
Success Stories and How to Identify Speculation in Your Own City?

In late 2015, activists and organizations from cities around the world, including Barcelona, Dublin, and Atlanta, came together in a collective day of protest against the multinational corporate landlord and private equity firm Invitation Homes/ Blackstone. After the subprime mortgage crisis, private equity firms like Blackstone bought numerous properties, evicted tenants, and raised rents. Through meticulous research, the aforementioned organizations were able to identify Blackstone and all their subsidiaries, hidden in various LLCs, as a “vulture fund” (that preyed on people’s vulnerable position) and a serial evictor across the world. Their message to Blackstone’s CEO Stephen Schwarzman:

“Mr. Schwarzman, I stand with Blackstone tenants and community organizations around the world. Stop buying up our foreclosed homes and public housing, stop all your unjust evictions and make your rents affordable. I support this important struggle and will not let up until you meet the tenants’ demands. Homes are NOT a commodity!”⁴⁰

³⁹ Villela de Miranda et al 2019.

⁴⁰ McShane 2015.



On June 14, 2019, the state of New York passed a comprehensive rent control law which makes it the second state this year, after Oregon, to enact statewide rent control.

Figure 9 (middle): New York becomes the second state in the US to pass state-wide rent control with improved protection for tenants. Source: <https://www.theadvocates.org/2019/08/new-york-becomes-next-state-to-pass-statewide-rent-control/>



#StopBlackstone
OUR HOMES ARE NOT A COMMODITY

Figure 10 (bottom): Tenant advocates come together in an international effort to spotlight Blackstone as a “vulture fund” and mass evictor. Source: <http://www.tenants-together.org/updates/blackstoneinvitation-homes-tenants-fight-back>

Figure 11: The United Nations also singling out Blackstone for contributing to the global housing crisis. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/mar/26/blackstone-group-accused-global-housing-crisis-un>

UN accuses Blackstone Group of contributing to global housing crisis

World's largest corporate residential landlords called out for their practices of inflating rents and 'aggressive evictions'



▲ Stephen Schwarzman, CEO and co-founder of Blackstone, was sent a letter accusing the company of helping fuel a global housing crisis. Photograph: Gonzalo Fuentes/Reuters

This message came from the ground-up; grassroots activists researching evictions, affordable housing shortages, and the foreclosure crisis in their respective cities came together to issue this cry. Above all these groups attacked one practice: speculation. Speculation drove the financialization of their homes, with the promise of immediate and large returns for “predatory-equity investors.”⁴¹ The collective protests and voices of international activists came to a head in a UN report accusing Blackstone for feeding into the global housing crisis.

“Landlords have become faceless corporations wreaking havoc with tenants’ right to security and contributing to the global housing crisis... We remind all states that while gold is a commodity, housing is not, it’s a human right.”

⁴¹ ANHD 2009.

⁴² Butler and Rushe 2019.

- Leilani Farha (UN rapporteur)⁴²

The victory of naming the institutions and the processes they engaged in to profit from people losing their homes, is one of the successes of housing justice scholars. The other has been in the passing of regulatory policies, like state-wide rent control passed in New York. New policies offer tenants enhanced protections against predatory equity investors and their harassment tactics to evict tenants. For example, New York state has removed “vacancy decontrol” which grants landlords opportunities to raise rents in rent-controlled buildings once they’ve been vacated by their current tenant. That is no longer possible under the new regulations, keeping rental units affordable long-term.

How can you identify if speculation is happening in your city? And what can you do to prevent its harmful outcomes on tenants?

One of the easiest ways to find out if speculation is happening in your neighborhood is to track real estate listings. Is the listing price of a building more than the actual possible income that building can provide with current rent rates? Oftentimes, a building advertisement will include “possible” rents—do these seem much higher than tenants are currently paying? If yes, then more than likely the listing price is “speculating” that the new owner can and will evict current tenants for a higher building income. If this is the case, tenant organizing can help a building come out in front of a potential buyer and let them know that these tenants are here to stay.

Another tool is county assessor data, which often includes information on the owner of a building or lot, as well as recent dates of sale. If a building was

recently sold to an LLC, you can track the LLC's registered mailing address using <https://www.corporationwiki.com/> and see if the LLC rolls up to a broader institutional investor (i.e., a real estate speculator).

Speculation also tends to follow announcements of public infrastructure projects, PPPs, or renewal projects. If a new stadium or train is coming to town, check your local press outlets for information on public partners on the project. If a major university is expanding or building a new campus, ask a real estate broker which buildings or parcels of land are being targeted. Follow where new green infrastructure is being installed; for example, bike lanes, or the conversion of industrial lands or waterfronts to parks, can all show you where government is directing investment. Knock on doors in the area to build tenant power and unity, so that when speculators try to buy them out, tenants know their rights and refuse to be displaced. ■

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Counter-Mapping: Dismantling Dominant Narratives

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“Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both.”

– bell hooks

Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which counter mapping can be used as a methodology for advancing housing justice. Historically, mapping has been used to count people and allocate resources. As we will discuss below, such tactics often function as a means of control and a form of extraction. Counter-mapping provides an opportunity for researchers and community activists to dismantle dominant narratives, reclaim territory, and build power. This chapter defines counter-mapping as a methodology, explores the theory and principles behind it, and presents three case studies showing the use of the methodology to study an issue and organize around it.

Defining Counter-Mapping

Mapping, as a dominant form of discourse, provides an official rendering of the world. Maps both produce and represent meaning; they both create ways of seeing and knowing space while also containing a multitude of signs and symbols that themselves conduct and generate pathways of power. Maps draw from an empiricist tradition of scientific objectivity, a way of knowing that professes to be isolated from the cultural, political, and economic conditions surrounding knowledge production. Increasingly mediated through the technology of GIS (geographic information systems), mapping traditionally claims to represent the world objectively, a form of a “truth claim.”¹

Counter-mapping rejects the supposedly depoliticized and position-less claims of mapping. It argues that mapping actually advances a deeply politicized agenda by leaving out mechanisms of extractive colonialism, class warfare, racism, sexism, resistance, and other forms of struggle that structure the world.² When rendering these generative mechanisms obscure or invisible, mapping reproduces injustice by representing our world as natural or inevitable. In practice, counter-mapping aims to not simply utilize the technology of mapping in a radical manner, but instead to flip the very meaning of spatial data on its head by refusing, at times, to represent data through visibility.³ It begins from the knowledge of those most marginalized by the aggregating power of the traditional map, working across domains of scholarship and activism to purposefully create spatial representations that aim to liberate rather than count and allocate.

Theory and Principles of Counter-Mapping

Rather than aiming for some ostensibly objective, sealed off stance, counter-mapping draws on the intersections between critical theories such as post-colonial urban interrogations, the feminist tradition, and critical race and ethnic studies to direct our attention toward particular realities that dominant accounts misidentify or leave unnamed.⁴ Arguing that all knowledge is partial, the theories that underpin counter-mapping prioritize knowledge situated at the margins to make visible the erased histories and contemporary processes of violence, oppression and resistance that produce and reproduce the world.⁵ At the same time, these theories encourage knowledge production that interrogates macro-level sources of injustice such as colonial projects, transnational

1 Wilson 2017.

2 Bernt 2016; Kaiwar 2014; McElroy and Werth 2019.

3 Simpson 2014.

4 See, for example, Roy 2017b, Harding 2014, Cacho 2012, Chakravartty and da Silva 2012, and Roy 2018.

5 Haraway 1988; Harding 2005; Roberts 2018; Brickell et al., 2017.

flows of capital, and obscure increasingly pervasive mechanisms of financialization that play out in local settings.⁶ Discourse around the idea of “seeing from the South,” for instance, encourages us not only to re-orient the vantage points from which we theorize, but to reconceptualize “the South” as a marginalized position within global relationships of coloniality, rather than exclusively as a spatial location.⁷

Consistent with feminist and indigenous approaches to inquiry, counter-mapping calls for mapping that is often done by, or in partnership with, marginalized communities.⁸ Theoretical and empirical constructs embraced by counter-mapping support the efforts of marginalized groups to assert visibility, name injustice, and make claims. For instance, concepts like “racial capitalism” and “racial banishment” account for how dynamics such as racial exploitation, violence, and forced disappearance have shaped particular localities, disrupting whitewashed accounts of urban landscapes and laying the groundwork for reclamation.⁹ In this framework, homeless shelters, which in the dominant lexicon, are mapped as “services” and “resources,” may be reconstructed as “zones of ambiguity” where staff wield discretionary power to make rules, exact discipline, and control movement, and where residents lack due process in the face of abuse and neglect.¹⁰ In such spaces, claims to a cot or mat, and other human and civil rights, are tenuous at best. And when law enforcement officers force people living outdoors into shelters by threat of citation and jail time, shelters can be reformulated as “spaces of banishment” where people are rounded up, removed from society, and rendered invisible. The technology of mapping, especially prevalent through the “point-in-time” count, in which US cities attempt to accurately quantify homelessness in a race for federal dollars and subsidies, contributes directly to this situation of deprivation. Counter-mapping, in such extreme examples of marginalization such as homelessness, forces activists and scholars alike to ask why we race for numbers to legitimize homelessness, and instead to think about how we might instead create a kind of deliberate “innocence” that refuses counts in favor of structural socio-spatial shifts.¹¹ For example, the activist group Picture the Homeless in New York City employed counter-mapping to count not the number of homeless people outside on a given night, but the number of vacant properties being warehoused for speculation by both private developers and the city itself.¹²

Methods like participatory action research, which requires participation and reflection during the research process, help counter-mapping flip the empiricist script by reconstituting “research subjects” to be worked on, as “producers of knowledge” that researchers work with and for in a spirit of co-ownership.¹³ Working together with communities, participatory action research deconstructs dominant ideologies, names underlying causes, holds perpetrators accountable, and advances new models of justice.¹⁴ Researchers pay attention to power dynamics and diverse subjectivities and strive for participation that enables the expression of all voices.¹⁵ As described by Andrew Ross, a Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis and social activist, militant research goes a step further by urging researchers to “play a role in actions and share the goals, strategies and experience of their comrades because of their own committed beliefs and not simply because this conduct is an expedient way to get their data.”¹⁶ By calling on the researcher to participate in the movements they are studying with conviction, militant research helps ensure that the outcomes of mapping serve the interests and goals of the activist group or other community with which the researcher works. Counter-mapping builds collective power by making oppression visible, centering the agency, interests, and experiences of marginalized groups, and working in collaboration with community members throughout the research process and in social movements.

6 de Miranda et al., 2019.

7 Watson 2009; Roy 2011; Roy 2017a; Roy 2018.

8 Graziani and Shi (forthcoming); Tallbear 2014.

9 Robinson 1983; Roy 2018.

10 Garrow and Devanthery 2019.

11 For more on counting and homelessness, see Marquardt 2016 and Willse 2015.

12 Picture the Homeless 2011.

13 Whyte 1990.

14 See, for example, Askins and Pain 2011.

15 Cahill 2007.

16 Ross 2013: 8.

Limitations of Counter-Mapping

As a field, counter-mapping is explicit about the limitations of any project that attempts to render reality given the fast-paced nature of certain forms of violence, exploitation, and resistance, the diversity of their expressions across localities, and the obscure nature of global forms of extraction. For instance, counter-mapping cannot always stay up to date with changing realities. Furthermore, the counter-mapping process may intentionally exclude certain aspects of reality to prevent maps from becoming tools of surveillance and persecution by the state.¹⁷ For example, squatters or people living in homeless encampments, places that Oren Yiftachel describes as “gray spaces” existing between legitimacy and illegitimacy, tolerance and intolerance, may at once claim the right to live somewhere and wish to remain invisible in response to the constant but indeterminant threat of state violence.¹⁸ When used sensitively as a methodology, counter-mapping must respect the wishes of the people and communities at the margins to remain unmapped. It is also the case that certain forms of data that could be useful are legally unavailable. Eviction records, police disciplinary records, records pertaining to children, and certain medical records may be sealed, for example. Other public records may be available only in heavily redacted form.

Case Studies

This section provides case studies that show different ways in which counter-mapping has been used by researchers and community advocates to dismantle dominant narratives in their communities and build power. The case studies showcase different uses of the methodology, including highlighting redlining in Louisville, KY organizing against the privatization of public land in Santa Ana, CA and understanding land use patterns through community mapping in Lahore, Pakistan.

Redlining Louisville

Growing up in Appalachia, Joshua Poe was impacted by the long, harmful, and paternalistic narrative that poor people didn't know how to supervise themselves, and that they were primarily harmed by their own choices, socialization, and lack of knowledge. Poe has dedicated his professional career to countering this narrative through direct action, research, geography, and data visualization to expose systemic oppression as a root cause of problems in poor communities. As a graduate student at the University of Louisville's School of Urban and Public Affairs in 2008, Poe began researching and exposing the colonial and white supremacist foundations of the planning profession and the role of planning in racial banishment in Louisville. While this work put him in an oppositional position with much of the faculty, Poe found support for his work in fellow militant researcher, Dr. J. Blaine Hudson. Hudson was the Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Louisville and once led an insurgent occupation of the campus in 1969, protesting the University's racist policies and lack of a Black Studies program.

Emboldened by Hudson's support and encouragement, Poe unearthed Louisville's 1938 redlining maps from the National Cartographic Archives in Washington D.C. and published the storymap: “Redlining Louisville: Racial Capitalism and Real Estate” as seen in Figure 1 and 2. This project was recognized by Harvard's Kennedy School of Government in its effort to recognize best-in-class data visualizations. Upon release of the project, Poe began working with Black Lives Matter Louisville to conduct a series of public organizing workshops to

¹⁷ See, for example, Rolnik 2019.

¹⁸ Yiftachel 2009.

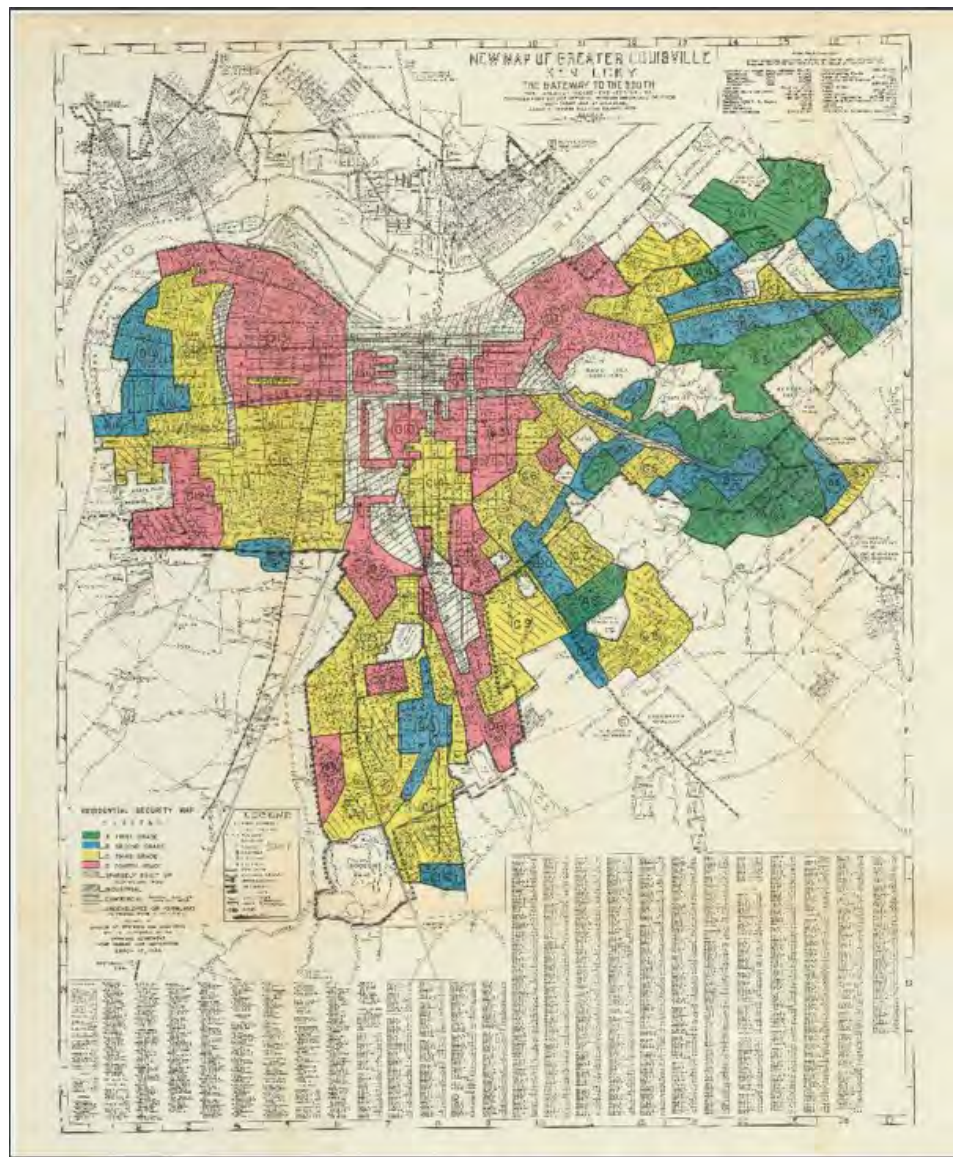


Figure 1 (top): A historic map showing the redlined area in Louisville.

Figure 2 (bottom): A screenshot of the Redlining Louisville Storymap.

Redlining Louisville: Racism, Capitalism, and Real Estate

Home About Timeline View Neighborhoods Compare Segregation Compare Income Compare Poverty Compare Race

Redlining refers to the practice of denying loans in certain neighborhoods because of race or socioeconomic characteristics rather than physical, design, or structural characteristics.

Click on the survey areas to open the area-wide assessments from 1937.

The Home Owner's Loan Corporation (HOLC) was created in 1933 to aid the housing market during the Great Depression. The HOLC created residential securities maps, better known as "redlining maps," to guide investment in US cities. These maps assigned grades 'A' through 'D' to neighborhoods to indicate their desirability for investment. Black, immigrant, and low-income neighborhoods were often given grades of 'C' or 'D', eliminating their access to mortgage insurance or credit for decades. Although the HOLC was discontinued in 1951, the impact of disinvestment resulting from redlining is still evident in most US cities today.

This storymap illustrates and allows you to investigate some of the ways redlining and the HOLC have affected housing development, disinvestment, and lending patterns in Louisville, KY since the 1930s.

This work was an independent research project. My hope is that this information will be used by the community to dismantle discriminatory systems of power, pursue economic and policy reparations through a process of truth and reconciliation for the descendants of U.S. slaves, and have a meaningful impact in restructuring our society through public

hold local government accountable and push for more equitable housing policies.

This project has been incorporated in the movement work of BLML to build power around divesting funding from the Louisville Metro Police Department and reinvesting in housing infrastructure for the poor. BLML uses the work to expose unearned white wealth and privilege as part of their Reparations Roundtable initiative in advancing direct-giving and mutual aid projects, such as the Emergency Housing Needs Fund, the Louisville Community Bail Fund, and the Black and Brown Femmes Needing Support Fund.

The University of Louisville's Pan African Studies Program, which began in response to Hudson's 1969 protest, the Redlining Louisville project, and the housing justice work of BLML, are all connected as part of a rich and radical tradition in Kentucky of using organizing, research, and direct action to challenge power.

Community Land in Community Hands: The Fight to Reclaim Santa Ana's Public Land

At the heart of Orange County, Santa Ana is the 4th densest city in the country with a population of 334,136 residents. The city is a tenant majority city, with 65% of tenants experiencing rent burdens. It is also largely a Latinx immigrant community (80%) with a history of disinvestment, and concentrated poverty in neighborhoods.¹⁹ In some neighborhoods, 50% of the households earn incomes below \$25,000 annually.²⁰ Santa Ana has a dire need for affordable housing and open space. Over the years, the community has organized to combat the private and public drivers of gentrification pitched as "revitalization" to protect the right of families to remain and thrive in their homes.

In 2016, community groups became aware of the city's plan to sell 98 parcels of public land to private interests. This alarmed advocates who for years had been calling on the city to build new parks and facilitate the construction of affordable housing. The *Community Lands in Community Hands* coalition, composed of local organizations and residents, formed to stop the city from privatizing public land, setting off a deeper investigation into all publicly owned land, and starting a public conversation about valuable public assets. Upon conducting public records requests, the coalition sought out partners to map public parcels, as shown in figure 3 and 4. The coalition garnered the support throughout different phases of the campaign from in-house staff at Latino Health Access, Kennedy Commission, and Orange County Communities Organized for Responsible Development. Additionally, research scholars with roots in Santa Ana provided support, including Dr. Carolina Sarmiento, Dr. Revel Sims, Dr. Erualdo Gonzalez, and Omar de La Riva along with students from the University of California at Irvine.²¹ Maps included the size, zoning designation, and funding source of each parcel, overlaid with quality of life indicators, such as income, rent burden, and access to open space. The maps were also used by the coalition for strategizing and identifying locations for community outreach and education. The intent was to counter the City's plan with one that made visible community identified needs and solutions.

The coalition used counter-mapping as a methodology to challenge the City's dominant narrative of using land for profit in the name of public interest while exposing the explicit dismissal of community needs voiced by residents. The maps made information public and proposed that "public" land requires community ownership. This means the decision-making process about its use must include direct community participation and the use must result in a direct

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau 2010.

²⁰ Sarmiento and Sims 2016.

²¹ Scholars who have supported grassroots mapping efforts include Santa Ana natives Dr. Erualdo González, CSUF Chicano Studies, Dr. Carolina Sarmiento, University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Human Ecology, Dr. Revel Sims, University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Planning and Landscaping Architecture, Omar de la Riva, a Harvard Graduate School of Design alumnus, and the UCI Department of Urban Planning and Public Policy, in particular Dr. Asiya Natekal and her undergraduate GIS class students.

Figure 3 (left): A map showing available public land in Santa Ana, including 98 released for sale by the City.

Figure 4 (right): A map showing priority uses identified by the community for public land through the Community Land in Community Hands campaign.

benefit to residents in the long run, rather than a one-time profit. Counter-mapping was also a power-building strategy. Community residents inserted themselves in the public conversation they were initially excluded from, leading their own land use planning process instead.

Faced with community pressure, city officials voted to delay selling public land without exploring the alternatives presented by the coalition. Community residents, organizations, and city officials formed a working group to assess vacant land and the mechanisms by which to retain and develop it. This led to the establishment of the THRIVE Santa Ana Community Land Trust, and negotiations began to transfer one parcel to meet community needs. With the support of two researchers with Santa Ana roots, THRIVE engaged the neighborhood in a community-driven participatory planning process to inform the development of the parcel.²²

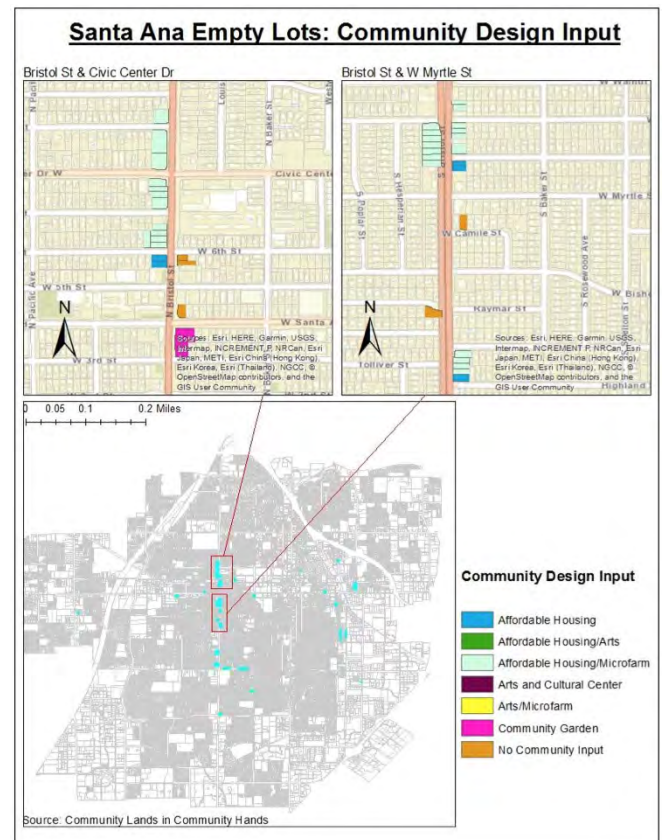
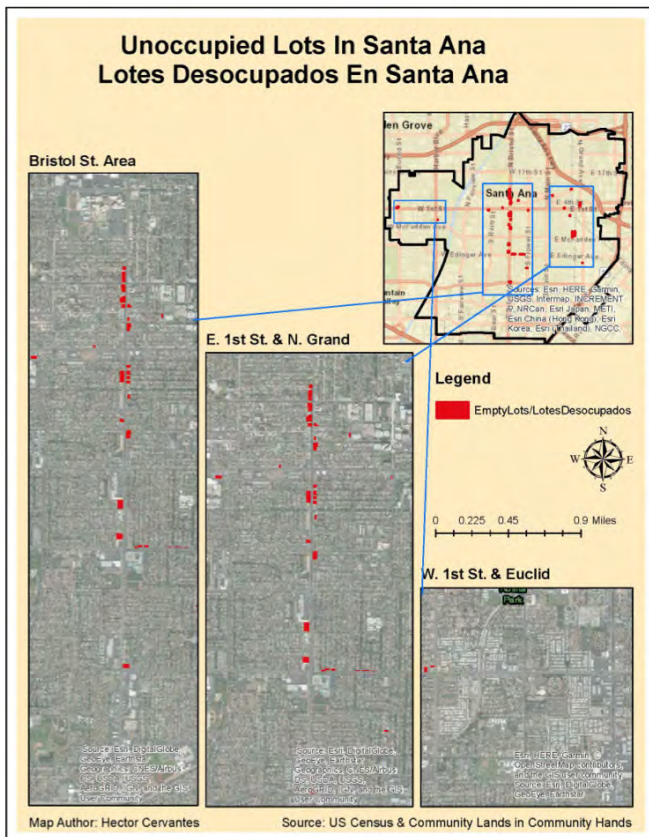
Counter Land Use Mapping in the Global South

The Gandhi Square neighborhood is located in the Gawalmandi area in Lahore, Pakistan. The neighborhood was largely developed in the 1930s around a central square. While the inner part of the neighborhood is largely made up of residential row houses with back alleys, the external part along major streets is made up of row houses with commercial retail space on the ground floor, as seen in Figures 5 and 6. With the creation of Pakistan and India in 1947, the Hindu and Sikh residents were banished, and the state settled Muslim migrants from India in this neighborhood. Over time, the commercial land use and housing density increased dramatically.²³

In 2011, Awais Azhar created a land use map of the neighborhood while studying at the National College of Arts. At the time, Lahore had no zoning in the older

22 Sarmiento and González 2018.

23 Azhar 2012.



parts of the city, so there was no record of the land use in the neighborhood. Similarly, there were no readily available digital maps of the street grid and land parcels. By using satellite imagery and fieldwork, Azhar created a base map that identified property boundaries and massing. He then developed a land use map of the neighborhood through interviews with community members and visual observation.²⁴

Azhar developed the land use map by showing residents the base map and asking them to identify the use, including differentiating areas occupied by different nuclear families within one structure. The residents' conception of land use did not completely correspond to notions of functional zoning, but rather was relational in nature. Furthermore, they did not define land use in broad categories such as commercial or industrial; rather, they focused on individual uses such as bakery or general store. Azhar mapped uses based on the community's understanding of their neighborhood rather than imposing existing standards.

The methodology of counter-mapping here produced a rich narrative of land use in the neighborhood and shaped research on different conceptions of land use in the country. Unlike historical land use maps, these ones were not developed in order to control uses through zoning but rather to develop a deeper understanding of how uses had stemmed organically from restructuring space over time. This bottom up approach provided a different conception of land use through community input in the Global South and allowed the researcher to present a different view of the community that did not demonize its internal planning structures as chaotic. This research expanded local advocacy efforts within academia to develop a pedagogy rooted in community planning in Pakistan and the Global South.

Figure 5 (left): A view of a town house in Gandhi Square with warehousing space on the ground floor.

Figure 6 (right): A view from the Square towards a side street, showing a mosque next to dense housing.



²⁴ *Ibid.*

Figure 7: Community Lands in Community Hands coalition at a public vacant lot after a community teach-in about the THRIVE Santa Ana Community Land Trust and visioning to reclaim the land for community benefit.

Conclusion

Counter-mapping can be critical to building new, insurgent narratives in communities around the world. As highlighted by the case studies in the previous section, it can play a key role in highlighting the impacts of historical injustices and advocating for reparations, building community power and promoting policy changes, and supporting an inclusive planning pedagogy in the Global South. Whether used for advocacy, organizing, or pedagogy, these examples show that in counter-mapping the traditional means of knowledge production and research goals are abdicated. As a methodology, it allows the “research subjects” to become the “producers of knowledge,” and highlights the relationship between power and knowledge.

Within the context of unequal cities, counter-mapping allows community activists and academics to mount a resistance to dominant narratives and build community power. However, similar to when using any other methodology, it is important to understand the limitations of counter-mapping, including the lack of available data, issues with updating data regularly, and the potential misuse of maps for enacting control. Nevertheless, if used with a deeper understanding of the methodology, it can make resistance visible, build power and strengthen community organization efforts. Combined with other methodologies, counter-mapping can help movements for housing justice build community power and further their goals to fight against housing precarity, displacement, and dispossession. ■



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Earl J. Edwards is currently a doctoral candidate at the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies and a researcher at the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools, the UCLA Black Male Institute, and the USC Homeless Research Policy Institute. His research interests include the impact of structural racism and implicit bias on American public institutions that serve youth impacted by homelessness, specifically public school districts and municipality’s homeless service delivery systems. In addition to his scholarship, Earl also leads race and equity workshops with youth service providers and municipalities across the country.

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Terra is a researcher and organizer based in Los Angeles, CA. Her work focuses on the dispossession and resistance of tenants in California cities and how policing and state violence are used to control people’s relationship to space. She founded and co-directs the Los Angeles chapter of the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project. She is on the steering committee of the Housing Justice in Unequal Cities Network and co-taught the Summer Institute on Methodologies for Housing Justice.

Madeleine Hamlin, *Syracuse University*

Madeleine Hamlin is a PhD student in the Department of Geography at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, where she also received her Master’s in Public Administration. Between her master’s and doctoral programs, she held a policy fellowship in Chicago, working on a variety of projects in the areas of public housing, police accountability, and justice reform. Her academic work examines how urban plans and policies shape city spaces and city life.

Meg Healy, *NOlympics, Rio On Watch*

Meg Healy is an urban planner and NOlympics organizer based in Los Angeles. She spent three years as a movement-based researcher and reporter in Rio de Janeiro investigating evictions and housing policy agendas before relocating to Los Angeles. Meg earned her Master’s in Urban and Regional Planning at UCLA and her Bachelor’s degree in Geography and Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Eliot Hetterly, *Community League of the Heights (CLOTH)*

Eliot Hetterly (pronouns: they/they) is an urban planner and housing justice advocate based in Brooklyn, NY. They currently work as a Project Manager for West End Residences, a supportive housing agency in Manhattan that focuses on the needs of homeless LGBTQ youth. They have a Master’s degree in Urban

Planning from Hunter College at the City University of New York and a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from the University of Delaware.

Lauren Ilano, *UCLA, Stop LAPD Spying, BAYAN USA*

Lauren Ilano is a PhD candidate in the Higher Education and Organizational Change program at the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. Her research is broadly concerned with how we measure the social and economic impact of university growth and expansion, especially within urban communities of color. Her mixed-methods dissertation combines community counterstories with geospatial statistical analyses of housing, employment, and crime data to explore the multifaceted impact of university expansion on campus-adjacent urban communities of color in Los Angeles and Baltimore. She holds an MA in Higher Education and Organizational Change from UCLA and a BA in Psychology and Gender Studies from UC Davis.

Bryan Jacobs, *Vancouver Tenants Union, Downtown East Side SRO Collaborative*

Bryan Jacobs is a Tenant Organizer and Community Researcher in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, Canada. He is also one of the founding members of the Vancouver Tenant Union (VTU) Data Tools Working Group and sits on the VTU Steering Committee. It is his passion to find the ways that research and data analysis can compliment community organizing and grow solidarity across movements. His family traces its origins to Akwesasne territory in southern Ontario and he explores 2spirit ways of knowing and spirituality with elders from Tsleil-Waututh nation.

Fernanda Jahn-Verri, *UCLA*

Fernanda Jahn-Verri is currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she is exploring the role of the judiciary in practices of dispossession in Brazil. Her research interests center on housing precarity, displacement, financialization, and housing rights movements. Prior to UCLA, she completed her MA in urban and regional planning at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Porto Alegre, where she is originally from and a city that she misses.

Danielle Kerrigan, *McGill University*

Danielle Kerrigan is a PhD student at McGill University working with the Urban Politics and Governance research group (UPGo). Her work so far has focused on the impact of short-term rentals on housing markets and the changing dynamics of landlord-tenant relations. She is committed to empowering communities to defend their right to housing and aiding them in their fight against the continuing commodification of their homes.

Hunter King, *Causa Justa :: Just Cause*

Hunter King is the Communications and Development Coordinator at Causa Justa :: Just Cause, a membership-based organization building grassroots power in San Francisco and Oakland by linking fights against racialized displacement to larger struggles for racial justice and immigrant rights. Their work strives to resource and promote a vision that frames the presence, needs, and leadership of working-class Black and Latinx communities as a critical and vibrant part of the Bay Area's future. Passionate about insurgent and emergent spaces for transformative justice and community self-determination, Hunter is dedicated

to combating the forces that attempt to prevent communities from coming together to organize collectively for liberation.

Tolu Lanrewaju-Kadri, *Rutgers University – Newark, University of Witwatersrand*

Tolu Lanrewaju-Kadri is a PhD candidate in Global Urban Studies at Rutgers University – Newark. Her research interests are housed within urban sociology and legal geography, focusing on the spatiality of the legal process of displacement and the consequential city-making. In her research on refugees facing evictions in Cape Town, she uses mapping and ethnographic methods to make visible the effects of the displacement and dispossession of vulnerable urbanites in South Africa, a country that affords residents a right to housing.

Lucas Lessa, *Taramela Assessoria Técnica em Arquitetura e Urbanismo and LEHAB - Universidade Federal do Ceará*

Lucas Lessa is an architect and urban planner from Fortaleza, Brazil. He is the co-founder and partner of the NGO Taramela Assessoria Técnica, a researcher in the Laboratory of Studies in Housing (LEHAB) of the Universidade Federal do Ceará, and a member of the network for the right to housing and to the city, Fortaleza's Frente de Luta por Moradia Digna. Lucas' work experience and research interests focus on urban planning, favelas, social housing, participatory projects, and counter planning.

Margaretta Lin, *Just Cities and Dellums Institute for Social Justice*

Margaretta Lin has been a longtime leader in advancing racial and social justice innovations in urban planning, public policy, education, community development, and law. Margaretta is currently the Managing Director of Just Cities, a platform for advancing restorative justice in planning and policy, and founding Director of the Dellums Institute for Social Justice. She has served as a local government official, civil rights and community lawyer, and founding director of multiple social change institutions.

Sofia Lopez, *Action Center on Race and the Economy (ACRE)*

Sofia is based in San Antonio, Texas, and works as a researcher at the Action Center on Race and the Economy, where she does strategic corporate research in support of organizing campaigns across the country. Through her research, Sofia works to expose how the financial sector extracts profit from communities of color through housing. Sofia has a background in urban planning.

Albert Lowe, *Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), Chinese Historical Society – Southern California*

For the last twenty years, Albert Lowe has worked on many campaigns in multiple classifications, primarily in the areas of organized labor, housing or community archives. Lowe currently works in the Strategic Research and Analytics Department at United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and previously been Campaign Director at Alliance for Community Transit – Los Angeles (ACT-LA) and Associate Director at Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE). Lowe has an advanced degree in Ethnic Studies from University of California, San Diego, a MLIS from UCLA and also taught classes in Communications and Research Methods at UCLA, Antioch University, and Pacific Oaks.

Hayk Makhmuryan, *Skid Row Design Collective, Skid Row Neighborhood Council Formation Committee, Skid Row Community Improvement Coalition, Glendale Tenants Union*

Hayk Makhmuryan was born and grew up in Yerevan, Armenia, immigrating to United States in 1999. He has worked in LA's Skid Row neighborhood since 2008, and advocates for equitable access to arts as a fundamental human right. Hayk coordinates Studio 526 community arts space, is on LA County's Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative's advisory committee, and is also involved in tenants' rights and anti-gentrification work regionally in Glendale and Los Angeles.

Hilary Malson, *UCLA, Los Angeles Center for Community Law and Action (LACCLA)*

Hilary Malson is an urban planning and geography scholar studying planning theory, race, migration, diaspora, housing justice, and community building. At present, she is a PhD Student in Urban Planning at UCLA and a Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellow, and her current research examines how Black geographies of dispersal and displacement shape space in exurban Los Angeles. In addition to working within the academy, she is committed to developing public scholarship and regularly collaborates with museums, movement-based organizers, and digital outlets.

Nancy Mejía, *THRIVE Santa Ana, Latino Health Access*

As the Director of Community Engagement and Advocacy at Latino Health Access, Nancy manages and provides strategic direction to civic engagement, leadership development, and policy efforts working towards health equity and building power among immigrant, underrepresented communities in Orange County. She has co-led campaigns alongside promotores to improve access to affordable and dignified housing, open space, community-driven development, and safe active transportation. Nancy is actively involved in Santa Ana Building Healthy Communities and is a founding member of the THRIVE Santa Ana Community Land Trust and Santa Ana Active Streets Coalition.

Kimberly Miranda, *UCLA, Los Angeles Center for Community Law and Action (LACCLA), Eastside Local Los Angeles Tenants Union*

Kimberly Miranda is a first generation Xicana from East Los Angeles. She is currently a Ford Foundation predoctoral fellow and a PhD student in Cesar E. Chavez Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at UCLA. Her research interests are, but not limited to, housing justice activism, gentrification, racial and feminist geographies, urban sociology, and WOC feminism.

Joel Montano, *UCLA*

Joel Montano is a UCLA Masters in Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) student whose research advocates for universal rent control, tenant right-to-counsel, and anti-tenant harassment enforcement measures. He is a recipient of UCLA's Luskin Leadership Internship Awards Program, working with Liberty Hill Foundation to support their Agenda for a Just Future Los Angeles Housing Justice campaign. He currently serves as the Community Action Co-Chair for UCLA's Planners of Color for Social Equity. Prior to his arrival to the MURP program, Joel worked as the Affordable Housing Tenant Outreach Organizer for eight and a half years with the Coalition for Economic Survival—a non-profit tenant's rights organization based in Los Angeles.

Deyanira Nevarez Martinez, *University of California – Irvine*

Deyanira Nevárez Martínez, MS, MSGIST, (nevarezd@uci.edu) is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Urban Planning and Public Policy at the University of California, Irvine. Her research focuses on the role of the state in the creation of informal settlements, local governance and enforcement, and urban and rural informality.

Lydia Nicholson, *UCLA, L.A. Tenants Union, Street Watch LA*

Lydia Nicholson is a housing activist and law student based out of Los Angeles. They currently organize with the LA Tenants Union and the National Lawyers Guild. In law school, they concentrate on Public Interest Law and Policy and Critical Race Studies. They are dedicated to fighting vulture landlords and the capitalist system that enables them to prey on tenants.

Liliana Ordóñez, *Universidad de los Andes, Housing Ministry of Colombia*

I am a Colombian economist and human geographer. Currently, I am working as senior economist in the urban land titling program at the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory of Colombia. I am convinced people with low financial resources in Colombia need and deserve social housing policies aimed to respond to their necessities.

Joshua Poe, *Black Lives Matter Louisville – Housing Team*

Joshua Poe is a scholar-activist, city planner, community organizer, and geographer. In 2017 he authored and published the interactive storymap, *Redlining Louisville: Racial Capitalism and Real Estate*, which received recognition from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government in its effort to recognize best-in-class data visualizations. He is the co-founder and Principal Investigator with the Root Cause Research Center in Louisville, KY, where he focuses on movement-based research.

Isuri Ramos, *The Kennedy Commission*

Isuri Sadadhy Ramos is the daughter of Mexican immigrants from Acapulco and Puebla, and was raised in Santa Ana, CA. She earned a BA in International Studies – Political Science and Urban Studies Planning (USP) at the University of California, San Diego; through her USP classes, Isuri better understood her lived experiences and how they were impacted by poor urban planning choices, practices, and systems that marginalize and continue to gentrify and displace communities. Isuri returned to Santa Ana and began working for The Kennedy Commission as a Community Organizer and now as a Policy Analyst, where she continues to work with residents and community partners in Santa Ana to do resident organizing, tenant rights work, outreach, education, and policy advocacy to improve the quality of life for residents with limited resources.

Leon Rosa Reichle, *Center for Urban Research on Austerity at Leicester University*

Leon Rosa is a critical housing scholar doing a PhD on tenants' relations in the restructuring, politically polarized Leipzig (East Germany) at the Centre for Urban Research on Austerity (CURA) in Leicester (UK). With a background in political sociology, Leon's academic interest in socio-spatial questions is paralleled by practical commitment to challenging the injustices of hegemonic neoliberal austerity urbanism. Leon has been involved in a variety of feminist, urban and housing struggles, such as the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, the Womens'

Strike Assembly and initiatives for housing justice in France, Moldova, and Germany.

Raquel Rolnik, *University of São Paulo / São Paulo Evictions Observatory*

Raquel Rolnik is a professor, architect and urban planner, with over 35 years of scholarship, activism and practical experience in planning, urban land policy and housing issues. Based in São Paulo, she is a professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo and currently the head of Design and Planning Department. In her career, she has held various government positions including Director of the Planning Department of the City of São Paulo (1989-1992) and National Secretary for Urban Programs of the Brazilian Ministry of Cities (2003-2007), as well as NGO activities, such as Urban Policy Coordinator of the Polis Institute (1997-2002). From May 2008, Ms. Raquel Rolnik was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council as UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing for a six years mandate, ending June 2014.

In 2019, she organized a Research Action Lab (LabCidade), based in FAUUSP, where an Observatory of Evictions is one of the main projects. The project includes a permanent cartography of evictions which are taking place in metropolitan São Paulo as well as the building of a network of organizations around both making visible those processes, advocating for compliance with the right to adequate housing and imagining alternative planning and projects (observatorioderemocoos.org). She is author of several books, including *Urban Warfare: Housing and Cities in the Age of Finance* (Verso 2018) and *A Cidade e a Lei* (studio Nobel), and *São Paulo Historia Conflito e Territorio* (Tres Estrelas) among others.

Ananya Roy, *UCLA*

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 Institute on Inequality and Democracy at UCLA, which promotes research and scholarship concerned with displacement and dispossession in Los Angeles and seeks to build power to make social change. Previously she was on the faculty at the University of California, Berkeley, where she received her Master's in City Planning (1994) and Ph.D. in Urban Planning (1999).

Ananya's research and scholarship has a determined focus on poverty and inequality and lies in four domains: how the urban poor in cities from Kolkata to Chicago face and fight eviction, foreclosure, and displacement; how global financialization, working in varied realms from microfinance to real-estate speculation, creates new markets in debt and risk; how the efforts to manage and govern the problem of poverty reveal the contradictions and limits of liberal democracy; how economic prosperity and aspiration in the global South is creating new potentialities for programs of human development and social welfare.

Esther Sullivan, *University of Colorado – Denver*

Esther Sullivan's research focuses on poverty, spatial inequality, legal regulation, housing, and the built environment, with a special interest in both forced and voluntary residential mobility. Esther is the author of the 2018 book, *Manufactured Insecurity: Mobile Home Parks and Americans' Tenuous Right to Place*, a mixed-method geospatial and ethnographic study of the social, legal, and market forces that intersect to create housing insecurity for low-income residents in U.S. mobile home parks. Esther is currently conducting a National Science Foundation study of manufactured housing recovery following Hurricanes Michael and Harvey in Florida and the Gulf Coast.

Luis Trujillo, *University of California – Riverside, Comida No Bombas – Los Angeles, Northeast Los Angeles Alliance (NELAA)*

Luis Trujillo is a PhD candidate in the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Riverside. His work focuses on the racializing discourses that determine displacement and facilitate gentrification in low-income communities of color in Los Angeles, California. His dissertation is on the response by anti-displacement activist to challenge those discourses and preserve their places within the scope of past, present and future fights for justice.

Diane Wong, *New York University, Chinatown Art Brigade, CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities, Chinatown Tenants Union*

Diane Wong is an Assistant Professor and Faculty Fellow in the Gallatin School of Individualized Study at New York University where she teaches on Asian American politics, urban studies, cultural and media studies, and innovative pedagogies. As an educator, multimedia storyteller, and cultural organizer based in New York City, she works closely with CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities, Chinatown Art Brigade, Asian American Feminist Collective, and The W.O.W. Project.

Amy Young, *UCLA, Los Angeles Housing and Community Investment Department*

Amy Young is an Urban and Regional Planning Masters candidate at the University of California, Los Angeles, who studies affordable housing and homelessness in support of community-based solutions to housing stability. In the Bay Area, Amy worked with the Turner Center for Housing Innovation, at the University of California, Berkeley, as well as, with Hamilton Families, a regional non-profit addressing family homelessness. In Los Angeles, Amy works to develop affordable and permanent supportive housing on city-owned land, as a part of the City of Los Angeles' Housing and Community Investment Department. Amy holds a Bachelor's degree in Urban Studies from the University of California, Berkeley with highest honors.

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