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Cultivating Food Autonomy: The South Central Farm and Decentralized Gardening

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The South Central Farm and Decentralized Gardening

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by

Maritza Geronimo

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Cultivating Food Autonomy

The South Central Farm and Decentralized Gardening

by

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Master of Arts in Geography

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Juan C. Herrera, Chair

This thesis examines the ways Indigenous migrants in Los Angeles (LA) have created places of life through the formation of farms and decentralized gardens. The South Central Farm (SCF) was one of the earliest examples of food sovereignty in LA led by Indigenous migrants. I conduct a history of the life of the SCF from 1992 to 2006 and conceptualize food sovereignty for Indigenous migrants as rooted in practices of autonomy, care, and transmission of traditional knowledge. After the farm was demolished in 2006, I turn to the ways the spirit of the SCF lives on in the formation of decentralized gardens as a response to lack of food and land access. Repurposing empty lots, backyards and sidewalks for communal gardens, Indigenous migrants continue cultivating food communally. I draw on archival material, oral histories, and

contemporary interviews to argue that Indigenous migrant placemaking creates life-making, life-giving, and life-affirming places. Utilizing abolition geographies and placemaking as frameworks, I show how these places make life through the cultivation of food, give life back to the land through regenerative practices, and affirm the lives of Indigenous migrants who care for the land and each other. I suggest that at the center of these placemaking strategies is the struggle for fresh food, land to grow it, and autonomy.

The thesis of Maritza Geronimo is approved.

Judith A. Carney

Adam D. Moore

Juan C. Herrera, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> I have a deep sense that if we take care of the land, if we take the time to take care of the land, the land will take the time to take care of us. (Miguel Ramos)
>
> no nos den soil porque ya saben lo que vamos hacer [don't give us soil because you already know what we are gonna do]. (Laura Cortez)

Cultivating *autonomia* [autonomy] as Indigenous peoples in diaspora is grounded in relationships of care for community, land, seeds, and food. Autonomia is an idea and practice of caring for ourselves/our communities without having to depend on settler colonial systems, which for many of us starts with feeding ourselves. In the middle of the urban landscape of Los Angeles (LA) today multiple garden spaces are being cared for by Indigenous migrants, *Campesinos* [mixed-race farmers], and their descendent from Latin America. Indigenous communities from various geographies—Maya, Zapotec, Purépecha, Nahua, Mixtec, and more—come together to build relationships with the land and each other. As displaced Indigenous communities, seeds help keep stories, memories, knowledge. Seeds travel with migrants as they move through various geographies. Despite the lack of open land or space, Indigenous diasporic communities have found ways to cultivate seeds from their homelands to ensure they live on for the next generations. This forms part of a struggle for Indigenous food sovereignty in urban spaces.

Communities of color in urban spaces such as Los Angeles have long had to navigate inadequate food systems, infrastructure, and resources—living in what is commonly referred to as "food deserts." Yet Black, Latinx, and Indigenous food activists and geographers challenge terms such as food deserts, which overlook the systemic ways food and land access is spatialized in the city. Instead, critical food scholars have put forth concepts of "food apartheids" (White, 2018), which Reese (2019) notes is attentive to "the historical and ongoing significance of race at

the intersections of capitalist accumulation, dispossession, and residential segregation" (p. 7). With respect to African American experiences, she adds that the concept "requires an understanding of how geographic distribution of food is a reflection of anti-Blackness and oppression as much as it is about class and economic capital" (p. 7). This moves away from the implied neutrality of "food desert" by returning to the systemic ways food systems are made unequal.

In turn, proposals for alternative food systems are multiple. Some scholars and community organizations have proposed food access solutions such as implementing more grocery stores and state-led solutions (Short et al., 2007), while others argue for creating alternative food systems not reliant on large-scale agribusiness (Mihesuah & Hoover, 2019; Reese, 2019). This is what scholars and activists describe as food sovereignty. The struggle for food sovereignty aims to address the problem of inadequate food access by focusing on creating spaces of autonomy where the community builds a food system on their own terms. Food sovereignty struggles have largely focused on rural spaces and tribal communities. In this thesis, I center the struggles of Indigenous peoples in diaspora living in an urban setting like Los Angeles. I argue that food sovereignty for Indigenous migrants requires a spirit and practice of autonomy. Placemaking becomes one of the key strategies utilized to create autonomy to be able to cultivate land. Food autonomy is, then, possible in urban spaces—there is historical precedent for this in the city, which is currently being re-articulated through decentralized gardens.

Indigenous diasporic communities in LA have struggled for food sovereignty since they began arriving in the United States from Mexico and Central America in the late 1980s and early 1990s. One of the first articulations of Indigenous migrant food sovereignty took place at the South Central Farm. This farm not only created a space where food sovereignty was practiced

but also one that forged new relationships grounded in the struggle for land and life. The South Central Farm (SCF) was 14 acres of life amidst the warehouses that surround the eastern-most region of South Central. For food sovereignty organizers in Los Angeles and beyond, the SCF inspired people to create places of communal relationships with the land to build towards a more autonomous way of growing food. The story of the SCF is also one of "struggle," given that the community fought for it to exist in 1992 and continued to resist its eventual forced closure in 2006. The memory of the Farm brings with it the reminder that land is not guaranteed for Indigenous migrants and people of color—a realization that propels Indigenous food organizers post-SCF to innovate new strategies to grow food. After the demolition of the SCF many organizers and farmers continued creating food sovereignty projects in new places across and outside of Los Angeles. These food sovereignty projects include farms, community gardens, guerrillas gardening, and more recently decentralized gardens.

This thesis argues that Indigenous food sovereignty practices, rooted in decolonial politics of autonomy, care, and life, were instrumental to the making of the SCF. Despite the violent destruction of the farm in 2006 these politics continue to advance contemporary Indigenous urban food movements. This is evident in the way the struggle for food autonomy continues today in the form of *decentralized* gardens, which are the post-SCF gardening strategy highlighted in this thesis. Decentralized gardening is the process of growing food in multiple spaces including home back/front yards, sidewalks, and small spaces instead of the traditional community garden situated in one centralized location. The creation of a decentralized way of growing food for racialized and marginalized communities emerges as a spatial strategy that challenges lack of land access and notions of propertyhood based on individualism and whiteness (Bhandar, 2018), which are reified in a settler colonial city premised on racial

capitalism (De Lara, 2018; Nichols, 2020). The history of the SCF reveals that in a settler colonial city, it is indeed challenging for Indigenous migrant farmers, along with other marginalized populations, to secure holding onto large tracts of fixed and centralized farms outright. In this context, these groups advance decentralized practices of building relationships to land and in so doing create novel, adaptive, and mobile ways of cultivating food autonomy. The decentralization these groups employ is highly organized and politicized, amounting to an enormous amount of labor, care, and coordination to make work. Amidst the dispossession, environmental injustice, and violence found in many Los Angeles urban landscapes scarred by the ravishes of racism, I show how indigenous migrants build decentralized farms that center life and seek to abolish white settler colonial food systems.

I argue that the relationships Indigenous diasporic people build with their environment bring about life and affirm the life of the community. By highlighting these innovative, adaptive, and mobile practices, I seek to contribute to Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2017) call for an analysis of abolition geographies, and Nik Heynen and Meghan Ybarra's (2020) expansion of this concept to think of the ecological imperatives of abolition (see also Mei-Singh, 2020). Abolition geographies as described by Gilmore (2017) works towards the abolition of carceral and death driven geographies, in which from the destruction of such systems and worlds, emerges new life. Abolition geographies challenge the conditions of death and "slow violence" that communities of color navigate by creating other possibilities (Jones, 2019; Nixon, 2011). Gilmore (2017) states "Abolition is about presence, not absence. It is about building life-affirming institutions." For Gilmore, placemaking serves as a way to create these "life-affirming" conditions that are grounded in freedom and place. I add an important component of life—food—which I understand as central to the conversation on abolition in order to make discriminatory and racist

agribusiness and industrial agriculture obsolete. My analysis of the South Central Farm and contemporary food sovereignty struggles is therefore animated by the radical potentialities of placemaking to create the kind of worlds that affirm life rather than destroy it.

This thesis also contributes to scholarly understanding of placemaking by highlighting that an analysis of how human beings create place must account for life (as opposed to death), life-making, life-giving, and life-affirming practices. This triad allows for connections to be made between placemaking and food sovereignty struggles where life is made (producing food), given (regeneration of land/community), and affirmed (supporting the continuation of cultural practices) in gardening spaces. On the SCF and in contemporary decentralized gardens, moreover, the production and care of life is tied to placemaking strategies. By enacting food sovereignty, the farmers make life through the cultivation of food, give life to the soil/environment, and affirm the lives of the farmers who care for the land. Furthermore, I think of placemaking as grounded in an Indigenous understanding of relationships to land that are not based on property but relationality/responsibility (Coulthard, 2014; EZLN, 2016; LaDuke, 1999; Lyons, 2019; Simpson, 2017). I borrow from the concept of abolition ecologies, which underscores the importance of placemaking in relationship to land, water, and air environments and the intimate interconnections formed in those places (Heynen, 2018; Heynen & Ybarra, 2020). I am attentive to how Indigenous diasporic communities cultivate and care for life and the life cycles/places that arise against the capitalist settler designs/desires. These frameworks help understand the life/death process involved in the struggle of placemaking. They underscore that for Indigenous and marginalized communities, placemaking is intimately tied to making places to grow food and care for the land despite constant barriers posed by the settler governments. Indigenous diasporic communities come together to care for each other and the land through the

creation of life-making places. Cultivating autonomy has been the driving force for the creation of places of life such as the South Central Farm and contemporary decentralized gardens.

All together the discussion on food sovereignty and placemaking in urban space, contribute to political ecology discourse which pays attention to human-environment relationships and the control over land or resources (Robbins, 2012; Watts, 2000). Power relations are made evident in discussing who is allowed access to land and food in the city. The South Central Farm is a historical example of how a large-scale project for food sovereignty is met with demolition by the city developers. Relationships between land and environment were disrupted but reconstituted through decentralization. Decentralized gardens thus subvert the ways the city controls and defines where one can grow food.

This thesis is organized in the following fashion. I first delineate a history of the South Central Farm (SCF) to show how Indigenous diasporas from Latin America in Los Angeles created places of life through food sovereignty projects. Secondly, I discuss the specific ways the SCF defined food sovereignty in their context as urban displaced Indigenous peoples focused on autonomy, care, and land. Lastly, I discuss the struggle of placemaking in the case of the SCF and its eventual demolition and the rise of contemporary decentralized gardening as a spatial strategy to navigate the lack of access to land in Los Angeles.

Historical Convergences: The 1990s and Indigenous Diasporas in Los Angeles

The South Central Farm, its subsequent expression as a decentralized movement, and the broader struggle for indigenous food autonomy in Los Angeles is deeply linked to a confluence of political, economic, and historical factors. The political moment of the 1990s set the stage for new ways of organizing in Los Angeles. In this historical conjuncture in the city, a dignified rage was taking place against the constant violence enacted on communities of color through policing,

incarceration, food insecurity, housing insecurity, displacement, environmental racism, and transnational neoliberal policies. Black, Indigenous, and Chicanx/Latinx people spearheaded these mobilizations which resulted in transformational events in Los Angeles including the 1992 Uprisings in South Central, the Indigenous political resurgence after the Quincentennial arrival of Columbus, the Zapatista Uprising of 1994, and the influx of Indigenous and Campesino migrants from Latin America. It is these events combined that help tell the stories of the South Central Farmers who came from largely Indigenous, Latinx, Chicanx, and Black communities.

The 1992 LA Uprisings rose out of community anger over the verdict of Rodney King, a tipping point for the already marginalized and hyper-policed Black and brown communities in South Los Angeles. 1992 also marked the quintennial "celebration" of Columbus arriving to the Americas, sparking a politicization in Indigenous migrant and Chicanx communities in Los Angeles (Blackwell, 2017; Hernández, 2005). The community make-up of South Central was also beginning to shift during the early 1990s due to an influx of Indigenous people from rural areas of Mexico and Central America who were displaced from their homes due to U.S. intervention and neoliberal policies (Batz, 2020; Speed, 2019). Indigenous migrant groups from Mesoamerica (including Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec, Purepecha, Nahua, Huichol, and more) have since established diasporic communities in cities such as Los Angeles, California (Blackwell, 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Sanchez, 2019). Many of these Indigenous migrants also come from *campesino* [farmworker] or subsistence farming backgrounds, leading many to want to reestablish these relationships to land and cultivating practices in diaspora. Food and caring for the land became central to the ways Indigenous migrants recreate home and belonging in the city (Peña et al., 2017). While neoliberal policies in Mexico such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) resulted in the forced economic migration of thousands of Indigenous

peoples, those who stayed in Mexico still resisted the enclosure of common land as seen in the case of the Zapatistas (Klein, 2015; Speed, 2008). The Zapatista Uprising of 1994 in Chiapas awoke a political shift in Indigenous politics, both in Mexico and transnationally. In Los Angeles, Zapatismo (Zapatista Philosophy) became popular with both Indigenous migrants but also in Chicanx communities who reconnected with their Indigenous roots, began enacting Indigenous politics, and initiated the creation of coalitions with Indigenous peoples across the Americas (Gonzalez, 2011; Hernández, 2005; Luna, 2012; Zugman, 2005).

The South Central Farm emerged within this historical context, bringing together Indigenous, Latinx, Chicanx, and Black community members to build an urban farm which would foster a community of care and life. While in this thesis I am particularly focused on Indigenous people from Latin America and their descendants, it is important to note the solidarity that community members forged in this space due to the political emergences of the 1990s. In part, this thesis shows the ways radical relationships formed between Indigenous migrants and Chicanx people who led the struggle to save the farm. While not aiming to overly romanticize the relationships that emerged, the solidarity that took place adds another dimension to the conversations on Indigenous migrant and Mexican mestizo relationships, which have been framed through racial tensions (Castañeda et al., 2002; Herrera, 2016). The SCF offers another example of what cross-group solidarity can look like, especially when grounded in an Indigenous politic of life.

Throughout the thesis I utilize Indigenous Diasporas to describe those involved in the Farm who self-identify as Indigenous and/or who may encompass the Indigenous migrants of various *pueblos* (communities), campesinos (mixed Indigenous people), and *Xicana/o Indígenas* (often the children or descendants of Indigenous Migrants/Campesinos). Black scholars' use of

diaspora (Gilroy, 1993; King, 2019; McKittrick, 2006) serves as a useful framing to understand the networks of interconnectedness of peoples who come from communities across Latin America. Gilroy (1993) states "modern black political culture has always been more interested in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes" (p. 19). Moreover, Judith Carney's (2001) seminal work on the importance of food in the African diaspora and the knowledge that was carried with African peoples despite facing violent dispossession, informs the approach I take in this project looking at seeds and knowledge carried with Indigenous peoples displaced from their homelands. Carney (2021) also discusses enslaved African food gardens as sites of liberatory practice. This notion of peoples in diaspora, even when forced, has been widely explored in Black Studies but has not been fully interrogated in Indigenous studies until recently, with the rise of Indigenous migrants from Latin America in the United States (Blackwell, 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Gopinath, 2018; Speed, 2019). Moving away from spatially fixed notions of Indigeneity, scholars have reconsidered what it means to be both Indigenous and migrant. There is now widespread agreement that Indigenous people can and in fact do maintain/transform their cultural traditions and epistemologies alive in diaspora.

Lastly, I aim to understand Indigenous as a political relationality rather than a rigid anthropological, spatially and temporally fixed, object (Sharma, 2019; TallBear, 2013). Indigenous people post-1970s began to deploy a political and global Indigenous politic that was built on relationships and not colonial logics of blood quantum or recognition. In the 1990s, a similar politic emerged in Mexico and Latin American contexts where the politicization of the Indian populations resulted in employing *Indígena* [Indigenous] to connect and build across various communities (Durán Matute & Moreno, 2018). Moreover, Indigenous migrants and their

descendants are continuing their ancestral practices of caring for the land and creating autonomous food systems despite being displaced people.

Methodology

This thesis emerges from my own commitment to food sovereignty and autonomy in Los Angeles and the organizing I do with various Indigenous gardens across the city. As I gardened and listen to people's stories of how they became increasingly involved in growing their own food, I realized many of the organizers had met during the struggle to save the city's largest urban farm. These connections led me to delve into the history of the South Central Farm and to demonstrate the longer history of food sovereignty struggles in Los Angeles by weaving community archives with oral histories gleaned from interviews with gardening participants and advocates.

I employ an Indigenous methodological approach grounded in reciprocity, relationality, respect, and responsibility (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Working in a community that I consider myself a part of further adds to my commitment to food sovereignty beyond the academic sphere enacting a practice of *acompañar* (accompaniment) or walking with the community. Similarly, Amrah Salomón (2015) asks activist researchers to think about the importance of participants' stories as lessons that motivate/inspire us to move into action/struggle instead of viewing stories as an object that can be owned or sold. This in particular became apparent in the interviews I conducted, where dialogue often inspired us to organize events, zines, and workshops to continue thinking about this topic in our communities. Our conversations thus led us to act.

Shannon Speed (2019) offers us a way to approach research through what she calls "critically engaged activist research." She asks us to challenge the coloniality of anthropology and ask ourselves, what are the politics of knowledge production? "What effects will this

[research] have over the lives of people?" and "How do we not recolonize ourselves in the process" (p. 8). These are the types of questions to which I continuously return, especially by employing oral history, interviews, and archival research methods in order to not reproduce a colonial gaze (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Instead, my methods worked to center the Indigenous narratives of resistance from their own perspectives, stories, and archives.

Due to the absence of a formal (institutionalized) archive on the South Central Farm, I began collecting archival material from newspapers/media sources and built relationships with South Central farmers, who shared their archives of the Farm during its existence from 1992 to 2006. While newspapers and media sources discussed the early establishment of the SCF, most focused on the final struggle to save the Farm between 2003 and 2006. In these news/media archives, I mainly draw upon testimonies shared by participating farmers (such as Rufina Juárez, Tezozomoc, and Alberto Tlatoa) as well as statements of the property owner (Ralph Horowitz), city politicians, and the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank who were all implicated in the SCF's demolition. Aside from these testimonies and statements, I also found images of the Farm and the protests, as well as maps of the SCF then and now. I collaborated with two of the main organizers and community historians of the South Central Farm to gather primary sources in the form of photographs, video, and statements. Interviews with two South Central farmers and organizers provided details on their migration histories, prior involvement in food sovereignty projects, the South Central Farm, and the future of food justice in the city. Oral histories are vital for keeping record of our own histories and knowledge that are often excluded from dominant histories and archives (Blackwell, 2017; Speed, 2019). Speed (2019) utilizes oral histories because it "means not just taking Indigenous peoples experience seriously but also taking their understanding of it seriously" (pp. 8–9). These life narratives are embodied and counter so-called

positivist "truth" by offering testimonies of life trajectories that inform identity and social movements. For this reason, we must take them seriously.

To discuss the contemporary food sovereignty projects that have emerged since the closure of the SCF, I additionally conducted participant observation and interviews with participants in three decentralized gardens from South Central, South East, and East Los Angeles. These are the gardens where I have been involved for four years and the ones that inspired my interest in looking back at the SCF. These decentralized garden sites are largely comprised of Indigenous migrants and Xicanx/Latinx peoples working toward creating new approaches to growing food communally. The organizations and community decentralized gardens include members of the Eagle and Condor Liberation Front (ECLF), Earthseed project, the Casita del Barrio, and La Cosecha Collectiva. These methods together allowed me to narrate this broader story of Indigenous food sovereignty in Los Angeles, from the past to the present.

Literature Review

The urban food landscape is being reimagined by Indigenous migrants who constantly navigate racialized, neglected, and colonial geographies. Blackwell et al. (2017) address the ways Indigenous migrants challenge notions of Latinidad and Indigeneity in their conceptualization of "Critical Latinx Indigeneities." Blackwell (2017) emphasizes "how indigeneity is defined and constructed across multiple countries and at times, across overlapping colonialities" (p. 156). While overdetermining Indigenous migrants as settlers, their framework is still helpful to understand Indigenous displacement and how mobility does not impede the reassertion of indigeneity. More broadly, scholarship on Indigenous diasporas or Indigenous Latinx groups in the US has focused on the myriad ways in which they maintain relationships to place/*pueblo* (home community), with particular focus on cultural production (Boj, 2017),

transnational organizations/networks (Blackwell, 2017; Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Rivera-Salgado, 2000), language revitalization, labor (Holmes, 2013; Stephen, 2001), discrimination (Sanchez, 2018), detention/criminalization (Speed, 2019; Ybarra, 2021), and food (Peña et al., 2017). Foodways have been discussed from various scales such as home gardens, kitchen spaces, and community gardens/farms with a frequent emphasis often focusing on the cultural-political importance of food (Peña et al., 2017). This thesis contributes to the interest in food movements by adding the dimension of community organizing and placemaking in urban spaces. A geographic approach focused on the spatial dimension of Indigenous food sovereignty illuminates how certain places are made unlivable (lack access to food, clean water, etc.) and the ways such communities respond by caring for each other through their own forms of placemaking. In this thesis, I weave together the scholarship on Indigenous food sovereignty, food geographies, land, and placemaking to discuss the South Central Farm and the contemporary decentralized gardens this movement has spawned.

Food Sovereignty and Food Geographies

Food Sovereignty emerged out of the global struggle of campesinos known as the Via Campesina, who articulated the right to control and create their own food systems (Hoover, 2017). These farm workers aimed to move away from the concept of food security, a term commonly used by the United Nations, which is not the same as having full autonomy of one's own food system. Gálvez (2018) clarifies, "for food security to be achieved, it does not matter how, where, and by whom food is produced" (p. 82). Many Indigenous people across the globe did not agree with the term "food security" since it did not ensure that people dictate their own food systems or maintain their own seeds, thus allowing the state to continue controlling them through food access. According to Elizabeth Hoover (2017), food sovereignty challenges

dominant conversations of food security that simply aim to address an "adequacy" of food supply without thinking of the larger food system. Food sovereignty shifts then "the focus from the right to access food, to the right to produce it" (p. 33).

Hoover (2017) brings forth a new addition to the food sovereignty conversation that is grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing. She states that Indigenous food sovereignty "is not just focused on the rights to land and food and the ability to control a production system but also a responsibility to the land which encompasses culturally, ecologically, and spiritually appropriate relationships with elements of those systems." Furthermore, this framework recognizes that "food is sacred" (p. 39). Indigenous food sovereignty scholars have focused on various aspects of foodways in the United States and Canada, including a renewed interest in native seeds (Hill, 2017; White, 2019); the connection between autochthonous foods and health (Lindholm, 2019; Livingston; 2019; Martens et al., 2016; Mihesuah, 2019); Indigenous cooking (Mihesuah, 2019); creating collective farms (Chang et al., 2019; Wires & LaRose, 2019); home gardening (Budowle et al., 2019); traditional ecological knowledge (Cajete, 1999; Kimmerer, 2013; Salmón, 2012); and traditional agricultural practices (Clarke, 2019; Wall & Masayesua, 2019). Michelle Daigle (2017) writes that food sovereignty scholars are reconceptualizing the term to best fit their geographies, specific histories, and socio-ecological relationships. In this thesis, I add to the conversation on Indigenous food sovereignty by looking at the role of Indigenous people in diaspora in urban spaces such as Los Angeles where most food sovereignty and autonomy projects are intertribal and cross-ethnic, moving away from the largely rural and tribal specific literature.

Food geographies is another literature that I draw on to understand the spatiality of food sovereignty, particularly with regard to land access and placemaking. Scholarship has focused on

commoning practices (Ginn & Ascensão, 2018), community land trusts (Thompson, 2015), and public gardening (Bach & McClintock, 2020; Blomley, 2004). While all these initiatives are important, much of this literature concentrates on European countries and people in both urban and rural regions. Scholars of color and those working from a social justice framework have thus pushed the field to consider Black, Indigenous, and Latinx struggles for food and space (Slocum & Saldanha, 2013). Commoning practices (the process of communally owning or working the land) are of continued importance in people-of-color communities for challenging the notion of private property and transforming relationships with the land (Federici, 2018; Hegeman, 2019; Heynen, 2020). More recently, there has been a call for a radical food geographies praxis that work to center the relationships between places and social movements, land and people, and food and environmental justice (Brown et al., 2020; Gilbert & Williams, 2020; Hammelman et al., 2020). Black food geographies in particular pushes us to think about the possibilities of freedom and self-reliance found in creating one's own food systems (Jones, 2019; Reese, 2019). Geographic approaches to food allow connections to be made across the way spaces are designed and how communities organize against the logics of racial capitalism through creating their own places of resistance. Building upon the Indigenous food sovereignty and food geographies, I explore the way Indigenous diasporic communities create their own places (geographies) that foster a continuation of their practices of caring for the land and growing food in both large community gardens and small-scale decentralized gardens.

This thesis outlines the history and importance of the SCF in the broader Indigenous food sovereignty movement in Los Angeles. I build on prior scholarship on the SCF farm that overlooks the Indigenous migrants' relationships to land and place built on the farm. Such research has narrowly focused on policy and planning (Barraclough, 2009; Irazábal & Punja,

2009; Lawson, 2007) or emphasized a political economic analysis of the Farm (Broad, 2013; Jones, 2012). I augment this scholarship through a direct focus on the role of Indigenous migrants and by drawing on materials written by scholars involved in the struggle to save the Farm (Gonzalez, 2011; Mares & Peña, 2010) and South Central farmers who define their struggle for food as one grounded in their connections to the land as displaced Indigenous peoples (Juárez, 2017; Tezozomoc & SCF, 2019).

Land and Care

For Indigenous people land is not equivalent to the settler capitalist notion of property (Coulthart, 2014; Cronon et al., 1993; Goeman, 2013; Simpson, 2017). Indigenous people in diaspora further challenge ideas of land as property or fixed territory, by not making claims to land based on settler ontologies but rather form a radical relationality and responsibility (Harjo, 2018; Smith, 2012). By looking specifically at diasporic communities of color, we learn about ways of relating to land that are not trapped within state territoriality or land as property but more so as an ongoing, mobile, temporal process. As in the case with Black diasporic communities, McKittrick and Woods (2007) argue that Black geographies think of place as "the location of co-operation, stewardship, and social justice" (p. 6). From these relational approaches to land, I argue that Indigenous diasporas are deeply concerned with a radical spatial relationality to people and place that enact co-operation with their new environments. While not the central focus of this thesis, the question of land does arise, and consequently, I am interested in how Indigenous peoples in diasporas think through their relationships to land and how they enact placemaking as a tool to adapt to and invent new cultural belonging and relations after being displaced in the form of farms or gardens.

Placemaking

Place is always in the process of being made and remade through various emerging power geometries; thus, place is neither bounded nor singular in meaning (Massey, 2005). Placemaking functions as a political tool, that Andrew Grant (2018) argues can be used to make the lives of marginalized communities more livable. While the process of making and transforming place often comes with cultural significance, it is also resistant to oppressive structures. Gilmore (2017) pushes us to rethink placemaking's radical potential by noting the ways placemaking is utilized to resist the daily attacks on Black life. McKittrick (2006) shows that Black women in particular have always created place despite ongoing violence and rendering Black people as "ungeographic". Furthermore, McKittrick (2011) writes that "a black sense of place can be understood as the process of materially and imaginatively situating historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounter" (p. 949). Indigenous scholars have also contended with the question of sense of place and placemaking noting its significance in ancestral belonging and origin which are often overshadowed or erased by settler colonial geographies (Cajete, 1999; McGaw et al., 2011). Placemaking has also become central for Indigenous migrants who are coming to new overlapping geographies and moving through various colonial regimes (Blackwell, 2017). In this thesis, I also contemplate the idea of "place-lessness" present in the writings of scholars mentioned above, especially as it relates to those who have been displaced and are not trying to reproduce violence over the land. By drawing on these scholars, I add to the literature on placemaking by defining it as a process of making life in unexpected places through deep relationalities with land/environment.

Thesis Chapter Overview

This thesis is divided into five chapters. In this introduction I have provided a brief background and the three main aspects of the thesis: (a) conceptualizing food autonomy projects by Indigenous migrants, (b) placemaking as a tool to create places of life and the struggle over land in the city; and (c) the enclosure of communal land, and the rise of decentralized spaces. Chapter 2 then offers a history of the South Central Farm, which includes the context for its geographic location in South Central Los Angeles, the Farm's evolution from 1992 to 2006, and the struggle to save it from 2003 to 2006. I specifically focus on the various actors involved in evicting the farmers, the ways the SCF community organized resistance, and the alternatives that emerged following forced abandonment. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the Indigenous food sovereignty literature and a conceptualization of how the South Central farmers enacted food sovereignty focusing on autonomy and care. Chapter 4 discusses the politics of placemaking amidst competing understandings of land and place, demonstrating the ways Indigenous migrants create places of life through food autonomy projects that are then rendered as incompatible with goals and plans of private property owners, developers, and city officials. I then trace connections between the closure of the Farm and the subsequent emergence of decentralized gardens as a response to the lack of land access in the city. Chapter 5, the conclusion, reflects on the overall thesis and future research directions.

CHAPTER 2: BIRTH, LIFE, AND AFTERLIFE OF THE SOUTH CENTRAL FARM

> For Fourteen years the 14-acre south Central Farm (SCF) was the largest and most biologically diverse urban farm in the United States. The farm was established in 1992 at a site located in an industrial warehouse zone of South Central Los Angeles. After a three-year campaign to save the farm, the farmers were evicted and the crops bulldozed in June 2006. The Farm had 360 individual family plots cultivated by a culturally diverse community that includes members of indigenous Mixtec, Nahua, Seri, Yaqui, and Zapotec peoples among many others. Each plot comprised an impressive collection of diverse native crops sown from heirloom seeds that have been kept and conserved by families for countless generations. (The South Central Farmers UN Delegation, 2007)

The city of Los Angeles has abandoned the impoverished residents of areas of South Central, prioritizing the transportation of commodities produced by industrial agriculture elsewhere. The Alameda Corridor that intersects this urban squalor prioritizes land use for the warehouses and railroads that dominate the landscape and take precedence over providing public resources to the people of color who live there. This process of systematic abandonment has had negative effects on communities of color (Gilmore, 2007; Reese, 2019), but has also sparked the creation of infrastructures and places of life and care that rely on community members rather than the state. Gilmore (2017) speaks to the type of systemic violence such as incarceration that leads to premature death, which has also been the concern of scholars studying food access. Living in communities that have been denied access to food has also resulted in what some scholars refer to as slow violence (Jones, 2019; Nixon, 2011). South Central LA and the South Central Farm (SCF) were at the center of this struggle for food because the area is disproportionately home to many Latin American migrants yet lacked grocery stores, fresh food, or public transportation to access food in other parts of the city. As Reese (2019) states, “the two—life and precarity—exist in tension” (p. 133), but communities learn to navigate these spaces and create anew. Indigenous and Chicanx migrants in Los Angeles cultivate these places of life to combat the capitalist structures of uncaring.

The South Central Farm (SCF) contested the absence of food security by offering a new way of growing food in the city. This chapter focuses on the geographic history of the South Central region located alongside the Alameda Corridor and how that space has historically been rendered unlivable by looking at the example of the LANCER trash incinerator project. I then provide a brief overview of the Farm's existence and the actors involved in the eviction of the farmers. This history honors the struggle of the South Central farmers and the role the Farm played in subsequent urban food movements. I draw from archival material, written testimonies, and oral histories from the South Central farmers and organizers that show the birth, life, and afterlife of the Farm. The chapter ends with a discussion on the role of city officials in conjunction with the original property owner and the LA regional foodbank in the Farm's demolition in 2006. Overall, I argue that community organizational practices of care for place and each other were modes of resisting the logics that rendered South Central as unworthy of life.

South Central Los Angeles and the Alameda Corridor

South Central Los Angeles is a large region largely populated by Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people. A region as large as South Central has a varied landscape with some areas more industrial than others. Not until recently—notably, with the rise of gentrification—have areas in South Central been prioritized for development, benefiting those of higher socioeconomic status encroaching on the community. My goal is not to reproduce and overdetermine the image of South Central as inherently a space of warehouses; rather, in this chapter I focus on specifically the northeast region of South Central where the South Central Farm was located alongside the Alameda Corridor and amidst the heavily industrialized city of

Vernon (Figure 1). The South Central Farm was located on 41st and Alameda, a plot of land that has a longer history of struggle tied to it.

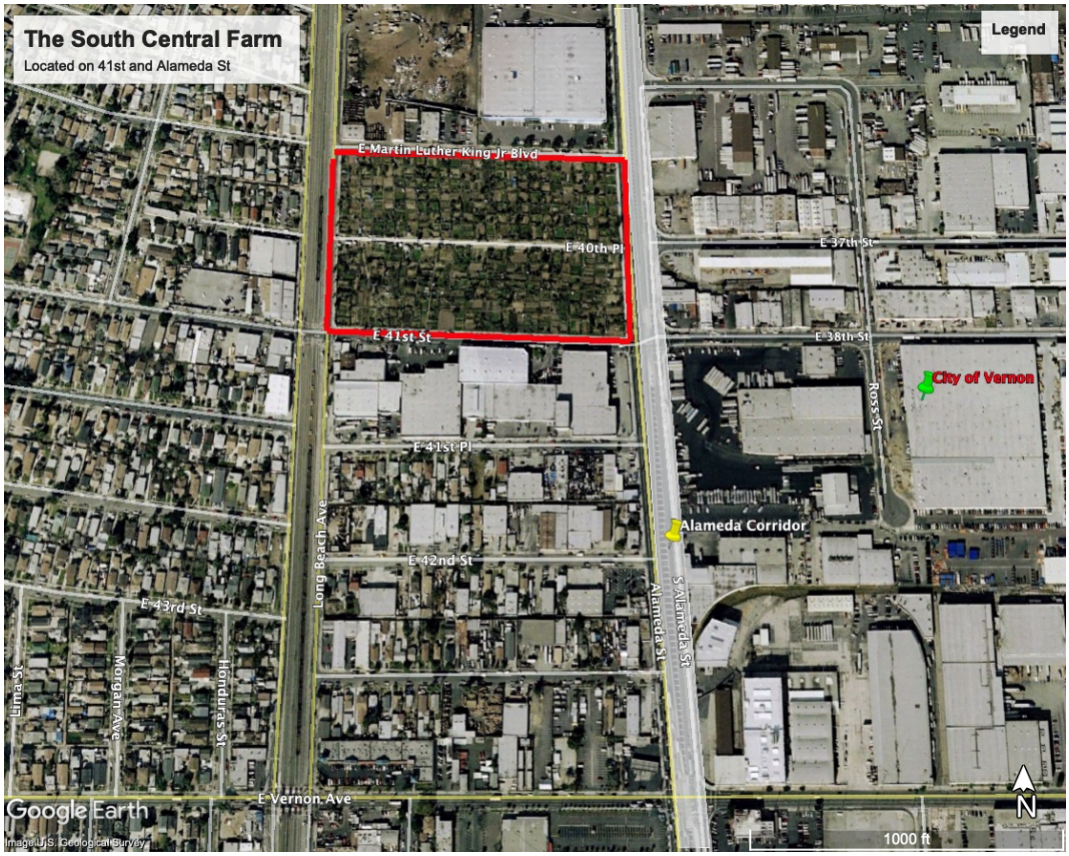

Figure 1. South Central Farm and South Central Region in March 2006 (Google Earth Pro).

This eastern-most side of South Central in the 1990s was zoned as an industrial area due to its proximity to the Alameda Corridor (along Alameda Street) meant to transport commodities in and through the city from the port of Long Beach (Barraclough, 2009; De Lara, 2018). The Alameda Corridor begins in the City of Vernon known for its warehouses and railroads which makes it a hub of daily commodity production and transportation. Investment in the transport of commodities rather than public transportation add a defining characteristic of the area: defining who/what is mobile. The Alameda Corridor and Vernon have also been central to understanding the effects of environmental racism on working-class communities of color evident in the way the region of South Central and East LA are deemed hazardous spaces, both of which are

predominately Latinx low-income communities (Pulido et al., 1996). Environmental reports show the region's intense air pollution due to the constant movement of big rigs that offload goods from the port to the warehouses and drive through the area on a daily basis (LACDRP, 2015). The city of Los Angeles intended the area to house warehouses not people and much less, an urban farm. In fact, the city often disregarded the reality that there were people living in these areas, including high-density residential zones of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people just on the other side of Long Beach Ave. The warehouses and hazardous projects developed on the 14 acres of land around 41st and Alameda constantly were opposed by community members who envisioned a different South Central urban environment.

The LANCER Project

In 1986 the city of Los Angeles utilized eminent domain to build a waste-to-energy incinerator on the 14 acres of land which would later house the SCF (Re-envisioning the SCF, 2017). This trash incinerator came at a time when waste was becoming a large concern for the city of Los Angeles. The project was termed LANCER (Los Angeles City Energy Recovery) and worked on creating waste-to-energy sites that were to be placed across various cities in Los Angeles County. The first one was planned to be built on 41st and Alameda, precisely in a low-income community of color. The *Los Angeles Times* reported the cost and goals of the project:

> Originally scheduled for completion in 1989, the $170-million facility at 41st and Alameda streets, a mile east of the Memorial Coliseum, would burn at least 1,600 tons of garbage per day. Proponents would like to portray it as a large community hearth; they laud it as both the solution to the city's waste disposal problem and the springboard for the revitalization of South Central Los Angeles. (Haywood, 1986)

City officials saw this as advantageous for the urban economy and waste problem but did not think about who was left out of the plan or the collateral consequences of the project. Years had gone by and nothing had been mentioned to the community; in fact, many South Central

community members mentioned that they only recall the city framing this trash incinerator as both safe and beneficial to the community in a series of three workshops in 1985 (Haywood, 1986). Another *LA Times* article by journalist Connie Koenenn (1991) noted that "a film presentation explained how the towering, $170-million plant, disguised by walls and artful landscaping, would use state of the art technology to burn tons of household trash to make electric power. This would provide both electricity and jobs to the community, officials said." The LANCER project promised more jobs and electricity generation. Nevertheless, many of the supposed jobs required specialized skills resulting in hiring outside of the community and only about 40,000 houses could be powered with the energy (Haywood, 1986). While the LANCER project tried to "disguise" their efforts as beneficial for the community, they failed to mention the risks and possible long term environmental/health hazards. Some of these included a rise in toxic air quality due to the release of pollutants (including metals and gases) causing long-term health hazards such as asthma, cancer, and respiratory problems (Concerned Citizens SCLA, 2021). The trash incinerator was particularly concerning because it was placed in an economically depressed and predominantly Black community (at the time) which was not expected to organize against such development projects. The supposed "revitalization" of South Central was a motivator for this development, but did not align with the community's vision for the well-being of the people and environment.

Community members from the area argued they were not well-informed about the site and organized under the name Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles to stop the development of the trash incinerator. One organizer, Robin Cannon, mentioned, "we saw it [LANCER project] as a health threat, but we also considered it an environmental issue …An incinerator has the potential to impact the air, the land, and the water. LANCER affected the

totality of where we lived and worked" (Koenenn, 1991). One of the largest concerns was why place the trash incinerator here? Organizers argued that the city saw the community and environment of South Central as disposable. As one concerned South Central representative made clear, "if the project is as safe as you say, it could be put on Bunker Hill" (Roderick, 1987). Bunker Hill being in the central business district of downtown Los Angeles where many middle class people travel to daily. The comment of placing the trash incinerator on Bunker Hill draws us to the geographic importance of where the LANCER project was planned: in a place of no significance to the city. The Concerned Citizens of Los Angeles studied the potential hazards that came with the project and presented their findings to City Hall in 1987. The Concerned Citizens of Los Angeles won in August of 1987 when the Los Angeles City Council decided to drop the trash incinerator plans due to the pressure from community members and the mayor (Koenenn, 1991). This was a successful outcome for South Central which would come back to be of significance for the later struggle to save the SCF.

The city's vision for a "revitalized" South Central has continuously depended on the creation of hazardous projects such as the LANCER and Alameda Corridor, in effect, designating certain types of places inhabited by poor communities to be considered of little value in this urban enclave. The city prioritized profitable (hazardous/toxic) development instead of investing in community projects or much-needed infrastructure such as housing, public transportation, grocery stores, or green spaces. Thus, these former development plans show the lack of regard for the life of community members and the environment that some city officials and developers had for this region of South Central. The South Central Farm, located on this same lot on 41st and Alameda, would come face-to-face with these same logics of death and

disposability. However, during its fourteen years of existence, the SCF farmers came together to care for one another in response to state abandonment and violent displacement.

The Creation of the South Central Farm, 1992 to 2006

The 1992 Los Angeles uprising begin in South Central Los Angeles after the acquittal of four LAPD officers who used excessive brutal force against Rodney King. The community's anger resulted in protests and riots where they looted and burned stores down. Scholars have used the term uprising rather than riot to signal how people rise up against systemic oppression. Uprising acknowledges the conditions that lead people to enact a multitude of strategies, even those deemed extreme or illogical to the popular media. Community members took it into their own hands to achieve justice, while also showing the world that there was a need for change in the way the city was designed. Months after the uprising happened, whole plots of land stayed empty with no developers or city planners rushing to rebuild infrastructure and places. Abandonment continued and it was once again in the hands of the community to build their own places and infrastructures of life. Even so for many neighborhood residents, it became clear that especially in moments of crisis, those who care for the community are to be found within the community itself. South Central residents have a long legacy of taking care of each other when the state has systematically marginalized or abandoned them. Rosas (2019) focuses on the longer history of South Central residents' investment in their own community through the formation of banks, business, and community centers. The uprising revealed the need for more community-driven efforts, that challenged the disproportionate rates of food insecurity, policing, and health disparities in the area.

The South Central Farm arose from the ashes of the 1992 Rodney King uprising. The city of Los Angeles's Harbor Department, which manages the Port of Los Angeles, gave seven acres

of land to the Los Angeles (LA) Regional Food Bank to create a community garden on the 14 acres once planned to be a trash incinerator. The land was offered to the LA Regional Food Bank to show that the city cared about South Central. It is important to note that the land given to the LA Regional Food Bank was a "revokable permit," meaning the land was not owned by the community members who would come to create the South Central Farm (Santaromana, 2017). Despite these structural barriers, though, the food bank, which promoted the need for food access and security in the region, continued with their goals of creating a community garden, not knowing how important the place would ultimately become.

The LA Regional Food Bank left it in the hands of the community to plan and design the Farm. The plots were provided to families who met the requirements of being low-income, which was the population the food bank served (Radio Zapatista, 2006). South Central farmer, Alberto Tlatoa (pers. comm., November 8, 2020) mentioned that even before the South Central Farm the people in the community were growing their food wherever they could find space, often seeing *mazetas* (pots) and various ancestral fruits and crops in all their apartments or front yards. The South Central Farm brought the community together in a new way that required cooperation with the land and each other. Tlatoa (personal communication, November 8, 2020) recalled how it took 2 years of restoring and regenerating the land with Mesoamerican crops in order to bring life back into the soil:

> The land was originally given to the community in 1992 by mayor Tom Bradley so that the community could heal. And so, the project was originally supposed to be on 7 acres of the site, but the necessity was so big that it just jumped onto the other one and just became a total of 14 acres. The land was getting fixed, we had to take a lot of soil out and bring new soil in and also we used ancestral crops to remove some of the toxins, so for about 2 years people couldn't consume anything they grew on the site, to help with amending the soil and keeping it healthy. So, for two years we didn't grow anything. So it officially started in 1994 and operated from 1994 to 2006.

Tlatoa shares how the soil had been heavily contaminated by lead, as most of the region's land is, and had a lot of trash and concrete to be removed. The farmers recall this process as bringing the soil back to life. This raises another concern on the question of land access in Los Angeles: most of the land in communities of color is contaminated and thus requires long restoration processes before food can be safely consumed (this a problem contemporary gardens are also facing which is discussed at length in Chapter 4). The community came together to care for the land in those two years, transforming an urban environment that had been so heavily exploited and destroyed by city officials. In those two years, Native American crops such as corn and sunflowers were used to rid the land of toxins, which Tlatoa referred to as a long but ceremonial process that ensured the food grown was healthy to consume.

The South Central Farm became the largest urban farm in the nation in the most contaminated and polluted area of the southeastern region of LA. Farmers at the SCF were predominantly Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Chicanx community members. One farmer, Rufina Juárez, wrote that about two-thirds of the SCF participants were Indigenous due to the large population living in the area (Juárez, 2010). The Indigenous campesinos represented on the Farm included Nahua, Zapotec, Yaqui, Otomi, Maya, Seri and more (Broad, 2013). There was also a large group of mixed-race campesinos of Indigenous ancestry who over time no longer remained connected to their *pueblos* (communities). Lastly there was Chicanx people, the children of Indigenous and mixed-race campesinos who felt strongly about reconnecting to their Indigenous roots and often referred to themselves as Xicana/o[1] Indígenas. Together, these Indigenous migrants and descendants from Mexico and Central America cared for the 14-acre

[1] Xicana/o/x diverged from larger Chicana/o/x perspectives by centering an Indigenous world view and connection to their Indigenous lineages.

Farm—many of them made Los Angeles their home after being displaced from their homelands due to neoliberal policies such as NAFTA (Peña, 2017; Tezozomoc & SCF, 2017). Indigenous migrants came together to transform a once empty plot of land into a source of agricultural knowledge and subsistence practices. The Farm thrived with over 90 plots cared for by 350 families and a wide biodiversity of heritage foods and medicinal plants (South Central Farmers, 2018; Peña, 2005). The average plot was at minimum about 10 feet by 15 feet, and families were allowed only 1 plot per family as noted in their SCF agreements, but at one point some families had more than one plot (Kennedy, 2008). The Farm fed over 1,000 families in South Central Los Angeles by offering fresh food to their local communities in the form of bartering and alternative economic practices such as *tianguis* (local markets) (South Central Farmers, 2007). The Farm faced many critiques and attacks concerning the selling of the food being grown despite it being on a small scale, anti-Farm rhetoric made it seem capitalist driven when it was truly about supporting the farmers and accessing food otherwise not available in the community (Kennedy, 2008). Its more material effects included feeding the community members who faced high levels of food insecurity but on a more metaphysical level, caring for the land provided the farmers a sense of continuing their ways of knowing and creating community in an unwelcoming city. The struggle for food autonomy was in line with the farmers' longer histories of caring for the land, being farm workers, and fighting dispossession back in their homelands.

Rufina Juárez points out that "for many of the South-Central farmers, their forced migration from México and Central America was a result of agribusiness interests taking away their natural resources and farmlands while destroying their local self-reliant economies" (quoted in Penã et al., 2017, p. 29). Neoliberal policies of the late 1980s and early 1990s had enclosed the land of many Indigenous peoples in Latin America resulting in the influx of largely rural

campesinos coming from Mexico and Central America into Los Angeles (Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Peña et al., 2017). Many of these Indigenous peoples originated in established autonomous economies, places, and practices of caring for the land in their home countries. Yet for many Indigenous peoples who were forced to migrate to urban cities like Los Angeles, their forced proletarianization meant limited access to food and land to grow it. That is why for these Indigenous campesinos, the South Central Farm "represented the only connection we[they] had to the land, or Mother Earth" (Juárez, 2017, p. 29). The SCF represented an extension of themselves—it was their sustenance and their way of caring for the land and their community.

In the years from 1994 to 2003, the Farm was active in cultivating life on the 90 plots (Figures 2 and 3) of land. The geography of the Farm was shaped by the 20- to 30-foot plots filled with Native American foods and herbs; fencing between plots was common and often with living plants, such as cactus (Mark, 2006; Peña, 2005). Multigenerational families held plots for several years and some shared plots with other community members.

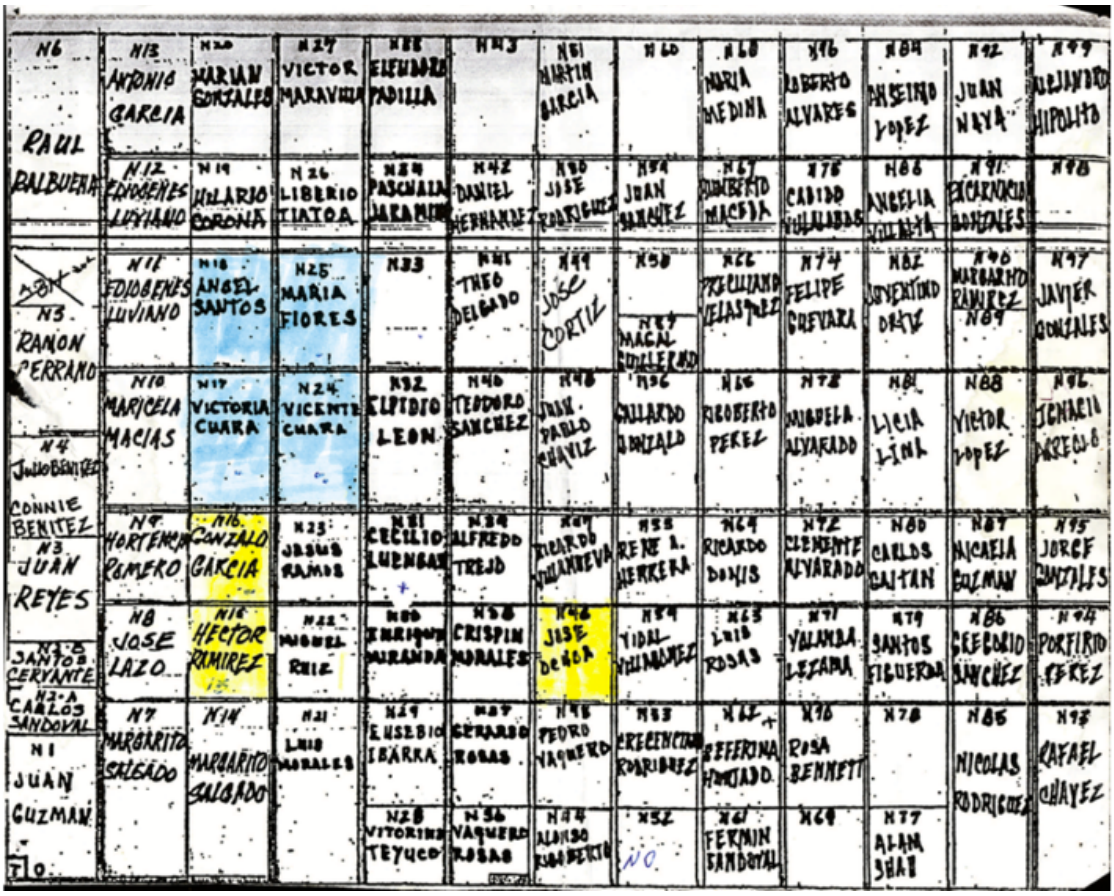

Figure 2. Map plots at SCF with family names on them (Metabolic Studio, 2017).

The Indigenous Mesoamerican farmers shared and grew seeds from their homelands, recreating a piece of home in diaspora and also relying on the Farm for subsistence. In the Farm, farmers cultivated a communal spirit involving seed and food exchanges and constantly sharing their own stories and experiences. The struggle to save the Farm heightened this communal spirit.

The Struggle to Save The Farm, 2003–2006

In September 2003 the farmers received notification of eviction from the LA Regional Food Bank. South Central Farmer Rufina Juárez recalled (2017) arriving to the Farm to a notice which stated "the L.A. Regional Food Bank thanked us, 'the gardeners,' for our ongoing participation in their 'gardening' program, but they were sad to inform us that the program had

ended" (p. 27). Similarly, South Central Farmer Alberto Tlatoa (2020) says he recalls being told "we had to leave and that our project was done" no reasoning just a date to be out of the Farm by December 2003. The farmers were aware that the land was being contested and fought over in court but did not expect to be officially informed through an eviction letter.

The goal of eviction can be traced to the 1980s when the city of Los Angeles took the land from property owner and developer Ralph Horowitz through eminent domain for the proposed LANCER project (Kuipers, 2005; Mark, 2006). Horowitz was offered 4.7 million for the land but received "the right to first refusal on the property if the city decided to sell it" (Mark, 2006). This gave Horowitz and his investment company Libaw-Horowitz the right to be the first to put in an offer to buy the land if it was ever put on the market again. Since the LANCER project ultimately did not go through because of the community's organized efforts against it, the land was technically opened to be purchased again. In 1994, the city sold the land to the Harbor Department for over 13 million dollars (Kuipers, 2005). Horowitz had fought to buy the land back since 1995, arguing he had not been given proper legal notice and first refusal, which is the right to be the first person to buy the land in 1994. However, the City Council did not approve his offer (Irazábel & Punja, 2009). Horowitz relentlessly fought to regain possession of this particular piece of land. In 2002, he filed a lawsuit against the city for not following through with the original plans proposed when the land was taken from him through eminent domain: i.e., it was not being used for "public good" (Irazábel & Punja, 2009). After years of lawsuits, the City Council voted in 2003 to sell the land to Horowitz for 5.5 million dollars in a closed session (Mark, 2006). South Central Farmer Rosa Romero recalled that after Horowitz threatened to sue, "the city attorney advised the city that they shouldn't face this law suit so in a backroom deal they sold this public land that was for public use, in a backroom deal for 5 million dollars and it

was even more land than he originally owned. Knowing that it was well worth over 16 million dollars" (Radio Zapatista, 2006). The city became another central actor in the closure of the Farm, whose initial goal was to give the land to the LA Regional Food Bank as a way to address the food insecurity conditions in South Central made visible during the 1992 uprising. Horowitz had wanted the land back since 1995 but the 2003 decision allowed the eviction of 350 families from the SCF. Yet the farmers persisted and struggled to save the Farm.

The LA Regional Food Bank played an important role in getting the farmers land access but in the end did not contest the decision. Echoing the sentiments of many South Central farmers, Journalist Dean Kuipers (2005) writes that the Food Bank had the ability to resist the land being sold and was the last barrier between the Farm and the eviction. The LA Regional Food Bank was quick to follow the request to evict the farmers taking a politically safer route. The LA Regional Food Bank's communication director Darren Hoffman states, "Originally, we were thinking temporary—we thought this would be like a two year project. But two years turns into 13 to 14 years, and nobody sees it as a temporary project anymore" (quoted in Kuipers, 2005). It seems almost unthinkable that a gardening project initially created to feed families was only to last two years, and that despite Hoffman mentioning that it is not a temporary project anymore they still went through with the eviction without consulting the farmers themselves. Rufina Juárez (2010) stated that the farmers had continuously challenged being called gardeners because it oversimplified the work that they were doing and that this was not just hobby gardening. Beyond this, the farmers critiqued the Food Bank for going against their mission of wanting to help feed marginalized communities in need (Juárez, 2010). For the South Central farmers, the Food Bank was complicit in selling the land and even assisted the eviction and demolition process, which I discuss next.

Rufina Juárez, a Xicana Indígena (Indigenous Xicana) Hña Hnu (Otomi), and one of the lead organizers with the South Central Farmers, read at a 2010 plenary on the SCF:

> We, the South Central Farmers Feeding Families (SCFs), began our struggle in September of 2003 when a single page notice written in English and addressed mostly to the Spanish-speaking community and some monolingual indigenous language speakers, that was posted to the entrance gates of the South Central Farm. (Juárez, 2010)

Before this moment, the Farm had been largely a space to cultivate and gather but this marked a shift for the farmers to begin organizing despite their vulnerable positions in society (largely being women, elders, and undocumented people). One farmer mentions that before the Farm the relationships were more likened to being "neighbors" but after the struggle began, participants now gathered in a new way to share stories and share space (Kuipers, 2005). In other words, their sense of community was fortified through struggle. The community not only included the families who had worked the Farm for years but also their children, community organizers, college students and educators, as well as a broader constituency of residents of South Central. One *LA Times* article describes the way the Farm was organized:

> There's a General Assembly meeting every week, where all 350 or so families can vote on farm matters like marches or buying a generator. The captains hear concerns and are in charge of security and logistics. Tezozomoc and Rufina Juárez are the elected representative interacting with lawyers and city officials. And then there Is a massive outreach campaign which everyone does his or her part, bringing in supporters, money, and outside organizing expertise. (Kuipers, 2005)

The farmers developed new ways of relating to one another that depended not just on feeding themselves but also on a struggle to protect the land/community. The social relationships became stronger despite the reality that towards the end of the three years of fighting, many became tired or disillusioned. There was also conflict on the Farm, which happens within most communities and organizing spaces, these conflicts resulted in violence and also breaking from the larger movement (Kennedy, 2008). Nonetheless, many of the farmers and organizers remained fully

committed to protecting the Farm despite having full-time jobs or being full-time students. Not only was the local community organized and supporting the farmers, but there was also international support. Of the many supporters were the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico from whom the farmers drew inspiration, making remarks such as "Atenco! Sur Central! La Tierra es del Pueblo! [Atenco (Zapatista Territory), South Central, The Land is the Community's]" (Radio Zapatista, 2006).

The farmers carried out a variety of strategies including organizing actions, civil disobedience, attending city hall meetings and the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous peoples in addition to raising funds to buy back the Farm. One of their central concerns was the closed session between Horowitz and the City Council where councilwoman Jan Perry was in support of selling the land for 5.5 million dollars, one-third of its actual property value in 2003 (Kennedy, 2008; Kuipers, 2005). The farmers believed they should have been informed about the possibility of buying the land as a collective. Every week for three years, the farmers showed up to City Council meetings to make statements in support of the Farm (Mercado, 2006). During those meetings they vocalized disappointment with the city councilmember Jan Perry who constantly sided with the property owner. The farmers also went on to sue all the power holders involved including the LA Regional Food Bank, the city, and Horowitz (Kuipers, 2005). During their struggle there were times where city council members and even country judges sided with the farmers and supported them giving them hope (Kennedy, 2008). Part of this hope included delaying the eviction of the farmers for three years with the support of pro bono lawyers, but in May of 2006, the farmers' fear of eviction heightened because Horowitz had gained the right to use the LA Sheriff's Department to remove them from the land. This is when the farmers began their encampment at the Farm, having about 80 people

sleeping at the Farm every night (Radio Zapatista, 2006). Despite all their organizing efforts, the farmers ultimately faced the unexpected arrival of bulldozers on the morning of June 13, 2006.

The Demolition of the SCF

The farm was locked by the city while police protected the perimeter. Meanwhile the bulldozers sat in the Farm threatening to move at any moment. The documentaries *Aqui Estamos y No Nos Vamos* (list year) and *The Garden* (list year) makes the point that the farmers were caught completely off-guard by the bulldozers, and they quickly mobilized community members to arrive at the Farm. They had not been expecting the police since they had been told by the city that their case would be heard in August. Rufina Juárez (2006) in *Aqui Estamos y No Nos Vamos* comments on the events of that day:

> They already came in with bulldozers started destroying peoples crops. Started killing the trees. And we talk about a mayor who's in for the greening of LA and this is what you get…He publicly came out and stated that he supported the South Central farmers, he supported the farmers staying here, and this space so that it could benefit all the community. And yet we get the police, and we get the sheriffs, so what kind of support is that…The Annenberg foundation believes in the greening of LA and believes in this project that has been in the community for 14 years right after the 1992 uprisings. It is a place where families supplement their meals, it is a place where families get their traditional medicine for their children, where are the families going to go? What is going to happen? We are in an area that is so contaminated with the commercial freight train line, with the passenger freight train line, with the alameda corridor, and you can see stretches and stretches of warehouses. Do we need another warehouse to pollute this area? No. Let me tell you why it is happening because this is a poor area…they think that people who are poor cannot talk about the environment. We've been talking for the past three years, this deal was done in a backroom deal and we have been spreading the word.

At this point Juárez and the farmers were very upset with the Latinx mayor of LA, Antonio Villaraigosa, who had made promises to stand with the Farm but decided to be in solidarity with the property owner as one farmer put it. For Juárez, it was clear that the farm was disposable to city officials and that all the organizing done by the community was being severely overlooked because it did not benefit the city to care.

The LA Regional Food Bank communications director stated they were committed to feeding families in the area; nonetheless when the city asked the Food Bank to shut down the Farm their board quickly agreed to demolish it. Food Bank communications director Hoffman is quoted saying "we were supposed to return the property in the way we received it. So, all the interior fencing would have to go and basically, all of the foliage" (Kuipers, 2005). They had the ability to stand with the farmers and chose not to due to the fact that they were also being threatened to be sued by Horowitz. The bulldozers came in to complete the job, not allowing any of the community members to take their plants, seeds, or harvests. Several organizers attempted to stop the bulldozers by chaining themselves to trees, but they were all forcefully removed (Mercado, 2006). The farmers watched overwhelmed and in pain as their farm was bulldozed. As Claudia Mercado (pers. comm., January 8, 2021) director of *Aqui Estamos y No Nos Vamos* and organizer with the South Central Farm shared with me, "And I remember you know shooting the process of them digging and removing those trees, and those trees were crying, they were crying. I could hear them crying, and I never would have imagined that."

After the demolition of the Farm, the organizers and farmers gathered at City Hall to share their statements at the city council meeting. Alberto Tlatoa, interviewed in the film *Aqui Estamos y No Nos Vamos* (Mercado, 2006), shared, "It is a sad day in LA, we will never forget when you guys (points to city council) decided to side with the developer and not the community. You have taken part in the destruction of food that feeds families, low-income families, and you should be ashamed of yourselves." The message to the city officials was clear, and they chose not to listen to the needs of the people. Another farmer at this same city council meeting stated, "Han destruido nuestros arboles, han destruido nuestro jardin, pero no han destruido a los campesinos de South Central." [They have destroyed our trees, they have

destroyed our garden, but they have not destroyed the South Central Farmers] (Mercado, 2006). For the farmers the demolition of the farm was not the end of their struggle, as many continued to organize and fight to get back the land. When asked about the meaning of the chant "Aqui Estamos y No Nos Vamos," farmers and organizers shared what it meant: to struggle, to be rooted, to be sovereign, to demand recognition that we are here and not going anywhere (Mercado, 2006). One of the farmers in the film states:

> *aqui estamos y no nos vamos*, and that means, "We are so deeply implanted here just like the roots behind us." The roots on this farm, we are so deeply implanted, that there is no way that anyone could every try to uproot us and take us away. Our spirit is here, our spirit will be here in seven generations to come. (Mercado, 2006)

The farm on 41st and Alameda offered a place of re-rooting in diaspora. Despite the destruction of the farm, it still carries a radiant presence in the food sovereignty organizing movement taking place today. The spirit of the South Central Farm continues to live on in the form of new community gardens and food sovereignty projects. Those who remember the SCF or who were present in the organizing to save the farm continue to work towards the goal of feeding our communities.

In 2007, South Central Farmers Rufina Juárez and Josefina Medina presented at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous People. Its meaning is evident in this quote from the South Central Farmers press release:

> For Fourteen years the 14-acre south Central Farm (SCF) was the largest and most biologically diverse urban farm in the United States. The farm was established in 1992 at a site located in an industrial warehouse zone of South Central Los Angeles. After a three-year campaign to save the farm, the farmers were evicted and the crops bulldozed in June 2006. The Farm had 360 individual family plots cultivated by a culturally diverse community that includes members of indigenous Mixtec, Nahua, Seri, Yaqui, and Zapotec peoples among many others. Each plot comprised an impressive collection of diverse native crops sown from heirloom seeds that have been kept and conserved by families for countless generations.

In this statement the farmers note the accomplishments they had which were met with violent destruction in 2006. The goal of the SCF delegation was to share this story of the Farm and their struggle while also being able to connect with other "geographically displaced indigenous people" (South Central Farm, 2007). Convening at the United Nations Permanent forum on Indigenous Peoples allowed them to build with the global Indigenous movement. They found that many displaced Indigenous people resonated with their struggle because they, too, had faced ongoing displacement and movement which had its own set of challenges in the realm of Indigenous law. The South Central Farmers became a group of doubly displaced Indigenous people but continued to look for places to grow food and practice their ancestral ways of knowing. Many of the farmers were made place-less through forced migration and the SCF enabled them to be emplaced in a new geographical setting.

The struggle of the South Central Farmers continued on land opened for them to care for by its custodians in a new venue in the Central Valley. Land was provided by one of their supporters and friends, Roger MacAfee, who let them use his land in Fresno, until he passed away which was another emotional loss for the farmers (Radio Zapatista, 2008). The 10 families who continue to struggle have been working on a farm in Bakersfield and drive into Los Angeles to sell their produce. Although this requires the Los Angeles-based families to drive out for the weekends to tend to the land, they still feel a strong connection to continue their struggle for land and food. As one of the farmers mentioned, "Nuestra Lucha no Tiene Fin" [Our Struggle has no end] (Radio Zapatista, 2008).

Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief history of the region of South Central and South Central Farm from 1992 to 2006, including the conditions leading to its creation, the struggle to save the

Farm, and the actors involved in its demolition. This overview of the Farm's history reveals the way South Central was thought of as disposable, an urban wasteland, and only legible for profitable development by the city. The 14 acres of land on 41st and Alameda had become a particularly contentious site of land, fought for by city officials, property owners, and community members alike. Yet it is clear that a community farm was not a priority for the city for it went against the logics of the city's real estate developers being a space inhabited largely by marginalized people of color. The South Central Farm emerged a site of life amidst the bleak warehouses that surrounded the community of South Central.

The following chapters provide more examples of how the South Central farmers practiced food sovereignty and placemaking. The next chapter discusses the ways farmers articulated food sovereignty to feed the community, build autonomy, and care for the land.

CHAPTER 3: INDIGENOUS FOOD AUTONOMY

In South Central Los Angeles and other low-income communities of color, access to food is unequally spatialized. This means there is less likely to be fresh, nutritious food or grocery stores in impoverished residential areas. In response to this neglect many community members have taken it upon themselves to organize their own infrastructures of care including mutual aid projects, cooperatives, gardens, and farms (Rosas, 2019; Spade, 2020). Hobart and Kneese (2020) define the practice of radical care as "a set of vital but underappreciated strategies for enduring precarious worlds" (p.2). They go on to share how radical care is enacted to create otherwise worlds, that move beyond state-sanctioned neglect. Radical care can be seen in the creation of the SCF and in the relationships fostered in place with the land and each other. As noted in the previous chapter the South Central Farm was created to feed the community, but it was also created to show the community that they could depend on each other and not government agencies.

In this chapter I argue that the SCF articulated a struggle for food sovereignty grounded in a spirit and practice of *autonomia* (autonomy). As Cree scholar Michelle Daigle (2017) makes clear, there are many Indigenous food *sovereignties* that vary across tribe and place. The SCF context was one that worked across multiple indigeneities in an entirely new geographic setting, showing that forms of cooperation are possible between and across difference. Another contextual difference for the Farm was the influence and inclusion of Black farmers. Ramírez (2015) argues that food sovereignty has stayed within the context of Indigenous studies and Black activists have utilized the language of food justice instead. This is an important note because the few Black people that were part of the Farm had been former Black Panthers from South Central (Kennedy, 2008). The Black Panther's free breakfast programs promoted

autonomy in urban Black communities through self-sufficiency (Hillard, 2008). Autonomy bridges struggles between various diasporic communities who in an entirely new geographic setting want to create food systems that support them and their communities.

For the South Central farmers, autonomy became central to their struggle for food enacting a political practice of communal self-governance that allowed for them to care for the land and continue to transmit ancestral ways of knowing. As Indigenous peoples in diaspora their struggles to feed their communities and care for the land are not based on claims to sovereignty (as in a relationship with the state). Instead, the articulation of autonomy (popular in Latin American contexts where "sovereignty" is not utilized) opens room to understand Indigenous people who are mobile and who despite no legal claims to the territory have a deep relationship with the land. The SCF's spirit of autonomy offered another way of growing food in Los Angeles outside of large-scale industrial agricultural production.

This chapter expands Indigenous food sovereignty scholarship in the United States, which has primarily focused on individual Native American nations in rural areas. I specifically contribute to conceptualizations of Indigenous food sovereignty by focusing on Indigenous migrants from Latin America now living in urban areas such as Los Angeles. Urban areas, unlike rural spaces, do not always have large spaces to grow food and common places such as the SCF are often inter-tribal, meaning they bring together Indigenous peoples from diverse geographical areas. These dynamics make for a radically different way of building food sovereignty. After reviewing the literature, I will draw on oral histories and archival interviews shared by the South Central farmers to understand what Indigenous food sovereignty means for displaced Indigenous communities in urban Los Angeles. I argue that for the South Central farmers food sovereignty is

articulated as a struggle for autonomy which is practiced and maintained by caring for the land and transmitting their traditional knowledges to the farm.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Food Geographies

Food Sovereignty was first articulated by campesino-farmers of the global South through the Via Campesina organization (McMichael, 2014). Via Campesina emerged in 1996 in response to neoliberal agricultural policies that were adversely affecting poor rural farmers across the globe. In 2007 the definition was revisited and came to be defined in the Declaration of Nyeleni stating: "Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable method, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Misehuah & Hoover, 2019, pg. 7). This declaration was named after a Malian peasant woman who fed her community and was signed in writing by 500 peasants, farmworkers, and food producer representatives from 80 different countries. Food sovereignty uplifted people's rights to protect their own seeds and create their own food systems. The conversation and practice of food sovereignty also challenged the preceding concept of "food security" which focused on access to food without thinking about the larger system of where food/seeds come from and the right to grow culturally relevant food (Misehuah & Hoover, 2019; Reese, 2019). Food security does not consider the conditions under which food is produced or distributed. Food security efforts tend to source from agribusiness corporations that employ exploitative labor and environmental practices. Food security does not tackle the root of the problem or move beyond problems of access. Food sovereignty offered a way to ensure sustainable food production and distribution which centered the well-being of the environment and the workers. La Via Campesina's articulation of food sovereignty has been helpful to support communities' efforts to build their own food systems that are culturally and politically

relevant and resilient. Yet their definition has stayed broadly within farm worker (campesino) frameworks in rural areas and does not always capture Indigenous people's particular relationships to land and food in urban spaces.

Indigenous peoples across North America have also begun to articulate their own food sovereignty centered on place-based histories, struggles, and knowledge systems (Hoover, 2017; Misehuah & Hoover, 2019; Whyte, 2017). Indigenous food sovereignty is helpful for understanding what localized food systems can look like for Indigenous peoples particularly from United States and Canada. Elizabeth Hoover (2017) defines it as "a reconnection to land-based food and political systems" and seeks to uphold "sacred responsibilities to nurture relationships with our land, culture, spirituality, and future generations" (p. 11). Kyle Whyte (2018) Potawatomi climate/environmental justice scholar also notes the importance of studying the histories of colonialism resulting in displacement and disconnection which have disrupted and remade Indigenous people's relationships to food. Indigenous food sovereignty scholars have focused on various aspects of foodways in the US/Canada including such as reclaiming native seeds (White, 2019); the connection between food and health (Lindholm, 2019; Livingston; 2019; Mihesuah, 2017); Indigenous cooking (Mihesuah, 2019), creating collective farms (Chang et al, 2019); traditional ecological knowledge (Cajete, 1999; Kimmerer, 2013; Salmón, 2012); and agricultural practices (Clarke, 2019; Wall & Masayesva, 2019). These various food sovereignty projects tackle the importance of the relationship between colonialism, land, and food in their own geographies and contexts. As Mihesuah and Hoover (2019) make clear, "Indigenous food sovereignty is not focused only on *rights to* land, food, and the ability to control a production system, but also *responsibilities to* and culturally, ecologically, and spiritually appropriate *relationships with* elements of those systems" (p. 11). Thus, this particular

type of food sovereignty encompasses the ways Indigenous peoples work to feed themselves and their communities and is grounded in ancestral epistemologies of responsibility and relationality. Responsibility and relationality are especially relevant and ongoing for Indigenous people in diaspora who are removed from their ancestral lands but seek to recreate relationships with the land.

While not all Indigenous peoples within the US agree with the use of the word sovereignty since the word infers a colonial relationship to the nation state, most still find it useful to articulate how they will build food systems independent from the settler colonial nation-state (Hoover, 2017; Mihesuah & Hoover, 2019). In fact, Indigenous peoples in the US who experience "nested sovereignty" (Simpson, 2014) mobilize to create what Harjo (2019) calls an *este cate* sovereignty, or radical sovereignty that is not dependent nor fixed to the dominant definition of settler colonial national sovereignty. Still, this notion of sovereignty for Indigenous migrants is even more complicated since their relationship to the state is neither formal nor secure. This tenuous relationship to territory makes it easier for migrants to be continuously displaced as was the case with the South Central Farm. Furthermore, it is important to discuss what food sovereignty encompasses for Indigenous migrants who are rebuilding relationships to place in diaspora as what Charles Sepulveda (2018) calls *Kuuyam* (the Tongva word for "guest").

Place has been central to Indigenous food sovereignty practices, and it is helpful to approach these conversations through a geographic lens. Food geographies as a field has focused on tending to the importance of space/place by studying Black food geographies (Ramírez, 2015; Reese, 2019), land histories (Brown et al., 2020), repatriation (Gilbert & Williams, 2020), and praxis (Hammelman et al., 2020; Reynolds et al., 2020). Many of these studies are focused on

resistance: whether about the lack of access to food, places to grow food, or the lack of concern by White environmentalists in urban spaces with the needs of impoverished communities and people of color (Ramírez, 2015). Geography allows us to be attentive to the ways in which Indigenous displaced people come to enact placemaking in diaspora to form food sovereignty projects (discussed in the following chapter). Furthermore, it helps understand the spatial strategies of resistance Indigenous peoples use as a response to lack of urban land/space to grow nourishing food communally.

While anthropologists and other food scholars have focused on themes of food in Indigenous communities from Latin America, what it means to practice food sovereignty as Indigenous migrants has yet to be fully explored (Peña et al., 2017). Indigenous food sovereignty has been taken seriously in US Native American contexts yet but less so regarding other Indigenous displaced communities in urban spaces who wish to divest from the powerful agribusiness food system that actually dispossessed many of them from farming in their home countries and forced their migration to the United States. As these migrants do not have permanent or legal relationships with the state to assert any type of formal sovereignty, in this chapter I consider what food sovereignty means in the particular case of the South Central Farm which has since used as an urban farm model. South Central farmers' own accounts, scholarship about the Farm, and archival material offers a way forward for conceptualizing *food autonomy*.

The South Central Farm: Cultivating Autonomy

The South Central Farmers articulated their struggle as one for food sovereignty. This section shows that their definition of food sovereignty is particular to their geographic and political contexts. Rather than wanting or claiming any sort of formal sovereignty, as in a relationship with or recognition from the state, the farmers talked about *autonomia* (autonomy).

Autonomy is helpful to understand the urban spatial context, where there are various Indigenous communities without any rights sovereign or otherwise to land or territory. The language of "sovereignty" has been predominately used by government agencies that impose western understandings of self-governance. Autonomy instead derives from a longer Indigenous Latin American tradition that centers communalism and the ability to self-govern, self-name, and transform on one's own terms (Escobar, 2018).

I continue to use the term food sovereignty throughout this thesis because there is room for the definition to expand and transform. The SC farmers' definition for food sovereignty is an example of employing and articulating autonomy, which allowed them to continue to care for the land and transmit traditional agricultural knowledge in diaspora. The next section shows how autonomy functions as both a spirit and practice that allows for food sovereignty to be carried out. Two examples of food autonomy in practice include caring for the land and transmitting traditional knowledge.

Toward Food Sovereignty and Autonomy

South Central farmer Rufina Juárez (2010) clarifies the difference between food security and food sovereignty for the Farm as this quote indicates: "Food security is limited to ensuring that sufficient amount of safe food is produced without taking into account the kind of food produced, how, where and on what scale it is produced" (p. 3). SCF farmers were concerned with not only gaining access to food but also with larger questions of where food comes from and how it is produced. This is especially significant in the context of the SCF where most of the farmers came from campesino backgrounds and knew the harsh conditions of agribusiness crop production. She goes on to explain that food sovereignty is another way of growing food outside of globalized or neoliberal food systems:

> When the SCFs talk about food sovereignty, we mean having control over the system of the types of foods that are available and meant for our community to eat! It matters to us that the food we eat does not exploit people who grow, pick, and distribute it (…) Food Sovereignty is a threat because it is more than securing food in the bellies of the poor. (Juárez, p. 5)

Food sovereignty for the South Central farmers became part of their conscious effort to exit exploitative agribusiness working conditions toward creating their own community-based autonomous food system. These participants envisioned the need for more farms like South Central to exist in every *barrio* (poor neighborhoods of color) in the United States, which would radically transform both access to food and the ways that people relate to their food and to the land.

South Central farmer Tezozomoc and the South Central Farmers (2017) shared in an essay entitled "Fragmentary Food Flows: Autonomy in the 'Unsignified' Food Deserts of the Real":

> Capital faces the challenge of our epistemic refusal and strategic "delinking" from the machinery of capture. You gave us food deserts? We refuse to eat there. Instead, we are creating autonomous spaces that lie beyond the reach of this commodity relation to food. (p. 229)

For South Central farmers the importance of autonomy as a concept is to "delink" or move away from the harmful dominant food system in the US that controls the ways people relate to food, to those who produce as COVID-19 made so startlingly clear, and by extension the land. They refused to engage with the dominant food system which makes people dependent on systems that do not care about people, the land, or environment. Instead of viewing food as a commodity, the farmers grew crops that were imbued with cultural significance as well as political intentions to re-kindle traditional ways of relating to food/land. In Mercado's 2006 documentary, the farmers emphasized the importance of decentralizing the control of food by large corporations because those feed only a few people. They also indicate how the Farm was offered visible examples of

what self-governance, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance could look like for a poor community. Each of these ideas offer critical insights of an autonomous food system and the meaning of collective power to feed your community. Pablo Gonzales (2011) argues that the SCF farmers were inspired by the Latin American Indigenous and campesino movements that were struggling for autonomy from below, rather than acquiescence to oppressive power from above. Autonomy in an urban space requires a different way of relating to land, place, and people because it requires deepening relations with your community members to depend on each other outside of the state.

Figure 3. Sign at the entrance of the SCF. Photo by Jonathan McIntosh (CC BY 2.5, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=774949).

Figure 3, taken at the South Central Farm in May of 2006, shows a sign that reads "Our garden provides: Food, Safety, Park-Open Space, Family Activities, Self Reliance." Self-reliance stands out because again, while the farm's overall function was to meet the needs of the community by providing a safe space to grow food, it was also planting ideas that they could rely

on each other rather than on dominant food systems. Reese (2017) puts forth a theoretical framework of geographies of self-reliance which highlights "how the everyday lives of residents disrupt the dichotomy between death and survival to reveal how hope and visions for an uncertain future inspire small-scale food justice work" (p. 408). For Reese, geographies of self-reliance are both rooted in a commitment to community noting that the "self" in self-reliance is interconnected and that self-reliance is a form of agency that resists precarious conditions. In particular, she notes the long struggle of Black organizations taking it upon themselves to feed their communities. Self-reliance then functions as both a response but also alternative to dominant food systems that exclude and exploit communities of color. In similar ways the notion of autonomy functions to articulate a separation or refusal to engage with dominant settler colonial systems.

I articulate a sense of food autonomy that is connected to food sovereignty yet speaks to a different relationship to the state and land specific to Indigenous peoples in diaspora. As Indigenous peoples in diaspora have no claims to territory in the United States, autonomy can be enacted at the day-to-day level working against and outside dominant systems. Instead of seeking recognition from the state or state-sponsored support, autonomy is practiced at the community scale to address local needs by relying on each other. As Indigenous peoples in diaspora, autonomy is also a practice that is mobile and cannot be contained to land/space. It is also important to recognize that the type of autonomy the SCF practiced was inspired by Latin American Indigenous politics of life (Escobar, 2018). Therefore, the SCF was enacting autonomy that aimed to care for all of life (human and more than human) in the region working against settler colonial structures of violence. Autonomy also resonates with what Harjo (2019)

calls radical sovereignty, which refers to the formal, informal, and mobile ways Indigenous peoples create their own ways of caring for their community outside of the state.

There are different ways to create autonomy, and many have spatial implications such as having your own land, place, or body to self-govern. One of the ways the South Central farmers were able to build an autonomous food system was by having a place to grow food, in this case they had centralized collective farm land. Autonomy is tied to land, as much as it is tied to food, seeds, and life. Thus, it is important to understand relationships to land that were formed at the Farm and what it means to care for the land and build mutual relationships with land in diaspora.

Caring for the Land

This thesis builds on theorizations of care in the contexts of social movements (Herrera, 2015; Hobart & Kneese, 2020; Spade, 2020) and relationships to land/soils (de la Bellacasa, 2017; Kimmerer, 2013). Caring for the land at the Farm was forged through a deep-seated relationship with the land before migrants arrived in Los Angeles. Juárez (2010) shares:

> For us the struggle to save the farm was for our ancestral and historical right to the land. It was a small-14 acre farm; the only place that we could use to teach and transfer our traditional knowledge of growing food and to regain our relationships with the land, our Earth. To me, as a woman—and I believe I carry the message for all women in our struggle—the movement is to reclaim our fire; our food justice as Indigenous people. This is the crucial aspect of the struggle for environmental justice, without which we cannot attain food sovereignty and autonomy for survival of our communities. (p. 5)

The farmers' relationship to land stemmed from their histories of migrating from Indigenous communities in Latin America and/or being campesinos. Caring for the land persisted despite migration through various geographies and colonial regimes. Kimmerer (2013) makes clear that the stakes for caring for the land are high and are about a struggle for life itself asking us "to care for the land as if our lives, both materially and spiritually, depended on it" (p. 9). Kimmerer also reminds us that this relationship to land builds on responsibility and reciprocity, which then

creates a new commitment to place as migrants. As we learn from Juárez and the experience of the farmers, regaining a relationship to land allowed them to not only grow food but pass down traditional knowledge for future generations, ensuring that life continues beyond the parameters of the Farm. This relationship to land is what will ensure a future for food sovereignty and autonomy.

Caring for the land is also about reciprocity and responsibility, a mutual relationship recognizing that when we care for the land, the land will care for us. Building on the previous quote, Juárez (2010) adds:

> My vision as an Indigenous woman involved in environmental and food justice starts with the fundamental principle that we cannot separate the environment from Mother earth, traditional knowledge from technological advancements, the right to eat from the right to grow your own traditional food, and autonomy from community self-governance of land and water. Here I am including our four-legged and our crawling, sliding, swimming, and flying brothers and sisters as well. Furthermore, this can only be accomplished when you have a relationship with and responsibility for, our Mother Earth and her resources. Ultimately, the only right that matters is truly the right to fulfill the sacred obligation of caring for our mother. (p. 5)

The earth is alive, often a difficult notion for the capitalist societies of the West to understand. But on the Farm Indigenous Mesoamerican cosmologies showed a different way of relating to the earth based on inter-dependence and responsibility. The ecological practices of care on the Farm were also ones that foregrounded a responsibility to life, mother earth, which is why the farmers enacted ancestral methods of growing food which are understood as "permaculture" or "regenerative" practices. Additionally, de la Bellacasa (2017) states that "permaculture care ethics consider that humans are not the only ones caring for the earth and its beings—we are in relations of mutual care" (p. 161). These relationships on the Farm with the land and each other were ones of mutual care and as Juárez mentions, they were also part of a "sacred obligation." A sacred obligation to care and protect mother earth and life more largely. Despite being in

diaspora due to violent displacement, Indigenous communities continue to care for the land in ways that challenge notions of land as property or something to be owned. By caring for the land, they also employed a radical care for each other in struggle. This care is a responsibility that travels with migrants and continues to be passed down as a teaching and practice that carries on beyond the Farm's life.

Recreating Home: Passing Down Traditional Knowledge

A South Central farmer's day began for many in the early hours of the morning where many would travel on bus and walk to open the gates of the Farm (Kennedy, 2008). Whoever arrived first would open the gates to the garden and begin checking their plants, cultivating, or harvesting what they had grown. The plots were filled with diverse crops such as squash, bananas, avocados, *guajes* (tamarind), corn, and much more. There were over 100 gated plots on the farm, where vines and cacti grew over the fencing making fluid boundaries that sought to enclose each plot. Techniques of intercropping were employed to ensure the soil could continue to be healthy. The greenery of the SCF was visible from a distance, standing out as one of the few green spaces close to downtown Los Angeles. When inside many farmers felt transported far from the urban realities they faced. The plots also included areas with chairs, tables, and small stoves because these were places where they could come together to share stories, foods, and rest. The farm was a place to *convivir* (creating life together by spend time together) and a place to ensure knowledge was planted for future generations.

The transmission of traditional knowledge at the SCF was important to farmer visions for a different way of growing food. The Farm was an intergenerational place where elders were able to grow alongside children and continue to pass down this knowledge that was not always possible in other contexts (Alberto Tlatoa, pers. comm., November 8, 2020; Radio Zapatista,

2006). In an interview with the *LA Times* Alberto Tlatoa discusses the reasons why his family decided to stay on the Farm for so long, "Our parents always wanted us to learn these farms were not just about putting something in our mouths, but to learn to grow our culture" (Kuipers, 2005). Growing ancestral foods became the main source of knowledge at the Farm, foods that many could only find there due to seeds being passed down from family to family for generations. The South Central farmers in a 2007 press release stated, "Each plot comprised an impressive collection of diverse native crops sown from heirloom seeds that have been kept and conserved by families for countless generations." Growing these native seeds and foods allowed the farmers to enact an important part of food sovereignty which is to grow culturally relevant foods and have a different foundation for their food system that was not exploitative of the land. By growing a diverse range of foods, the Farm challenged the industrial monocultures that defined agribusiness farms. The SCF followed the crop cycles and grew food ancestral to Mesoamerica recreating polycultures or milpa ecologies.

Milpa ecologies are traditional ways of intercropping certain foods such as corn, beans, and squash along with other crops to form an interdependent diverse garden plot. Devon Peña (2005) conducted an in-depth study found over 100 diverse crops were grown on the Farm and states, "El jardin [the garden] is a source of plants for medicine and traditional recipes; it is a diverse polycultural agroecological space that biophysically and symbolically connects the migrant to her origin community. This allows for a transnationalization of a sense of place" (Peña, 2005). Peña wrote about the individual plots on the Farm and how farmers cultivated foods and plants (Figure 4) that were reminiscent of those from their homelands. A new sense of home was created through the cultivation of garden plots and practice of milpa ecologies that they brought to this blighted urban center. In one of Peña's interviews with the South Central

farmers, a Zapotec women mentioned, “I planted this garden because it is a little space like home. I grow the same plants that I had back in my garden in Oaxaca. We can eat like we ate at home and this makes us feel like ourselves. It allows us to keep a part of who we are after coming to the United States” (p. 8). This resembles that which Alberto Tlatoa (pers, comm., November 8, 2020) shared with me:

> I got to see so many elders share the recetas de medicina (medicinal recipes) because also a lot of people grew medicinal herbs as well too so definitely it was just a hub of ancestral knowledge and I didn’t really value it until I got older, and that’s why I continue to do this work and advocate for it because I see the importance of it and I want to make sure that other people have the same autonomy and knowledge about growing our ancestral foods.

Tlatoa recognizes that the foods grown were medicine and were imbued with ancestral knowledge shared by the elders. As Indigenous migrants coming to live in an urban space, growing food in a traditional way was difficult due to lack of access to land. The Farm provided the space for milpa ecologies to be practiced in an urban setting and to engage in inter-tribal foodways. The milpa ecologies practiced also had in mind future generations who could still maintain their ancestral commitments to land and their foods.

Figure 4. Native Mesoamerican Foods (Corn, Tomatillos, Tomatoes, and Guajes) grown at the SCF. Photo by Jonathan McIntosh (CC BY 2.5, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=774949).

The SCF farmers believe the Farm was demolished because it reaffirmed to the community that other ways of growing and distributing food was possible in urban spaces.

During the struggle to save the farm Rufina Juárez (2006) gave a speech to the farmers who at that point were protesting daily, in which she stated:

> This is the only place where the farmers can eat the food they grow; It is a very different struggle of farmers who cannot eat the food they grow. Where they cannot pass down the teachings to their children. That is the difference. That is why we're getting punished. For trying to uplift our community and teach our children what we have forgotten. And what is that? It is the traditional knowledge of how to cultivate a plant. (*Aqui Estamos Y No Nos Vamos* Documentary)

The South Central Farm worked against the violent alienation to land/food produced through corporate farms in their homelands and in diaspora that were dependent on Indigenous migrant labor. At the SCF the whole ecosystem created was predicated on sacred relationships to land, place, and past/present/future generations. These relationships and responsibilities were seen as incompatible with the way "farms" are designed under capitalist modes of production. As Juárez mentions, the SCF was being threatened with eviction because they were planting seeds of rebellion that showed another way of growing food was on the horizon.

Conclusion

This chapter contributes to the literature and theorizations of food sovereignties that vary by place and community. The South Central farmers enacted food sovereignty and grounded it in a struggle and vision of autonomy. Autonomy allows farmers to exit or move away from dominant exploitative food systems, to create instead a new vision of growing food in a collective way with the land/environment in mind. Thus, the notion of caring for the land plays a central role in how Indigenous migrants come to grow food in the city, being both based on their historical relationships to the land and a larger obligation for the sacred earth. Lastly food sovereignty for the South Central farmers was committed to transmitting their ancestral knowledge especially because of their migrant position, of being in a new place and wanting to recreate a sense of home for them and future generations.

Since the demise of the South Central Farm, other autonomous food geographies that resist capitalist and settler colonial systems have emerged across Los Angeles. These autonomous food geographies include gardens, farms, seed libraries and much more. These sites of food production are lived and experienced outside of the capitalist food order and are predicated on Indigenous values that center life. City spaces are shaped through capitalist modes of production in urban landscapes, placing communities of color at higher risk of environmental hazards and access to food. In response, Indigenous migrants seek to create places for a dignified life. For the South Central farmers and contemporary food movements: autonomy starts with growing your own food.

Autonomous food geographies are networks that challenge the state, by reasserting the primacy of restoring land and our relationships with each other. Land, particularly its access, thus becomes a central concern for Indigenous migrants in Los Angeles. This raises the major question: who is allowed access to land? where does one cultivate food autonomy? Access to land is an ongoing struggle in a city designed to allow racial capitalism to thrive, making Indigenous migrants and people of color dependent on this system to survive but also leaving them without adequate food for nourishment. The struggle for land is neither limited to nor guided by the concept of ownership. Rather, Indigenous migrants understand land as a relationship, as a multi-species kinship, and a site for the struggle for life itself. Thus, in the process of finding land to grow food communally, many do so informally, not asking for permission from the city or having formal property rights. The next chapter brings the academic literature on placemaking into conversation with abolition geographies/ecologies to understand the ways Indigenous migrants create their own places of life in urban landscapes through food

autonomy projects. Contemporary decentralized gardens that have formed reveal new ways of cultivating food autonomy despite limited access to land in the city.

CHAPTER 4: LIFE-MAKING PLACES

What Tezo taught me
last night standing among the fields
peopled by organic chard
rábano
zanahoria
is that to be
tribe is to be
without property
with land abundant
all around.

"Losing a plot of soil would break us
had we believed it was ours."
How to hold two thoughts
in your head at once
without the heart exploding.

The land is ours and it is not.
They move us off
we return to another
field of food.

This is the poetry of the campesina
who holds a piece (a place) of dirt
fertile and fecund
in the banks of her memory
in the bowl of two hands together. (Cherrie Moraga)

The South Central Farm was a struggle for food autonomy, land, and life. Through their labor on the Farm, members established a sense of home contoured by traditional ecological practices, foods, and community making. This chapter outlines the placemaking practices carried out in the SCF that I define as *life-making, life-giving, and life-affirming*. This triad allows for connections to be made between placemaking and food sovereignty struggles where life is made (producing food), given (regeneration of land/community), and affirmed (supporting the continuation of cultural practices) in gardening spaces. I argue such placemaking practices center relationships with the land, water, air, and the more-than-human world. The chapter then

discusses the demolition of the SCF which marked the end of the physical farm, but also the beginning of another way of growing food in the city. The poem entitled “South Central Farmers” by Xicana Indigena Writer, Cherrie Moraga, narrates the importance of relationships to land that continue beyond the Farm and that are invented anew through decentralized forms of placemaking.

In what follows, I first review the relevant literature on placemaking and abolition geographies and then outline key placemaking practices and the worldview/relationship to land that informs them. In the third section I detail the emergence of contemporary decentralized gardens to demonstrate how the placemaking practices which made, gave, and affirmed life through the SCF continued after its demolition. The spirit of the South Central Farm and political project of food autonomy lives on today through the creation of intentionally organized decentralized gardens across Los Angeles. I draw attention to the types of food autonomy projects created post-SCF and how people who were at the struggle to save the Farm went on to create various types of gardens. I pay particular attention to decentralized gardens, because they offer a way for more neighborhoods and people to get involved in cultivating their own food in the growing absence of centralized gardens in LA. The three decentralized gardening collectives in this chapter describe decentralization as a spatial strategy resulting from not having formal access to large plots of land leading organizations and communities to grow food in smaller sites including backyards and sidewalks. Decentralization, as in the proliferation of smaller sites for growing food, continues the struggle for food sovereignty and autonomy by creating life-making places networked across Los Angeles.

Placemaking and Abolition Geographies

The literature on placemaking has not always considered the role of or relationships with the environment, land, and more-than-human life. The South Central Farm was an example of how all of these come together in relationship through placemaking. I draw upon placemaking and abolition geographies along with Indigenous ecologies to think of *place as a web of relations between the environment, land, and multiple forms of life.*

Placemaking is a process that involves various understandings of place and desires for what place ought to be. Pierce et. al (2010) describe placemaking as often resulting in competing place frames where conflict may arise. Some may utilize placemaking to enact violence over people and space, such as through process of gentrification, displacement, and exclusion (Burns and Berbary, 2020; Wilhoit Larson, 2019). Thus, placemaking is not inherently oppositional to systems of power, but does have a radical potential to disrupt the norms of a place. This thesis contributes to investigations of placemaking by and for marginalized communities for emancipatory purposes. In this thesis placemaking is employed as the process of making the spaces marginalized people inhabit more livable. It recognizes the myriad ways communities imbue places with their ways of knowing and being (Grant 2018; Lara, 2018; Torres 2020). Juan Lara (2018) posits that "placemaking is a process initiated by groups of individuals and involves everything that can be observed at the eye level where what began as a mere street layout evolves into a series of networks of human interactions and activities, i.e., places." (p. 30). Lara emphasizes that placemaking is a process and action, actions taken by Indigenous migrants to address food insecurity leads to their placemaking. He notes that placemaking should consider that the "physical, social, ecological, cultural, and even spiritual qualities of place are intimately

entwined" (p. 31). But the political is also entwined in placemaking, as geographers have emphasized in the relationship between placemaking and freedom struggles.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2017), concept of abolition geographies, urges us to consider how placemaking can create liberatory spaces. Katherine McKittrick (2006) argues that it is imperative to highlight Black placemaking in order to affirm Black life despite ongoing systemic violence. Abolition Geographies shows that placemaking is not only about enduring in a place but about the desire to make it into a place of life (for people and the environment), starting from the "homely premise that freedom is place" (Gilmore, 2017, p. 231)." I build on these considerations by emphasizing that placemaking must also consider the ecological political ecological relationship between people, land, and the environment.

As Indigenous ecologies shows us, relationships between the human and more-than-human world are in co-operation with each other (Daigle, 2017; Estes, 2019; Simpson, 2017). When Indigenous migrants make place, they keep the well-being of all relations in mind, taking seriously their responsibility to the more-than-human world. I employ placemaking to show the material ways that Indigenous migrants come to create places of life while also constructing alternatives to dominant food systems. Placemaking also helps understand the metaphysical importance of Indigenous relationships to land that sustains communities' cultural connections. The relationships (to land and each other) forged through the processes of placemaking creates spaces that are both physically rooted while also mobile, allowing for these practices to extend through decentralized gardening.

The process of placemaking through growing food in the city is also tied to the struggle of caring for the land as a life-giving force. Indigenous scholars such as Leanne Simpson (2017) have discussed the importance of life stating that Indigenous systems are meant to bring forth

more life instead of destroying it. She writes "our way of living was designed to generate life—not just for human life but the life of all living things" (p. 4). Winona Laduke and Deborah Cowen (2020) challenge the idea of "Wiindigo" (Cannibal) cannibalistic infrastructures that are excessive and settler- imposed that destroy land and life across Turtle Island. Instead, Indigenous infrastructures are life-giving and central to Indigenous communities and ways of knowing. Articulations of "life" as something to be cared for, also appear in Indigenous Latin American contexts as seen in the work of Colombian campesino soil practitioners (Lyons, 2020) who create life amidst poisoned landscapes. The Zapatista struggle in Chiapas led to creating autonomous communities where they say *nuestra lucha es por la vida* (our struggle is for life) and against development projects that hurt mother earth (EZLN, 2016). In all these varied Indigenous contexts the struggle to defend and take care of all living things is vital to their ways of knowing. Abolition ecologies builds on Gilmore's work by showing the importance of the places people have made in relation to life giving forces such as the land, water, atmospheric environments where places are made (Heynen & Ybarra, 2020; Mei-Sign, 2020). Creating life-affirming, life-giving, and life-making places builds on these articulations by focusing on how Indigenous migrants are building autonomous food systems predicated on life.

The South Central Farm was an example of resisting and creating life-affirming places in "inhuman geographies" or "forgotten places" (Gilmore, 2007; McKittick, 2013). Even though the SCF was demolished, Gilmore (2017) urges us to "not only to identify central contradictions—inherent vices—in regimes of dispossession, but also, urgently, to show how radical consciousness in action resolves into liberated life-ways, however provisional, present and past" (pp. 227–28). Therefore, the contemporary rise of decentralized gardening, the development of numerous small garden sites, shows how Indigenous places of life and food

sovereignty persists, enacting placemaking and life-making practices across various geographies in Los Angeles.

Life-Making, Life-giving, and Life-affirming Places

South Central Los Angeles is inhabited predominately by a Black, Latinx, and Indigenous population. What gave the area value was its proximity to the railroad that eased the flow of commodities from the port to the workplaces located there and the poorly paid labor force employed in hundreds of warehouses (De Lara, 2018). It was a place to house warehouses not people. Consequently, the people who lived there were largely left to create their own places, networks, and infrastructures of life and care. The South Central Farm was one of these places that emerged out of the community's conditions of exploitation. The SCF came to be a place of life that stood out amidst the industrialized region.

Rufina Juárez's written testimony tells the history of the South Central Farm as deriving from the struggles working class people of color faced in the city which led them to transform a 14-acre plot of land in the most contaminated and polluted area of the southeastern region of LA, into a fully functional traditionally designed farm. Rufina recalls the moment the Farm received the eviction letter from the LA Regional Food Bank in 2003 which thanked them for their work but asked them to pack up and leave the property. The property owner and developer's plan targeted the land for the construction of more warehouses and a 2.6-acre soccer field. Being made to feel disposable was a common experience for people of color in South Central, who had already been facing hazardous environmental conditions.

Figure 5. Sign at the South Central Farm. Photo by Jonathan McIntosh.

Rufina (2017) writes, "The U.S. government gives priority to international trade over peoples subsistence and right to autonomous livelihoods" (p. 31). The farmers struggle and right for food sovereignty and autonomy were foreclosed. The community demanded to know why in a food-insecure community the city government would allow the demolition of the only autonomous farm in the area. As Rufina states:

> Food Sovereignty is a threat because the work is about more than securing food in the bellies of the poor. The work disrupts the norms of securing food contracts from major corporations in the food industry. We realized the SCF was a true threat to the establishment—we were a threat to the pocketbooks of the local McDonald's, Domino's Pizza, La Superior, and Food4Less. Can you imagine what our communities would look like if we had a South Central farm in every barrio throughout the Unites States? (p. 33)

The South Central Farm as a movement for food sovereignty and autonomy, predicated on a dignified life, was contagious. Rufina asserts that growing food in South Central disrupted the dominant food system by creating a system that could feed the local community and rely less on agribusiness systems. When Rufina asks us to imagine what a SCF would look like in "every barrio" (neighborhood), she recognizes the power of being able to feed oneself and how the SCF was part of that larger struggle to go beyond food security. As another South Central farmer,

Tezozomoc, shared, “There’s a bigger thing we’re trying to get at. It’s the concept of the commons. Livable cities require commons. Our principal stand is about making our cities more livable” (quoted in Mark, 2006, para. 5). The SCF cultivated and had the possibility to inspire the creation of other autonomous, communal, and life-making geographies. The city rendered South Central a space for warehouses, but the people reimagined and redesigned South Central otherwise. Through their practices of placemaking, the farmers created new possibilities of how land could be utilized in the city, creating a site of freedom, belonging, care, autonomy, life and dignity.

Making Places of Life

In the previous chapter I began conceptualizing Indigenous migrant food sovereignty as grounded in autonomy, care for the land, and the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. Examples mentioned in that chapter show us types of placemaking practices that brought about life on the farm including regeneration of soils, garden design, and relationships created.

The first example of placemaking was the initial process of healing the land and creating a healthy environmental foundation for the farm. Soil regeneration was the first practice the farmers had to enact when they were given the land in 1992. The Farm’s foundation was the contaminated remnant of the warehouses that were there and filled with trash, concrete, and toxins. But the farmers did not see this piece of land as innately toxic; they saw it as land to care for, land still alive needing regeneration. Alberto Tlatoa (pers. comm., November 8, 2020) recalls being a young boy when South Central farmers began removing the trash from the 14 acres of land and their efforts to bring in outside soil to create new foundation for the farm. The farmers commented that they helped “make the soil live again” (as quoted in Nader, 2006), that caring for it to the point of restoration and making this type of placemaking life-giving. As

Leanne Simpson mentions, in the Anishinaabeg society "the purpose of life then is continuous rebirth, it's to promote more life" (Klein, 2013, para. 21). Similarly, farmers utilized Indigenous ecological practices from North America such as practicing ceremony and planting seeds (such as sunflowers) that were known to bring back life to the soil.

Another form of placemaking on the Farm was in garden design. As seen in the pictures of the farm (from Alberto Tlatoa's personal collection) and documentaries such as *The Garden* (Kennedy, 2008) or *Aqui Eestamos Y No Nos Vamos* (Mercado, 2006), the farmers aimed to recreate agricultural spaces such as those in their homelands. The farmers created milpa ecologies by planting traditional foods such as beans, corn, and squash together using ancestral techniques in their growing process. They intercropped a variety of foods creating diverse plots. Devon Peña, an anthropologist and close friend to the farmers, shared in a 2006 keynote that "The events at South Central are ultimately about the relationship between people and the plants they cultivate understood as a pathway to their own wholesome identity as people and community place" (p. 4). Peña makes note of the various ways the farmers created what he calls "autotopographical spaces", a process of self-defining through placemaking. He provides the example of how they used the nopal cactus as a fence on the Farm. Metal fencing divided many of the plots but many of the farmers shifted to live fencing with nopal resembling those in Mexico. This also provided them edible fruits (known as tunas) and leaves for cooking. Placemaking was accomplished through introducing seeds and traditional food plants in this urban space. The food was used both for subsistence and in the design of the farm. Through the process of placemaking a diverse green space, the farmers created life by growing food for their community in a distraught urban industrialized corridor. The South Central Farm was the largest

urban farm in the United States and was an example of local life-making places, its greenery radiating amidst the inescapable smog.

Relationships are also central to the creation of place (Massey, 2005). The creation of the Farm helped create and sustain community relationships that centered around food but also promoted community organizing (once the struggle to save the Farm began). It was a place where farmers reimagined social relations and human-environment relationships. Alberto Tlatoa (pers. comm., November 8, 2020) recalls the ways the place function to build and strengthened community relationships:

> It was a place where people could barter stuff and trade stuff, like yo tengo aguacates [I have avocados] I give you some, you give me some guayabas kinda thing, right? So, we really built the relationship of land and people and we built a community space because we didn't have any community space in our neighborhood.

For Tlatoa, the Farm was a place where they grew food together and created forms of sociality grounded in their ancestral ways of knowing. These practices were life-giving because they ensured the well-being and life of the farmers by feeding/caring for each other. As Tlatoa mentions this was also a community space and when the struggle to save the Farm began, it took on a new meaning by becoming a place for organizing and politicization. Meetings were held in the open spaces where tables were placed, and food was often made to be shared. These were spaces of collective decision making, which meant sometimes there were moments of joy, consensus, and conflict. The struggle for place also politicized many of the members who before had feared speaking up due to their undocumented status. This allowed for many members to participate in new ways and relating to each other not just as co-gardeners but as organizers fighting to save a place that they had created. A new type of responsibility imbued these relationships solidifying their struggle for life.

The relationships to land created at the Farm produced material support (through the production of food) but also a sacred place. As Tezozomoc reminds us in the documentary *The Garden*:

> I think sometimes in these kinds of struggles we lose a little bit of focus of what this really means for the community. It is as if I went to your community and I took down your temple, I took down your church, that is what we are talking about. These are sacred things, and you are taking away our way of life." (Kennedy, 2008, 57:00)

Tezozomoc mentions the SCF as sacred: the attacks on its right to exist became attacks on the people themselves, showing just how interconnected community and place are. The South Central Farm's placemaking practices were ultimately met with violent eviction over differing views and values of land and how place should be used.

Varying Worldviews and the Demolition of the Farm

In 2006 the South Central farmers were evicted, and the Farm was demolished. The struggle to save the farm, as Tezozomoc states, reflected "a collision of two different worldviews. One is about a symbiotic relationship with the nature that sustains us. The other is a utilitarian world view that thinks only about how we can use nature…" (quoted in Mark, 2006, para. 17). Land for the farmers was about relationship, about a responsibility to land. This relationship and responsibility to care for the land was severed by the property owner and officials who allowed the farmers' eviction. City officials protected the property owner and hundreds of families were left without a place to grow food and provide for their needs.

The farmers' autonomy made them a particular target for eviction. Rufina (2010) states:

> The families living and working on the farm in South Central LA represented what is going on in many parts of the world today – our traditional farming was brutally interrupted, and the people were de-rooted off the land. You cannot see it now, but our traditional agricultural practices helped us harvest the massive amount of food that we had on 14 acres in an urban setting. This model challenged the institutional definition of how urban land is supposed to be used and, more important, how we are supposed be organized to work" (p. 4)

The Farm allowed Indigenous migrants to replant their roots in the soil as displaced peoples but the process of eviction de-rooted them once again. A model of growing traditional foods in a place surrounded by warehouses challenged "how urban land is supposed to be used" (Rufina, 2010, p. 4). In a region zoned for industrial production, the property owner and city officials did not see SCF as contributing to capitalist production, marking it disposable. As a place of life, the Farm countered the pollution of land and the environment that was prevalent in South Central. Josefina, a South Central Farmer, states at the end of *The Garden* documentary, "Para mi es la historia de la vida. Porque sin tierra no somos nada. Que somos sin la tierra? Tu planta en el cemento halgo que vas a tener? Nada. Es vida simplemente. Es la vida." [For me this is the story of life. Because without land we are nothing. What are we without the earth? You try to plant something in the cement what will you have? Nothing. It is simply life. It is life]. This place of life was not only life-giving for the farmers but also for the soils, for the animals/critters, for the air, water, and so much more. This place of life made itself present in the community and challenged the logics of death, despite being violently demolished.

Gilmore (2017) states that abolition is about presence. Abolition geographies and ecologies are about making life where it is not expected. The presence of the South Central Farm amidst the absence of green spaces, of grocery stores, and nourishing food systems, was not enough to save the Farm given the political forces that opposed it. The stakes of the struggle are evident in remarks by the property owner Ralph Horowitz: "This has nothing to do with race or religion. This is an economic discussion. I purchased a piece of land and I have the right to do with it what I want" (Kennedy, 2008). Horowitz understood the right to land as being based on legal land titles, a product of the settler colonial project. Horowitz justified his decision to evict

the farmers by minimizing their care of the land and discrediting the food system being grown there:

> They have a group of people doing what I would call, basically doing weekend gardening on little plots of land. I have walked it on occasion, and it wasn't like walking through Iowa and having pleasant conversations with everybody, because I don't speak Spanish and um they didn't speak English. They were growing things like cactus and various sundry of other plants. I have never seen a list of the various plants that were grown there but the overwhelming impression you had as you walked through it, drove around it was there was a great deal of cactus type plants. (zutown, 2013)

Horowitz did not care about the significance of the South Central Farm or the radical possibilities of their placemaking. In fact, Rufina makes clear that the South Central Farmers did not like to be called gardeners because their effort was not a casual one or a hobby but a relationship to land and the necessity of survival. The type of food they grew was not legible to Horowitz who claimed only to see cactus even though the list of food they grew was extensive (Peña, 2006). By comparing the SCF farm system to monoculture commodity crops, he failed to acknowledge how the farmers were truly feeding families in the community. Horowitz claimed time and time again his reasons for closing the farm were not due to race, and yet even when they raised the money to buy the land back, he refused. Instead, the land was sold to a conglomerate of fashion warehouses and the rest of the land remains empty (Figure 7).

In archival newspapers images and statements, I routinely came across the remarks "aqui estamos y no nos vamos" [we are here, and we will not leave]. To make place in a city that deems you as a disposable labor force and as inferior because of undocumented status and Indigenous ethnicity, is a political and liberatory project. To make place when you have been displaced from your homelands and to grow familiar seeds when you are uprooted is a political and liberatory life making project. As Gilmore (2017) argues, abolition is literally about

changing place with the knowledge that you bring to a place, to build freedom in any way you can.

The South Central Farm played a significant role in the history of food sovereignty in Los Angeles. The farmers' collective vision for what an autonomous food system could look like in South Central has inspired the formation of many contemporary community gardens. Still the memory of land loss continues to sit in the hearts of many food sovereignty organizers in LA. Even looking at an image (Figure 7) of where the SCF once was, fills community members with deep sadness and frustration. Once the largest urban farm in LA is now just another plot of land for warehouses, showing the political priorities on certain uses of urban space over others. But it also echoes the point made by geographer Juan Herrera (2016) that placemaking is made visible and kept alive through memory. Remembering the Farm ensures its promise will not be forgotten and inspire more people to learn about and from the SCF. The plot of land is a reminder of loss but also of resistance, a reminder that food sovereignty struggles will not so easily be erased.

Figure 6. SCF, March 15, 2006 (Google Earth).

Figure 7. SCF, March 21, 2020 (Google Earth).

While several gardens exist and continue to emerge throughout the city, none have reached the size of the SCF. As gentrification encroaches on various communities, many community gardens are at risk. They may continue to exist but not cultivated by the communities of color they once represented. Access to land to grow food in the city is scarce, despite so many empty lots being sold for city development projects. Alberto Tlatoa (pers. comm., November 8, 2020) shared that the SCF today is still working on getting access to land, but now in the form of a land trust rather than through a city permit:

> all those people who got to experience it [the SCF] took a big learning lesson from it and learned to replicate it, so definitely it's important, all these places are important, but now we are shifting the narrative and say yes these [gardens] are beautiful but now we got to buy the land so it doesn't become a South Central Farm story where it's sold and

> developed into something else right, because a lot of the community gardens in Los Angeles county are city owned, so whenever the city says it is done, it is done right. So that is why we are trying to shift the conversation to land trusts, and really so we can be autonomous and really develop these projects for our communities and won't be destroyed and other generations can enjoy them as well.

Land access for Tlatoa and the South Central Farmers today continues to be a struggle, after being forced to leave Los Angeles, they seek a return to create places for food cultivation led by community. The demolition of the Farm was not the end of struggles for food sovereignty in the city, instead it materialized in new ways with newfound hope.

Immediately after the demolition of the Farm many SCF organizers and farmers went on to create new food sovereignty projects. Some created new farms on the outskirts of Los Angeles, others new gardens under electricity generators, and some grew food on sidewalks. The SCF movement inspired many to continue organizing ways of addressing food insecurity, a problem that did not end with the destruction of the Farm. It has been almost 15 years and the struggle for food security and access continues to affect communities of color in Los Angeles.

New strategies and projects have emerged in response to the need for healthy and culturally relevant food, many still inspired by the struggle of the SCF. The following section discusses one of the many new types of gardening strategies emerging in the city: *decentralization*. Indigenous gardeners show that the act of placemaking is not fixed to a singular place, instead it is networked and mobile creating multiple places to grow food throughout the city.

Decentralization of Community Gardening

Seeds are meant to be grown; they are not meant to be stagnant in a seed bank somewhere never to be touched. Seeds must be shared widely to live and spread life. In this same way, the move towards decentralized gardening is a continuation of life-making, life-

affirming, and life-giving places, that are not fixed or tied to a singular piece of land but move with the seeds and the people who plant them. Instead, more life and autonomy is created in the process of cultivating food in whatever spaces can be found, forging community in the process. Decentralization describes the shift from traditional community gardens in one centralized location, to growing in one's home, front/backyard, or sidewalks. Placemaking continues to inform these decentralized garden projects in the ways they transform physical areas such as backyards, front yards, and sidewalks to make life in the community.

Conversations with farmers in three contemporary Indigenous gardening projects in Los Angeles exemplify how decentralization is being articulated and employed across various geographies. The three garden collectives highlighted in this thesis are deeply grounded in a politics of creating autonomy and asserting their right to the city in ways that bring communities together to share life-practices. These small-scale farmers share views on land access in the city and the way they strategically navigate growing food in urban space. The farmers share their approach to decentralized gardening where growing food in their homes and coming together to do food exchanges allows them to continue growing food despite not having centralized community gardens. They also challenge the centralized nature of agribusiness food systems, by promoting food autonomy, where all people can and have the right to grow nutritious food wherever they find space. Growing food in communities facing food apartheids and environmental hazards (ie. Lead contamination) also politicized these decentralized gardens to organize their neighbors and community members.

Organization is a key component to these decentralized gardening projects, where constant communication and support is required to establish networks of relationship amongst various garden plots. Through group chats and spreadsheets, the projects organize who is

growing what this season and when food is available to pick up in certain areas. Furthermore, these decentralized gardens are often sites of political education where the gardeners inform their neighbors of the environmental conditions and the importance of challenging the dependency on agribusiness. Therefore, decentralized gardening depends on building relationships that lead to organized networks across LA based on a politic of food autonomy.

Ultimately, decentralization creates networks between community members and farther communities centered on relying on each other rather than the dominant food systems. It is an organized effort reliant on trust and an assertion that another food system is possible. Through decentralization these collectives have created places of life: that are affirming the culture of community members, making life by continuing to grow food despite lack of large pieces of land, and giving life back to the soil by employing regenerative ecological strategies. The sections that follow further elaborate the importance of holding land collectively, even if in a decentralized manner, and how decentralization is practiced and organized in LA.

Collective Land Access in Los Angeles

The three decentralized gardening collectives are located in predominantly Latinx Indigenous communities South Central, South East, and East Los Angeles. These are networks of sharing food across neighborhoods and even distant cities. La Cosecha Collectiva (The Collective Harvest) is one of the longest running and most organized collectives and comprised of home gardens across the whole Southeast County of LA. Casita del Barrio (House of the Hood), based out of East Los Angeles, is a community house and part of the Cosecha network. Lastly, Earthseed is based largely out of community members' houses in East LA and South Central.

These gardening collectives arose out of the shared need to feed themselves and their communities in urban spaces. These collectives were directly inspired by the South Central Farm's struggle and some of its members were involved in the struggle to save the Farm. All three of these gardening collectives consider themselves autonomous and are outside of the city registered gardens. They maintain a distant relationship to the city to maintain autonomy over their projects and spaces they cultivate on, showing that they can grow food in any spaces not just those designated by the city government. Those that I spoke to reference the lack of access to land available for Black, Indigenous, People of Color and low-income communities living in an urban space and decentralization became their solution. What follows is the brief stories of how these collectives emerged in response to community need for spaces to grow their own food and connect to land.

La Cosecha Collectiva was created in 2012 by the East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice (EYCEJ) focused on challenging the food apartheid through community-based food exchanges. Laura Cortez, one of the collective members of EYCEJ and La Cosecha Collectiva, is from South East LA and became involved in decentralized gardening through her political organizing for environmental justice in South East/East LA. While she and her family come from a long line of farmers and sharecroppers in northern Mexico, she did not really begin to see the importance of food sovereignty until she began her work at EYCEJ. Cortez remembers how she began to recognize the ways the city did not care about the life of her community especially after the Exide lead spill[2] which contaminated the soil of East LA. Environmental Justice is Food Justice, she mentions. For Cortez, these two struggles are interconnected, especially when thinking about how food justice requires us to think about soil health and

[2] The Exide plant is in the city of Vernon and has continuously poisoned the soil with their lead-smelting operations. The plant closed in 2014 but have not undergone a toxic clean-up process (Barboza and Poston, 2017).

food/land access. Cortez told me about how the decentralized garden was born out of the struggle to stop the building of a Walmart in the City of Commerce.

Despite not having access to grocery stores in the area, community members did not agree with the exploitative practices of Walmart and later found out that the proposed plan included creating a Walmart warehouse behind the store which meant an increase in truck trips in the region contributing to adverse air quality. Cortez notes that some community members wanted to have the Walmart because at least they could have access to food, which made the collective realize the problem was with the food system and the way food is disturbed in the city. Cortez (pers. comm., January 14, 2021) shares that ultimately La Cosecha Collectiva started from the premise that "we need to grow our own food systems and take care of each other." At first the collective tried to find a way to tend to some land behind an elementary school but the school district asked them to fundraise $45,000 for its creation there. Unable to raise the funds, the collective chose to think of alternatives. As the La Cosecha website states, "At this point, we decided to move away from a large community garden concept, to instead create a decentralized community garden based in our homes" (La Cosecha Collectiva). Despite not having access to land, members of the collective started to redistribute fruit from the trees in their front yards and from unharvested fruit trees in their neighborhoods. Eventually they created garden beds in their front yards/backyards, planted food in driveways, sidewalks, patios, windows, growing wherever they found space.

Similarly, Casita del Barrio on the East side of LA started because co-founder Miguel Ramos was tired of seeing his community being evicted and fighting gentrification. Ramos had been an anti-eviction organizer in North East LA when he noticed that access to land was one of the reasons his community was under attack. During this period, he decided to go on a bike ride

from LA down to Guatemala, visiting his ancestral homelands along the way. On this journey he was able to learn from various Indigenous communities who were also resisting displacement from the land and began making connections to what was taking place back in LA. He also learned from his elders the various ceremonies tied to land and food, which led him to return to LA and develop deeper relationship to native plants. He saw how the struggle for food and land were indeed inseparable. Ramos told me:

> all this (eviction) is because we don't have access to land, you know we don't have that opportunity to build that relationship with people because we're always being displaced, we're always being moved, and so because we don't have a place where we can let our roots you know actually connect to the earth, we are always uprooted, we are always taken away from our community, our family. And so I thought I want to establish roots here in Los Angeles but I want it to be a place where I can offer a space for community members to stay but also a place where I can think about and live by the principles that I want to practice, which was like building a relationship to the land, honoring the native flora and fauna, and being able to be food sovereign, where we are not having to rely on food from across the world to feed us. (pers. comm., January 12, 2021)

For Ramos, collectively owning a home and opening it up as the Casita del Barrio was a way to challenge the lack of access to land in the city and to resist the constant evictions happening daily in his community. His reflections resonate with South Central farmer statements on the closure of the Farm and the effects it had on them when it was demolished. The memory and reality of displacement and uprootedness directly motivated Ramos to create Casita del Barrio, a home collectively owned where there is more of a sense of security than renting where one can be removed from the land at any moment. Decentralized gardening ensured more community members could participate in growing food in their homes, meaning that even if one person moved or faced displacement, the rest of the community could continue to support each other with their own plots of land. Therefore, the food system would not rely on one centralized farm, but rather a multitude of small-scale plots making food sovereignty possible for Ramos and his

neighbors. By transforming their front and backyards they began sharing Indigenous foods with their neighbors and larger community.

The Earthseed organization was inspired by seeing the rise of decentralized gardens and by reading Octavia Butler's (1993) *Parable of the Sower*. It was created with the vision of building the world they hope to live in and learning Indigenous ways of knowing that can be brought to the next world. Ary Amaya and Alain Argueta, two Earthseed members of the decentralized backyard gardens, mentioned the move to decentralized began both in response to lack of access to land in the city but also as something that was traditional to them/their communities. Ary Amaya is Wixarika from Nayarit and an organizer whose family comes from a line of transnational farmworkers. She grew up learning how to care for the land by visiting relatives who worked on farms in California. Transnational relationships with her grandparents in Mexico were also important to how she maintained relationship with her ways of knowing and community. When Amaya moved to Los Angeles, she began learning more about growing food from her neighbors but soon realized the challenge was access to land. Amaya stressed the importance of land:

> I just think the reality of it is that access to land is hard, especially coming from Black Indigenous communities. Like we saw that with South Central farm even though they had the community support, they still weren't able to bypass all of that policy and, you know, all of that complex stuff that comes with owning land or owning property. And the reality is that a lot of us rent. And because of gentrification some of us might not even be able to afford rent. So I think with the little access to land that we all have in our own spaces, I think that's [decentralized gardening] just a realistic way to grow as a community and also think it brings the community together (…). (pers. comm., April 5, 2021)

Amaya struggled with the idea of decentralization at first noting that she always envisioned having a big community space to grow food. However, after searching and searching, Earthseed members realized that decentralized growing would be one of the best ways to bypass the

necessity to own land. Buying land and even putting land into land trusts is a long process that can take years and is not always within the means of community members, thus decentralization offered another way to plant food together. Growing in backyards did not take away from the collective nature of gardening, instead it reinforced it in new ways. Furthermore, Earthseed's decentralized garden is also networked across the city by sharing seeds and foods with their immediate neighbors and organization members. This allows for Amaya in East LA to be able to exchange food with fellow member Alain Argueta who is Nahua from El Salvador and lives in a rented house in South Central. Argueta forms part of the decentralized garden network by growing seeds in his front yard and sidewalk area. In his community the only community garden in close proximity was always locked and closed to the public. Thus, decentralized gardening made it easier for him to grow food in the space available, transforming a front yard to a garden with Nahua corn seeds from his homeland.

As we see in these experiences, access to land is not only difficult but contentious because of ongoing evictions taking place in these communities. The experience and memory of land loss, enclosure, and eviction like those that took place at the South Central Farm continue. Yet these collectives' lack of access to community gardens did not stop them from wanting to continue to care and build relationships with the land/each other. While the question of who is allowed land and life in the city is important to consider, we see here that land is a relationship that continues outside centralized city demarcated community gardens. They have found new strategies to address the realities of an urban context but have not let fear of evictions or loss of land access stop them from enacting food sovereignty and creating the food systems they envision. Life continues to be made and regenerates anew.

Decentralization: Spatial and Ecological Strategy

Throughout my conversations with these members of three collectives, one thing became clear: decentralized growing has been happening for a long time in Los Angeles. Many shared that in their community it was normal to see señoras and señores (community elders) growing foods and herbs in pots and front yards. Laura Cortez, Miguel Ramos, Ary Amaya, and Alain Argueta all recognized that they had grown up in environments where sharing seeds and growing food (no matter how small the plot of land) was normal. Amaya elaborated (pers. comm., April 5, 2021):

> Even though we have limited space [and] even though we're from a bunch of different areas we always bring our land to wherever we are, so we know we are like miles away from home, everybody had their own way of reconnecting to that land and I think I kind of just grew up knowing that, even though you only have an old bucket or whatever you can still grow those things that are traditional to you.

The types of practices decentralized gardening is based on have a longer trajectory in the city because ultimately it was a way to continue caring for seeds and foods from one's homeland. While the process of growing food in one's home and sharing seeds is not necessarily new—and has been more commonly known as kitchen gardens or home gardens (Sandoval & Rodine, 2020; Taylor & Lovell, 2015)—this shift to a politically organized decentralization has intentionally centered around community autonomy networked across different scales. Today's gardening collectives build on this tradition but are more intentionally organized around community autonomy which opens more land to be collectively cultivated. The collectives involved in popularizing decentralized gardens are also very driven by the politics of food sovereignty and environmental justice, bringing awareness to these topics through their work. Using the time and space of gardening to also conduct political education and convince more community members to grow their own food. Therefore, one person's space for growing food,

such as their backyard, also becomes a motivator to help others do the same. These efforts have also been seen in Los Angeles Black community such as Ron Finley's gardening project and more recently Jamiah Hargins "Microfarms" (Ramsey, 2021). Black and Indigenous gardeners are showing the possibilities of reclaiming space to show that food can be grown in spaces outside the traditional community garden. Placemaking continues to be enacted in this process by redesigning home spaces into garden sites. This intentional system of organizing community to participate in growing their own food, seed exchanges, crop swaps, redistribution builds a sustainable infrastructure that endeavors to become a viable alternative to the dominant food system.

For La Cosecha Collectiva decentralization was also already in practice before naming it this, many collective members had been growing food in their own homes, but once they decided to become a decentralized garden community, they began to incorporate elders and neighbors who wanted to grow collectively. They spent time making raised beds for community members who had the space but who were scared to plant directly into the earth because of the lead contamination of the soil. While many grew in their own homes, some asked community members to open up their backyards/front yards to be cared for by La Cosecha members. Laura Cortez highlights how two community members in Long Beach opened up their back yards which have now become two of the bigger sites for growing food within the decentralized network.

One of the key aspects of growing food in this way is that everyone grows only what they can in their space, knowing that other people are also doing this amounting to a wide variety of foods that can be shared. Cortez really enjoyed this type of exchange that took place and talked about the way they sustained this through online chats. She would post when she had guayabas

to share and others would share when they had oranges, avocados or other foods and organize pickup/drop-off dates. This type of relational exchange forged community, which to Cortez was one of the most important parts of this process, thinking about how community could still be made despite not seeing each other regularly or being in single space. For her making sure people stayed connected was a top priority. She also recognized some of the challenges of getting people on board with the pickup/drop-off method:

> It is easy to go to Food for Less and buy everything in one place, it is easy, it's half spoiled but it's easy, so it's hard to get people to knock that habit so that's also an issue with the sustainability. So being able to have folks understand not only is it better, even if you have to drive to 4 homes to get some of this produce, but you know that I'm not using no pesticides in my food. And ultimately that's not what you're trying to feed your kids right? (pers. comm, January 14, 2021)

Decentralization challenged the way people in urban spaces are used to buying food at one centralized store. As Cortez mentioned, although it is easier to buy food at the local grocery store, it is not the most nutritious food. La Cosecha emphasizes that the decentralized approach is nutritionally better for the entire family and will last longer than store bought produce. But this is also a process done in community. Cortez emphasizes that part of what makes it sustainable is relying on one another to support with pick up/drop offs when some families may be struggling to do so. The decentralization of gardening has allowed for food access to be rescaled, allowing community members to be able to also exchange foods with their direct neighbors and also at the larger scale of other LA cities interconnected through La Cosecha network.

Decentralization has created a new way of forging community through networks of interconnectedness across various geographies. As seen in the experiences of La Cosecha collectiva despite not being in one single garden growing food together every day, they still find ways to support each other and foster a sense of community. Placemaking happened in both the relationships formed through decentralized gardens and the physical transformation of front

yards, backyards and sidewalks into gardens. The decentralization of gardens required more purposeful social relationships grounded in trust. These relationships led to an organized effort to have various communities grow various foods and come together to create places of exchanges through food swaps. Building these relationships of trust ultimately led to more people wanting to join into these organized networks and grow food in their backyards.

La Casita del Barrio is part of the LA Cosecha extended network focused on sharing food in the region of East Los Angeles. Miguel Ramos shared that what intrigued him most about joining La Cosecha was to be able to meet other folks interested in growing ancestral foods in their own spaces, but also to be able to share/exchange beyond his neighborhood block. For him decentralization also offered a new way of relating with the larger Black, Indigenous, people of Color (BIPOC) community in LA who are growing food; while they are not working on a concentrated piece of land together, they are still finding ways to build community interdependence. As part of the decentralization of gardening, Ramos has been involved in seed bed construction, seed exchanges, and food swaps where relationships are created and sustained through life-giving and life-affirming practices. Ramos (pers. comm., January 12, 2021) shared, "As we become decentralized and as we start building our networks, we can then start supporting each other" and these networks of support are truly grounded in joy and transforming our relationships with each other.

Additionally, decentralization also offered a path to stay in LA which was important to Ramos who noticed that a lot of people were leaving LA to create farms and land projects. For him staying in LA was important to show that these ways of relating to land were possible in urban spaces too and without abandoning his community. In designing Casita del Barrios

decentralized garden, Ramos (pers. comm, January 12, 2021) explained that everything was thoughtfully planned out keeping in mind being a good guest and the pollution of the land:

> So what I chose to do was a native garden, and so I put all the native plants in the ground, and then I put all my food above ground, for two reasons: one I want to make space for the native plants to have priority, because this is their land their spirits are on this land and so I wanna honor not only the native peoples, but the native flora and fauna. (…) And within my garden I have raised beds for two reasons again, to prioritize native plants, but two because the soil is contaminated here. You know I am like a mile away from the Exide battery recycling plant, where they just emitted so much led into the community and so I had to one raise the beds because I wanted to have my own soil and bring my own soil in and make sure I am not eating something that has led in it.

Soil contamination and air pollution and relationships to land are similar conditions that other decentralized gardening projects are having to address. Prioritizing the native flora and fauna, for Ramos, allowed Casita del Barrio introduce themselves to the land and the plants of the region as he embarked on this journey of feeding himself and his community.

By planting native food crops directly into the soil Casita del Barrio also engaged in placemaking through the life-giving practices of regeneration. To meet their goal of feeding the community, they had to create raised beds to ensure his food was not contaminated. The raised beds are all located in the front yard so that community members walking by can easily access the food. Again, we see that not only is access to land/food an ongoing battle in Los Angeles, even growing in a decentralized way has had to be strategically planned so that they are caring for the land and community in the best ways possible. This work of decentralized growing has also raised awareness about the issue of contamination in LA, leading many collective members to employ regenerative models of growing and planting native seeds that help revive the soil. Ramos (pers. comm, January 12, 2021) shares that for him this process is grounded in, "a deep sense that if we take care of the land, if we take the time to take care of the land, the land will take the time to take care of us." As more people began growing food in their backyards, front

yards, and any space they can find Ramos envisions that more people will remember that sacred responsibility and relationship to the land.

In 2019 the most recent collective to shift to decentralized gardening, Earthseed, began in East LA out of Amaya's backyard. After almost three years of not being able to find a place to grow food together in Los Angeles, Ary Amaya, Alain Argueta and the rest of the Earthseed members began thinking of alternatives. Inspired by other collectives doing decentralized growing on sidewalks and homes, they shifted to this model by starting a decentralized seed library. This decentralized seed library required that every collective member take care of seeds in their own homes/apartments and share them with their neighbors/community. For Earthseed, this model was more sustainable because it meant everyone carried the responsibility to care, plant, and share seeds meaning more people would also have access. At the end of the season the participants return some of their seeds from their harvest to the seed library and continue to process of sharing seeds freely with community. This was counter to the model many official seed banks such as those held in government buildings or the famous Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway. These types of seed banks centralize all the seeds in one place that is highly regulated by one person/small group of people often leading to them just being stored rather than grown by people who need food. After the decentralized seed library was established, they began also growing those seeds leading to a decentralized garden. Amaya shares what she has encountered in her process of decentralized growing so far:

> I think just sharing with my neighbors and I'm just telling them that they can grow their own things I think has been really amazing and I've actually seen some of my neighbors, take their lawns out and then put like some seeds and they'll share some corn seeds with me. Like I live really close to an elotero (corn vendor), He had like a lawn and I was sharing with him how we changed our lawn to grow a little bit of food. And he was like oh that's, that's good so then he we kind of gave him some tools and he took his lawn on he's now going his own corn and I just walked by this morning, and I saw that he's actually growing corn again this season. And he shared seeds with me I shared seeds with

> him. And I think that's kind of the future of it . . . it's not really the future because it's already been happening. (pers. comm, April 5, 2021)

Decentralization in Amaya's experience has been a process of re-building relationship with her neighbors through the process of sharing seeds inspiring many to re-imagine and redesign their home spaces. This future of sharing and creating to new relationships to each other and the land are already being enacted in the everyday.

Alain Argueta is another collective member of Earthseed but lives and grows food in South Central LA. He has also had similar experiences to Amaya where the direct community becomes more involved and inspired to grow food by seeing a whole front yard covered in corn, tomatoes, onions and more. Argueta has also found that just by transforming his yard and sidewalk to gardening space, community members constantly stop to talk and share knowledge on growing certain foods or how certain herbs can be used. A central aspect of decentralized growing is also that exchange of food, seeds, and knowledge ultimately leading to building more community autonomy knowing that they can rely on each other for different foods. Argueta noted:

> Like growing this for me I think of it like that, it's an autonomous relationship that I'm growing, and with people getting curious. I know the neighbors next to me they grow, they grow their own things as well and in the past we've also traded like little seeds amongst each other and we're like, oh yeah, this goes good with this food or like, you can use it for this. So like we're sharing knowledge. And, and even too like we, like I mentioned earlier that sometimes we've told neighbors, because sometimes they would come over and be like, Oh, can we get some chiles or can we get this and that and then we'll be like yeah like you don't even have to ask like you could just come through and like get how much you need (…) It's just like communities just know how much they need and how much they don't need so then another person can like use it. (personal communication April 4, 2021)

Argueta indicates that in the process of decentralization has strengthened community relationships with his neighbors. He also mentions the importance of challenging the idea that growing in your home space means its only for you, instead he has created a space where

community members can come and take the food they need. This is a process of trust he says, a process that requires you not only to think about your own needs but that also thinks about other neighbors who may want to harvest from your garden (and those neighbors also keeping in mind the rest of the community). This cycle of reciprocity and care is what grounds the decentralized garden. Argueta (personal communication, April 4, 2021) states that in the process of making this garden he not only keeps in mind his neighbors, but also the more-than-human species that are nourished through the soil and environment he is co-creating. He shares, "the milpa (garden plot) is a space to care and provide life that insects and other species can rely on. It is all interconnected." Argueta's work is grounded in the belief that if you care for the land, the land will care for you and hopes that this is the message that continues to spread as more gardens emerge across the city.

Decentralization can be understood as both a spatial and ecological strategy that moves away from a singular centralized garden, allows for more autonomy and the ability to grow food in more places across the city. While access to land was found to be one of the biggest challenges for urban Indigenous and Latinx gardeners in Los Angeles, decentralization became their solution reaffirming that they will always find new places to grow. Therefore, decentralized gardening continues the process of placemaking by transforming any space into a garden. Pierce et al. (2010) put forth a relational placemaking that considers networks, placemaking, and politics. They suggest relational placemaking, "consider the interconnection and co-constituencies among place, networks, and politics by identifying specific conflicts and the places they produce, the dimensions of place-framing evident, and the multiply-positioned actors and places/bundles inherent in and underlying the conflicts" (p.67). The conflict that these various gardening collectives face is a lack of food and land access. As seen with the SCF this

conflict led to the demolition of the farm, but also produced new approaches to gardening. Decentralized placemaking makes growing food collectively more feasible at whatever scale available: a pot, a garden bed, a front yard or a sidewalk.

Conclusion

The "South Central Farmers" poem by Cherrie Moraga (2017) that serves as the epigraph for this chapter illuminates this struggle for land, life, and place. In the poem Moraga shares a lesson that Tezozomoc, teaches her "'Losing a plot of soil would break us/had we believed it was ours.'" The Land for the farmers was a relationship that could not be so easily broken through displacement. Instead, they moved to another piece of land to grow food on and continued to do this after every displacement they faced. Moraga continues by stating "This is the poetry of a campesina/who holds a piece a piece (a place) of dirt/fertile and fecund/in the bank of her memory/in the bowl of two hands together." For the farmers place moved with them, wherever they went places of life emerged. They carried the land in their hands and in the life-giving food they shared with the community. The struggle for land and life continued despite their vision of communal land being foreclosed by the city. The community built on the land and through relationships with the land was not completely lost after the SCF was demolished. Instead, they were transformed and reimagined. Decentralization is a spatial and ecological strategy that allows for relationship with the land to continue despite lack of land access or displacement. In this way the struggle for land and life will continue to grow across the city, showing that another food system is already in the making.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The ongoing global COVID-19 Pandemic has intensified discussions and organizing regarding food access. During the earliest moments of the pandemic in March 2019 agribusiness food waste was at an all-time high, while others went hungry with grocery stores empty. The response to community food access was led by community members who created autonomous mutual aid projects. Some of the most common mutual aid projects included food distribution sites, placing community fridges across Los Angeles, and promoting growing food in gardens/homes. There were workshops almost every other week on "how to start your home garden", on soils, seeds, and seasonal planting by both collectives discussed in the previous chapter but also other BIPOC collectives, and even city events. There was a sense of urgency to learn where our food comes from and to rethink our reliance on agribusiness food systems.

Community driven gardening and farming projects have become even more important to the infrastructure of urban cities. The visions of the gardeners and farmers in this thesis resonate deeply with the ongoing work being carried out during this pandemic. Urban autonomous food projects reimagine the concrete city by carving out places to grow food collectively. These farms, gardens, plots become sites of community building across racial and ethnic divides with the goal of feeding the people. Places of life and for life. Furthermore, these places of life are not fixed to a territory or space nor tied to property. Instead, relationships to land take priority, making BIPOC gardening placemaking strategies mobile and ongoing.

This thesis emphasizes the historical importance of the South Central Farm because it set the foundation for what communal land holdings by Indigenous migrant peoples might look like in Los Angeles. It also created a precedent for many food sovereignty organizers today who found themselves in the struggle to save the Farm. The contemporary food sovereignty projects

in Los Angeles help us to understand how Indigenous migrants are responding to the lack of healthy food and land access to grow it. The SCF continues to be a memory that inspires garden collectives today. The three collectives in this thesis are part of this legacy. Some of the collective members were at the struggle to save the farm but more importantly, they were inspired by what the SCF was able to create for a community of poor urban people. In that same spirit these post-SCF collectives, La Cosecha Colectiva, Casita del Barrio, and Earthseed work to feed their communities and create autonomy in a decentralized manner.

The relationship between politics, networks, and place are the driving motivators for these projects. They are not simply gardening for leisure. They are growing food to feed their community and politicize community members to think about where their food is coming from. Collective members from the SCF, La Cosecha Colectiva, Casita del Barrio, and Earthseed all exemplify the importance of intentionally creating places that challenge the corporate food industry because they know other ways of growing food are possible. Their Indigenous knowledge of land, place, and environment work in tandem with their food politics to create new urban food systems.

Overall, placemaking offers a radical spatial practice for creating autonomous food geographies and places of life. The South Central farmers and Decentralized gardening collectives show how placemaking is a life-making, life-giving, and life affirming practice. Through a spatial practice of decentralization relationships to land can continue even in the smallest of urban spaces, strengthening the possibilities for autonomy and life.

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