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It's a Racialized World After All: A Transnational Study of Oakland, California and Durban,
South Africa as Racialized, Yet Resistant Geographies

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Honors Thesis
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Acknowledgments:

I would like to dedicate this work first and foremost to Abahlali baseMjondolo and Moms 4 Housing, who I stand in solidarity with and whom I conducted this study about for the purpose of amplifying their struggles and resistance.

To all Black/African peoples, and those who suffer and fight with us.

To the communities I belong to, you have given me the strength to continue to be resilient.

This project is for those of us who are dreaming of a better future, and *especially* for folks whose minds have been closed off to new possibilities of a freer tomorrow.

Land Acknowledgment:

As this project works to uncover processes of white supremacy submerged within the landscape, I believe it is necessary to begin with a land acknowledgment—recognizing the stolen land I am currently on, processes of settler colonialism that are ongoing, and the resilient indigenous communities that continue to live and resist here. Borrowing from the Native American Student Development Office at UC Berkeley, in collaboration with the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, I affirm that:

“UC Berkeley sits on the territory of xučyun (Huichin), the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo speaking Ohlone people, the successors of the sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and other familial descendants of the Verona Band.”

[I] “recognize that every member of the Berkeley community has, and continues to benefit from, the use and occupation of this land, since the institution’s founding in 1868. Consistent with our values of community, inclusion and diversity, we have a responsibility to acknowledge and make visible the university’s relationship to Native peoples. As members of the Berkeley community, it is vitally important that we not only recognize the history of the land on which we stand, but also, we recognize that the Muwekma Ohlone people are alive and flourishing members of the Berkeley and broader Bay Area communities today.”¹

¹ Native American Student Development and Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, “Centers for Educational Justice & Community Engagement,” Centers for Educational Justice & Community Engagement, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://cejce.berkeley.edu/nasd>.

I encourage folks who reside in the East Bay, who are able to, to pay the Shuumi Land Tax, “a voluntary annual contribution that non-Indigenous people living on traditional Lisjan Ohlone territory make to support the critical work of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust.”²

Here is the website: <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/shuumi-land-tax/>.

² Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, “Shuumi Land Tax,” The Sogorea Te Land Trust, August 4, 2020, <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/shuumi-land-tax/>.

Collective Breath:

Before you proceed, I invite you to join me in a moment of grounding. The topics I am covering are extremely heavy and can trigger those of us living through the realities of white supremacy. So...

Stop.

Breathe.

Breathe in from your nose, using your stomach. Let it fill and expand.

Exhale.

Let this exhale be longer than your inhale.

Do this as many times as needed.

Abstract:

Traditional, Western geographers have theorized a separation between land, capital, and labor, which naturalizes a conception of geography as completely independent of sociohistorical factors. This conventional ideology strips the landscape from its ongoing relationship with capital and labor, isolating the land from its white supremacist histories, which—according to Andrea Smith—are embodied through processes of anti-black racism/slaveability, genocide, and orientalism.³ Scholarship in critical geography has revealed that forces of colonialism and imperialism transcend conventional spatial-temporal limitations, constructing geographies of confinement for people in contemporary times. In focusing on Moms 4 Housing—a collective of Black,⁴ marginally housed mothers in Oakland, California—along with Abahlali baseMjondolo (Abahlali)—a Black, South African grassroots movement run by and for shack dwellers⁵ in Durban, South Africa—this paper investigates how racial capitalism maps onto the lives of Black peoples in localized regions.⁶ More particularly, it offers a transnational study that works to illuminate how African peoples are able to transform racialized sites into sites of resilience. Drawing from Henri Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space, my work contributes to a spatial understanding of how neoliberal capitalism confines Black peoples to particular racialized landscapes across the diaspora. Rooted in the Black Radical Tradition, along with Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s conceptualization of abolition geographies, I examine what pushes distinct African

³Andrea Smith, “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy,” in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Oneka LaBennett, Laura Pulido (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), pp.66-90.

⁴ I capitalize the B in Black to humanize and empower Black/African peoples.

⁵ This is a self-identifying term for people who live in shacks or slums.

⁶ I am referring to racial capitalism, as defined by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Capitalism as an inherently racial-economic system that evolved out of the “old order” and is contingent on slavery, violence, genocide, imperialism, and dehumanization. Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

peoples to mobilize around humanity in ways that advance a transformative and inclusive politic of Freedom.⁷ Ultimately, this study reveals similarities in processes and practices, as well as “slippages, openings, and contradictions” between Black peoples in relation to a global fight against racial capitalism and white supremacy.⁸

⁷ I capitalize the “F” in Freedom and “L” in Liberation to allude to a type of Freedom that African peoples are still striving for. One that is rooted in humanity. I locate this type of Freedom in the Black Radical Tradition and within the two movements I am investigating.

⁸Gillian Hart, “Relational Comparison Revisited,” *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 3 (2016): pp. 275.

Introduction:

On January 14th, 2020 a group of Black, houseless and marginally housed moms were met at a vacant house they were occupying in West Oakland with military force.⁹ The police arrived to their doorstep at 5:15 in the morning with AR-15s, tactical gear, and a tank to evict and arrest the moms and, once again, displace them and their children.¹⁰ Dominique Walker, 34, and Sameerah Karim, 41—founders of Moms 4 Housing—claimed this vacant property on November 18th, 2019, after two years that the house remained empty. Moms 4 Housing’s goal is to “reclaim housing for the Oakland community from the big banks and real estate speculators.”¹¹ Following decades of segregation and redlining,¹² predatory lending practices, and the devastating effects of the 2008 housing crisis, rapid gentrification has gripped the city of Oakland.¹³ Oakland is a place that has been subjected to forces of racial capitalism and neoliberalism, which becomes apparent when critically examining the lived experiences and every day, violent occurrences of Black people enclosed within this particular geography. African Americans are often times propelled to relocate or pushed into cycles of houselessness, and are met with military force as they demand essential qualities of personhood—like food or shelter. Moms 4 Housing founder Dominique Walker sincerely contends, “we are not aggressors, but we are not running away either,” illustrating

⁹Moms 4 Housing (@Moms4Housing), “Moms 4 Housing Twitter post,” Twitter, August 28, 2020, 1:21p.m. <https://twitter.com/moms4housing>

¹⁰ Brandy Collins, “Moms 4 Housing: A Movement Begins,” Oakland Voices, January 22, 2020.

¹¹ Moms 4 Housing. Accessed October 21, 2020. <https://moms4housing.org/>.

¹² I am referring to redlining, as defined by the Urban Displacement Project (UDP), a research and action initiative at UC Berkeley. Redlining is a policy that started in 1930, created by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC)—a federal agency created under President Roosevelt. The HOLC issued “neighborhood ratings” that would correspond to an area’s worth in investment. The red/ hazardous zones were considered the “riskiest,” which were also predominantly communities of color. As these communities found it much harder to obtain loans to invest in their communities, they were often times neglected. Redlining is a racialized practice.

“Redlining and Gentrification,” Urban Displacement Project (UC Berkeley, April 25, 2018), <https://www.urbandisplacement.org/redlining>.

¹³ Margaret M Ramirez, “City as Borderland: Gentrification and the Policing of Black and Latinx Geographies in Oakland,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 1 (January 2019): pp. 147-166.

the presumed criminality projected onto Black people rejecting the conditions of the status quo.¹⁴ The day before the police invasion, 150 community members linked arms around the vacant house to support the mothers' claim to the property, and to assist against the eviction notice that was approved by Alameda County Superior Court.¹⁵ Poor, Black people in Oakland, California are being confined to particular conditions as a consequence of racial capitalism, and they are actively fighting to transform their lived reality (through land occupation and protest)—altering these racialized sites into sites of resistance. Moms 4 Housing is an example of that resistance.

Black people across the diaspora—in Durban, South Africa—are experiencing similar hostilities sanctioned through state violence, and interestingly, employing comparable tactics of resistance—namely, “illegal” land occupancy and protest.¹⁶ I turn to Abahlali baseMjondolo (Abahlali), a movement of Black shack dwellers, centralized in the city of Durban to understand the struggle against neoliberalism, racial capitalism, and particularly “neo-apartheid” in contemporary South Africa.¹⁷ Abahlali is a grassroots organization that emerged in 2005 and advocates for free and accessible public housing, stands against evictions, and is in support of widespread human rights. Abahlali baseMjondolo utilizes land occupation, road blockades, and protests in resistance to social stratification in contemporary South Africa that has roots in the apartheid regime.¹⁸ Unfortunately poor, Black South Africans bear witness to a disappointing truth in the wake of widespread neoliberalism: “the ubiquitous fact [that] exploitation can wear a black face.”¹⁹ Abahlali was born out of a road blockade at Kennedy Road shack settlement that took

¹⁴ Jane Tyska, “Photos: A look inside the Moms 4 Housing home in West Oakland,” *East Bay Times* (Walnut Creek, Ca). Jan. 14, 2020.

¹⁵ Tyska, “Photos: A look inside the Moms 4 Housing home in West Oakland.”

¹⁶ I place “illegal” in quotes, to illustrate the arbitrary nature of legality.

¹⁷ In the same way “neocolonialism” is used, I coin neo-apartheid to foreground the lived experiences of poor, Black South Africans experiencing racialized violence in the wake of the apartheid regime.

¹⁸ Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali BaseMjondolo* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), x.

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth. Pref. by Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 145

place on March 19th, 2005.²⁰ The land at Kennedy Road was once promised to the people who resided there by local councilors, including the director of housing. In a turn of events however, the land was withheld in an attempt to convert it into a brick factory.²¹ Fifteen years ago, 750 Black shack dwellers showed up in resistance to this “development” and were met with blunt police force. S’bu Zikode, president of Abahlali baseMjondolo, recalls the local councilor—who arrived at the site with the police—shouting to “arrest these people. They are criminals.”²² The police beat the resisters, unleashed their dogs to attack them, and arrested 14 people that day. March 19th, 2005 would be the beginning of over a decade of struggle for Abahlali.

Situating the resilience of two Black housing organizations within larger diasporic conversations, I explore the ways African peoples refuse to accept constructions of racialized geographies, and in the process create alternative meanings of Freedom that defy the limitations of contemporary politics. I strive to elevate the rationales of Black peoples who appear to be disrupting neocolonial/neo-apartheid control of space in pursuit of a kind of Freedom that has possibly only ever been imagined.

Black geographer and abolitionist Dr. Ruth Wilson Gilmore urges us to understand Black resistance within the context of place-making, upholding that “Freedom [as African peoples perceive it] is a place.”²³ If one critically examines the implications of liberatory social movements from a geographical lens, it is possible to see that as people mobilize behind independence, justice, and freedom, they are attempting to construct a new reality out of their current conditions. Contrary to the idealism associated with those words, this cannot be done in purely abstract terms, however. As folks engage in protest, strike, boycott, or any other form of action to liberate themselves, they

²⁰Ibid., 144.

²¹ S’bu Zikode, “The Third Force,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 41, no. 1-2 (2006): pp. 185-189.

²² Zikode, “The Third Force.”

²³ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence,” in *Futures of Black Radicalism* (London: Verso, 2017), 227.

are simultaneously participating in the production of a new world order and set of knowledges—regardless of the scale of their effort. Employing a creative abolitionist consciousness, African peoples have historically fought to “make where they were into places they wished to be.”²⁴ The development of Black resistance movements in the absence of legal slavery and apartheid suggest that Freedom (which is made into an action)—and abolition—are “quite literally to change places,” destroying geographies marked by white supremacy.²⁵ Ruth Wilson Gilmore coins the term “abolition geography” to illuminate a “radical consciousness in action” that emerges from people confined to landscapes which have been subjected to the violent forces of racial capitalism and colonialism.²⁶ Applying this critical and revolutionary awareness to Black housing movements not only clarifies their struggles, but humanizes their tactics of resistance that are notoriously criminalized.

Statement of Problem:

After moving to the East Bay for university, I immediately recognized that an incredible number of Black, houseless people live around the University of California, Berkeley and within neighboring cities. In studying the relationship between race, space, and agency during my undergraduate career, I came across the teachings of queer-abolitionist-scholar Dr. Angela Davis. Davis contends that “the idea of freedom is inspiring. But what does it mean? If you are free in a political sense, but have no food, what's that? The freedom to starve?”²⁷ These words expanded my limited conceptualization of Freedom and allowed me to question what Freedom could mean when it is grounded in Black humanity, as opposed to political representation—for a select few. I began probing the implications of Freedom in relation to people historically, and presently, being

²⁴Ibid., 231.

²⁵ Ibid., 231.

²⁶Ibid., 227.

²⁷ Belle Hutton, “‘We Have to Talk About Liberating Minds’: Angela Davis’ Quotes on Freedom,” *Another Magazine*, June 19, 2020.

denied access to space and place in a world dominated by racial capitalism and white supremacy. Directing my attention to two Black grassroots movements that utilize land occupancy and protest to express their struggles for Liberation, I asked: what processes are occurring on the ground that motivate African peoples to mobilize around an “expanded version” of Freedom? Additionally, I was interested in uncovering how Black people may engage in “Freedom dreaming” by pursuing a type of Freedom that we have never tangibly had access to.²⁸

Background and Significance:

Dissecting Freedom:

Kwame Nkrumah is known for his statement “freedom is not something that one people can bestow on another as a gift. They claim it as their own and none can keep it from them.”²⁹ Nkrumah was a Pan-African organizer, whose dedication to Liberation assisted Ghana on its path to independence in 1957.³⁰ Following the Black radical tradition, Nkrumah demonstrates how—within the African diaspora—Freedom transcends its passive status as an ideal or *thing* that can be handed down by one’s oppressor; it is rather characterized as “the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion.”³¹ Nkrumah’s proactive interpretation of Freedom contributes to my awareness of a common unwillingness amongst Black peoples to accept the dehumanizing conditions that characterize racist structures and cultural imaginaries of the status quo. There is a radical desire for agency and access that is prevalent in Black resistance struggles. Cedric Robinson explores the foundational elements of what he names the Black Radical Tradition in his book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. While foregrounding key

²⁸ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002).

²⁹ Kwame Nkrumah, “Motion of Destiny” (Accra, Ghana, July 10, 1953).

³⁰ Here I am referring to both the political philosophy of Pan-Africanism, as well as the particular history of Pan-African congresses that began in the 1900s with Henry Sylvester-Williams, a West Indian lawyer. “Pan-Africanism” is a movement towards the unification of continental Africans and African descendants to eradicate white supremacy.

³¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 47.

distinctions within the Black diaspora, Robinson describes “the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by historical struggles for liberation, and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being.”³² Robinson’s work supports a characterization of Freedom as an active process of striving to obtain tangible components of humanity—including self-determination and access to resources.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire problematizes conservative iterations of Freedom as well, outlining a practical guide to Liberation rooted in oppressed people becoming critically aware of the conditions of their oppression, and utilizing this knowledge as a tool to transform their reality. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Paulo Freire and critical theorist Donaldo Macedo highlight a self-emancipatory pedagogical process that encourages individuals to reflect on their lived experiences, and strive to “unveil, demystify, and understand the power relations responsible for their oppressed marginalization.”³³ In this proceeding, “the oppressed” must be willing to confront the status quo with direct action to overcome the institutional and geographical markings of systemic oppression. Maintaining that the pursuit of Freedom is a “project of liberation through praxis,” Freire and Macedo affirm decolonial sentiments that in attempting to transform their society, marginalized communities become the most qualified experts on the systems of their oppression.³⁴ Transformation can only be achieved through critical reflection, struggle, and action. As such, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* proposes a shift in frame of analysis when thinking through solutions to systemic problems. Whereas mainstream society has sensationalized politicians and academic institutions as a class of experts, Freire alludes to Italian political prisoner

³²Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 171.

³³ Donaldo Macedo in “Introduction,” in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

and philosopher Antonio Gramsci's declaration "all men are intellectuals."³⁵ Applying this grassroots approach to knowledge production, I turned to Black social movements resisting housing injustice to speak as experts on the failures of a neoliberal romanticizing of political emancipation. This study serves as a direct critique to policies and practices that reinforce a neocolonial, geographic project in contemporary times.

Scholarly Contributions:

Building on the work of African Diasporic Studies, Critical Geography, Black Geography, and Ethnic Studies, I am contributing to a geopolitical understanding of the mobilization of Black grassroots movements across the diaspora. I conducted an interdisciplinary study of racialized geographies in order to understand conditions of confinement, rationales of resistance, and the implications of expansions of Freedom amongst African peoples. By centering not only the violence in Oakland, California and Durban, South Africa but the people and movements actively resisting these racialized conditions, my research strives to uplift the lived experiences and political consciousness of survivors of the multiple logics of white supremacy. This project serves as an intervention to Western hegemonic control over space, as well as knowledge production. I intentionally chose to utilize local news stations, in conversation with the social media platforms of Moms 4 Housing and Abahlali baseMjondolo, to interrupt power dynamics that privilege outsider accounts of their struggles and resilience. In examining their social media—or self-curated virtual spaces—in particular, I shift power back into the hands of these Black housing organizations who are being denied access to place in the "real" world. My conclusions will contribute to scholarly conversations in both diasporic and decolonial studies, as well as growing knowledge of social movements.

³⁵ Antonio Gramsci, "The Intellectuals", in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith. (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 3-23.

Methodology:

Transnational Approach:

I attempted to understand African peoples' particular relationship(s) to racial capitalism—probing a multitude of topics, including racialized geographies, human rights, Black consciousness, and diaspora. As I analyzed the interrelations between the African diaspora, I chose to deemphasize the nation-state as a primary unit of analysis. I instead gravitated towards Black social movements as entry points to transnational knowledge concerning white supremacy, neoliberalism and racialized dispossession. Situating Abahlali baseMjondolo and Mums 4 Housing within the context of larger global phenomena including racial capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy, the Black radical tradition, and diaspora I revealed distinct, and interconnected geopolitical features that arise for Black peoples within landscapes of confinement—namely, Durban, South Africa and Oakland, California.

Mixed Methods:

For this project, I primarily used media/digital ethnography, which combines ethnographic methodologies and netnography. Ethnography is an approach to research that places an emphasis on understanding “context, culture, and nuance.”³⁶ Ethnography directs attention to local geopolitical processes from the perspective of the people most directly impacted by these forces. As Liam Martin argues in “Ethnography as Research Justice,” “the everyday practices of sociological research should be used to empower those most affected by the problem being studied.”³⁷ Therefore, my research unapologetically highlights the context, experiences, and voices of Black people experiencing housing injustice—people who are typically denied access to

³⁶ Lotta Junnilainen and Eeva Luhtakallio, “Media Ethnography,” *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, April 2016, pp. 1-4, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118541555.wbiepc025>.

³⁷ Liam Martin, “Ethnography as Research Justice,” in *Research Justice: Methodologies for Social Change* (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2015), 34.

academic or “official” conversations addressing social change. Netnography then, which is “a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through electronic networks,” may be used as a radical tool to uncover local relations that are unknown to mainstream society.³⁸ Moving beyond an understanding of the internet as static, media/digital ethnography provides a framework to examine expressions and formations of culture that emerge online—privileging knowledge we are to gain from social media.

Utilizing this approach, I explored the social media pages corresponding to Moms 4 Housing and Abahlali baseMjondolo. As these two groups of Black people continue to fight for physical place, I intentionally chose to highlight the media presence they have curated for themselves—showcasing one way they express their creative resistance to the status quo. Through preliminary research, I narrowed down Abahlali baseMjondolo’s social media presence to Facebook. Moms 4 Housing makes use of multiple platforms (Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook), however, for the purposes of this study, I examined their Instagram and Facebook. In uplifting these sources of knowledge, I am choosing to emphasize the voices of the Black organizers involved in these efforts of resistance, along with supporting community members. In addition to media/digital ethnography, I examined videos that uplift the struggles of the organizers in Durban and Oakland. These sources include the NBC Investigative Unit docu-series *The Moms of Magnolia Street* and the film *Dear Mandela*. To supplement this data, I conducted an extensive literature review on racialized geographies, neoliberalism, and Black radical social movements. Lastly, I analyzed news articles, Abahlali baseMjondolo’s digital archive, and the 2017 Alameda

³⁸ Kozinets, R. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39, 62. doi:10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935

County Homeless Count and Survey Comprehensive Report. By extracting information and local accounts of the racialized violence enclosed within these landscapes, I am disrupting power dynamics that privilege outsider accounts of their experiences.

Limitations:

To being, COVID-19 placed severe limitations on this project. While I had intended to conduct participatory observations with both groups, the global pandemic limited my research to what was available online. This transition in methodologies did not make my conclusions unsound, however I am cognizant that my research would have been stronger if I had been able to engage with Moms 4 Housing and Abahlali baseMjondolo directly. Another limitation to conducting this research project in the midst of a global pandemic, was the intensity of carrying out this scholarship in isolation, while witnessing the persistence of anti-Black violence on a global scale and plastered in the media. This moment in time presented significant challenges to me as a Black person and scholar. At this intersection, it became hard for me to process the magnitude of systemic oppression and this impacted my ability to engage with massive amounts of data. Working through topics including racialized geographies, police brutality and white supremacy were difficult, and I found myself having to take major breaks from this project. During this process, I realized that this research paper is only the beginning of my contribution to ethnic people's scholarship and resistance in academia. In the future, I plan on delving deeper into how geographies of confinement impact Black queer folks— as this demographic deserves more attention.

Literature Review:

Racialized Geographies:

Although landscapes appear “neutral” if stripped down to their most natural elements, locating the geopolitical features of a particular site reveals the multilayered dimensions at play within spaces and distinct places. Traditionally, geographers—and scientists alike— have applied a Newtonian lens to nature when attempting to conceptualize the implications of space. This characterization of nature presents the land as fixed, unimpressionable, and external to socio-historical forces. In *Uneven Development Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, Neil Smith and David Harvey trace the genealogy of this conservative ideology of nature to Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton.³⁹ Newton, also known as the father of modern science, was the pioneer of scientific thought that suggests that space and time are foundational elements of nature. Although he is attributed as one of the leading figures in contemporary scientific development, it is worth noting that a considerable amount of his theories were subjected to the influence of Judeo-Christian dogma. Namely, Newton came to theorize space as intrinsically connected to God, developing a seemingly unquestionable position for “absolute space.” This is the legacy that traditional scientific fields, including geography, have inherited.⁴⁰

Henri Lefebvre problematizes isolationist views of land with his theory: the production of space, naming nature as a phenomenon that is malleable and constructed through socio-historical forces.⁴¹ Lefebvre urges individuals to consider the historical, political, and economic processes that inform the socialization of landscapes. He moves beyond the capital-labor relationship outlined by Karl Marx, directing us to a “trinity formula”—inclusive of the land—that reveals the

³⁹ Neil Smith and David Harvey, in *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴¹ Henri Lefebvre and Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 7.

lived reality of people confined by marked geographies.⁴² Building on the work of Lefebvre, Fernando Coronil contributes to a global understanding of the production of space, engaging in a close examination of nature and capitalism in Venezuela. In *In the Magical State*, Coronil works to trace an interconnected web of capital flow across the globe, and in the process illuminates the force that underdeveloped the global south a “neocolonial disease.”⁴³ Coronil and Lefebvre offer crucial insight into the relationship between space, land, and capital that encourages investigation into the formation of geopolitical units—including the “first” and “third” world, along with the social confinement of communities of marginalized people. Considering nature a social relation, pushes the land beyond its physical elements and foregrounds power struggles and complex social formations, which provides a more nuanced analysis of localized regions.

African diasporic thinkers Achille Mbembe and Frantz Fanon direct our attention to sites around the world that restrict the agency and livelihood of Black people to racialized geographies.⁴⁴ In his book *Necropolitics*, Mbembe lays out the processes that occur during colonial coding that encourage a successful merging of physical landscapes with sociohistorical meaning.⁴⁵ He describes colonial occupation as a violent project that allows for the “seizing, delimiting, and asserting [of] control over a physical geographical area and of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations.”⁴⁶ His conceptualization of racialized geographies warrants inquiry into the formation of hierarchies, the creation of distinct classifications of people, the commodification of resources and humans, migration patterns, displacement, the making of

⁴² Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁴ I adopt María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo’s definition of racialized geographies, which affirms a socialization of the landscape that draws our attention to the colonial histories and contestations over power within these spaces. María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *Indian given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁴⁵ Joseph-Achille Mbembe and Steve Corcoran, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 79.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

ghettos, as well as carcerality. In fact, he specifically underscores the allocation of different rights to certain groups of people as a geopolitical reconfiguration resulting from colonization. For Mbembe, it is critical to look beyond the physicality of colonization to unearth the cultural imaginaries that are produced through space and time. It is through these socially produced ideologies and tropes that we derive the structure of our modern world.

Mbembe draws from Frantz Fanon's spatial account of colonial occupation, contending that "space was thus the raw material of sovereignty and of the violence it bears within it."⁴⁷ In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon provides a clear visual of the destructive, divisive nature of colonization. He insists that "the colonial world is a world divided into compartments—" specifically naming the structure of South African apartheid as an explicit indication of this.⁴⁸ Colonization involves the creation of boundaries and confines, embodied through the growing police state; it is upheld through force, and depends upon normalized exclusivity. These Black scholars deconstruct the racialized processes that are projected as natural, and expose the submergence of colonial logics deep within the landscape. Their critical geographic study foregrounds the urgency of my project, which works to uplift the resistance of two Black housing movements confined within racialized geographies.

Racial Capitalism:

When thinking through the implications of racialized geographies within the context of global, white supremacy, it is critical to engage in a discussion of racial capitalism. Some of us may be familiar with racial capitalism as it was conceived by Cedric Robinson in his political-

⁴⁷ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Pref. by Jean-Paul Sartre (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 38.

philosophical book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Although this conceptualization of capitalism is fundamental to an analysis of the complex social and economic struggles of Black communities throughout the world, I am intentionally choosing to gravitate toward a Black, South African iteration of racial capitalism, first.

Dr. Neville Alexander—an activist, academic, and revolutionary—from the Eastern Cape, laid out his interpretation of racial capitalism in his speech at the National Forum Committee Convention in Hammanskraal, Gauteng (South Africa) in 1983.⁴⁹ Alexander was a political prisoner on Robben Island with Nelson Mandela during apartheid, an educator, along with an organizer at the Azanian People’s Organization (among several other community and liberatory organizations).⁵⁰ Alexander begins his speech at the forum with an unapologetic proclamation of the mission of freedom movements in South Africa. He states, “the immediate goal of the national liberation struggle now being waged in South Africa is the destruction of the system of racial capitalism.”⁵¹ He identifies South African apartheid as a distinguished articulation of a larger geopolitical system—capitalism—and upholds that “apartheid will [truly] be eradicated with the system of racial capitalism.”⁵² It is crucial here to note that Neville Alexander recognizes apartheid as a race-based system intentionally manufactured to serve economic interests. As such, for this Black Marxist scholar, race cannot be separated from capitalism. Alexander’s racial capitalism is in direct response to people advocating for a “non-racial” or “multiracial” South Africa without actively working to deconstruct the political-economic structures that co-constructed and enforced

⁴⁹ Nicolas Magnien, “Dr. Neville Edward Alexander,” Dr. Neville Edward Alexander | South African History Online, accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/dr-neville-edward-alexander>.

⁵⁰ The Azanian People’s Organization is known to be the successor to the Black Consciousness (BCM) tradition founded by Steve Biko.

⁵¹ Neville Alexander, “Nation and Ethnicity in South Africa.” June 11-12th, 1983. PDF, 19. <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv-pdf/AK2117/AK2117-J3-16-AQ4-001-jpeg.pdf>.

⁵² Peter James Hudson, “Racial Capitalism and the Dark Proletariat,” Boston Review, April 21, 2019, <http://bostonreview.net/forum/remake-world-slavery-racial-capitalism-and-justice/peter-james-hudson-racial-capitalism-and..>

these “immutable” racial categories—namely imperialism and capitalism.⁵³ Neville Alexander is firm in his stance that “a non-racial capitalism is impossible in South Africa.”⁵⁴ He therefore advocates for an anti-racist, socialist South Africa to overcome legacies of racial capitalism—as expressed in the 1984 Azanian Manifesto.⁵⁵ This document is an embodiment of the radical discussions and resistance efforts that took place from the 1970’s through the 1980’s revolving around racial domination and capital accumulation. The political ideologies and theories produced during this time were part of larger dialogues between Marxist and diasporic scholars in a global Black consciousness movement (which I will discuss later on).⁵⁶ These scholars believed that racism and capitalism must be understood together—supporting Neville Alexander’s claim in 2002 that “the apartheid-capitalist system has simply given way to the post-apartheid-capitalist system.”⁵⁷ This analysis is pivotal to a close examination of the afterlives of racial capitalism and white supremacy.

Identifying a theorization of racial capitalism across the African diaspora, I pivot to Black American Cedric Robinson’s acknowledgement of the function of the Black radical tradition—or Freedom oriented practices and revolutionary ideologies held by African peoples (around the world) living under relational conditions of racial capitalism. In his book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Robinson makes a compelling argument for the linkages between particular elements of a Black Liberation struggle against global capitalism and white

⁵³ Peter James Hudson, “Racial Capitalism and the Dark Proletariat,” Boston Review, April 21, 2019, <http://bostonreview.net/forum/remake-world-slavery-racial-capitalism-and-justice/peter-james-hudson-racial-capitalism-and-justice>.

⁵⁴ Neville Alexander, “Nation and Ethnicity in South Africa.” June 11-12th, 1983. PDF, 28. <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv-pdfo/AK2117/AK2117-J3-16-AQ4-001-jpeg.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Action Youth, “Azanian Manifesto,” Azanian Manifesto | South African History Online, February 22, 2016, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/azanian-manifesto>.

⁵⁶ Peter James Hudson, “Racial Capitalism and the Dark Proletariat,” Boston Review, April 21, 2019, <http://bostonreview.net/forum/remake-world-slavery-racial-capitalism-and-justice/peter-james-hudson-racial-capitalism-and-justice>.

⁵⁷ Andy Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa after 1994* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 8.

supremacy.⁵⁸ His scholarship builds upon Black radical, economic thought that rejects fundamental principles accepted and promoted by the Western world—including liberal, Marxist propaganda.⁵⁹ Robinson insists that modern capitalism and Western racialization were a direct product of the old feudal order, contrary to Marxist dogma. He directs our attention to the European Dark Ages and the “racialization of the proletariat,” when the Slavs and the Irish were categorized amongst the West’s first *n******, as evidence of this phenomenon.⁶⁰ These racialized subjects—Robinson argues—were victims of displacement, colonialism, and slavery within Europe. He arrives at the conclusion that capitalism and racism evolved explicitly from this order, and from the Western metropolises formed a world hegemonic structure predicated on “racial capitalism.” This white supremacist force is dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide. Robinson is then able to identify a historical-material tradition resulting from racial capitalism that contextualizes African peoples’ strides for a human-centered conceptualization of Freedom and the development of an abolitionist consciousness, which he names the Black radical tradition.⁶¹ In *Black Marxism*, Robinson draws from the resistance of African peoples all over the world, including the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria, the Baganda tribe of Uganda, Haitians, Black Brazilians, and several Black American activists and scholars. This extension of diasporic and decolonial thought offers a transnational framework that is useful to understand the resistance efforts, along with the violent circumstances, of Black peoples across the diaspora. Robinson concludes that “the people of Africa and the African diaspora [have] endured an integrating experience that [has] left

⁵⁸ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁵⁹ I’m referencing scholars such as Black radical sociologist Oliver Cromwell Cox, along with Black radical historian and the first prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago Eric Williams.

⁶⁰ Cedric J. Robinson and Robin D.G. Kelley, “Introduction,” in *Black Marxism: the Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Penguin Books, 2021), p. xiii.

⁶¹ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 308.

[us] not only with a common task but a shared vision” for Liberation.”⁶² Similarly to with South African apartheid, it is important to be specific about the processes that confine Black people to the American landscape—namely chattel slavery and anti-Black racism. As a Black American, Cedric Robinson advocates against and theorizes about the multiple logics of white supremacy and the nuances of racial capitalism from this specific lens.

I introduce these distinguishable, yet interconnected, theories of racial capitalism to marvel at the implications of parallel concepts born out of conjunctural processes, while simultaneously holding space for each theories’ key differences. Although Neville Alexander seems to particularize the conditions of racial capitalism to South Africa, Cedric Robinson expands it and, in fact, universalizes it. For Alexander, racial capitalism produces a unique geo-political structure that confines Black South Africans separate from the rest of the world. However, Robinson examines racial capitalism as a global super-structure that is not restricted to the bounds of nation-states. Both of these activists have contributed to scholarship on racial capitalism, and their work reveals the violent and racialized processes that are active in localized regions. As I think through the lens of two theorists responding to separate, yet overlapping logics of white supremacy, I imagine them working in conversation with one another—transcending space and time—and disrupting neocolonial control of space. I believe that it is within these pockets of potential crossovers that true Liberation can be achieved on a global scale.

⁶² Ibid., 166.

Neoliberal Capitalism:

Situating distinct cities in the context of neoliberal capitalism allows for a tracing of limited, Western ideals of linear Development to be found around the world.⁶³ This tracing unearths the neocolonial logics that inform geographies of confinement in contemporary times. Both critical and urban geography refute conservative views of space as an isolated entity, and locate the city as a locus of predatory, neoliberal economic processes. In *The Urban Political Ambivalent*, Theresa Enright and Ugo Ross discuss the origins and implications of late neoliberal capitalism, emphasizing its relationship with globalized financial institutions, free markets and fair trade, along with “proliferating struggles over everyday life.”⁶⁴ They call out the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), the Bretton Woods Regime, and the Washington Consensus. These scholars foreground post-World War II and Cold War projects of “Development” in their analysis of a world that has been marked by violent Eurocentric economic standards, which have been legitimized through processes of Western hegemony. Enright and Ross stress how the development of the city has been at the core of a neoliberal development imaginary, borrowing Andy Merrifield’s term the “Urban-Financial-Complex.”⁶⁵ Enright and Ross note how this transition is characterized by a shift in who the city values as an acceptable or desirable citizen. The qualities that tend to make an acceptable citizen, they argue, are directly tied to both human and social capital. The neoliberal city is a place that privileges the livelihood of people who

⁶³ I am capitalizing the “D” in Development to make reference to Gillian Hart’s distinction between “big D/little d” development. Hart draws attention to the post-World War II era as a moment in world history when the United States projected its plan for market liberalism onto the rest of the world. As “the West” started using terms like “developing” for “the rest” of the world, the Global South was pushed to integrate themselves into global markets—imposing shifts towards “developing” their markets. Development was a “project of intervention in the third world” and has racial capitalist implications.

Vishnu Padayachee and Gillian Hart, “Post-Apartheid Developments in Historical & Comparative Perspective,” in *The Development Decade? Economic and Social Change in South Africa, 1994-2004* (Cape Town, South Africa: Hsrc Press, 2006).

⁶⁴ Theresa Enright and Ugo Rossi, *The Urban Political: Ambivalent Spaces of Late Neoliberalism* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan., 2018), 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

contribute to productivity over those who do not.⁶⁶ This becomes visible in distinct sites that implement policies of austerity, choosing to disinvest in public programs including health care, childcare, and affordable housing. It is no mistake that the city's most vulnerable populations—racialized subjects, poor folks, women, children, the LGBTQ+ community, etc.—bear the heaviest of burdens in these locations. To address these social inequalities, the city then turns to historically racialized measures of security, including policing—where the most vulnerable populations are ultimately criminalized and restricted to geographies of confinement.

South Africa as Racialized Geography:

In the beginning of the post-apartheid era, Black South Africans were promised “freedom,” in addition to access to housing by Nelson Mandela—a main anti-apartheid revolutionary and the first Black president of South Africa.⁶⁷ Attempting to leave behind a system that handed out privileges and withheld rights from individuals on the basis of race, Black South Africans were hopeful of a new system led by one of their own. Unfortunately, poor, Black South Africans bear witness to a disappointing truth in the wake of widespread neoliberalism: “the iniquitous fact [that] exploitation can wear a black face.”⁶⁸ As Frantz Fanon maintains in *The Wretched of the Earth*, expressions of “independence” within “post-colonial” societies warrant more investigation, if poor people do not have access to even bread, clothing, or shelter. In his book *Fanonian Practices in South Africa from Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*, Nigel C. Gibson contributes to an uplifting of the lived experiences and political consciousness of poor, Black South Africans in the post-apartheid era. Although Nelson Mandela's political party—the African National Congress

⁶⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁷ Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali BaseMjondolo* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 20.

⁶⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Pref. by Jean-Paul Sartre (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 145

(ANC) —has been in power since the official end of the apartheid regime in 1994, Gibson sheds light on the “specific political-economic choices defined and made during the transition period by nationalist political elites that turned their backs on mass democratic participation.” Political officials in South Africa have chosen to prioritize profit over people. This is apparent in the case where the ANC boasted about a “cost-recovery” program to build 1.8 million new houses to address inaccessible housing, however, based on a study conducted by David Alexander McDonald and John Pape on the effects of cost recovery programs on basic municipal services, it is estimated that, conversely, two million people were evicted by 2001.⁶⁹ In the documentary *Dear Mandela*, filmmaker Dara Kell and Christopher Nizza follow the growing shack dwellers movement Abahlali baseMjondolo and further illustrate the exploitative relationship that government officials have with poor people and housing in South Africa.⁷⁰ Early on, the film spotlights a Black South African woman who lives in a shack settlement. This woman expresses how every election season candidates from the department of housing approach the settlement to pander for votes—writing down the number of houses needed in the community that they promise to deliver upon election. She informs us that each election, there is no action—just more false promises. Her story supports South African scholar Sampie Terreblanche’s argument that “the quality of life [for] the poorer 50 percent has deteriorated considerably in the post-apartheid period.”⁷¹ Terreblanche upholds that South Africa is far from liberated, and merely changed from

⁶⁹ Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali BaseMjondolo* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014),74.

⁷⁰ *Dear Mandela*, directed Dara Kell and Christopher Nizza (Sleeping Giant, 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G879w1zD0oY>.

⁷¹ Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali BaseMjondolo* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014),73.

a highly racialized society to a highly stratified society that “has not been cleared of its erstwhile rigid, racial . . . legacy of apartheid and colonialism.”⁷²

Nigel Gibson also directs our attention to Abahlali baseMjondolo—the real experts on the conditions of neo-apartheid in South Africa. Abahlali is a shack dwellers movement that advocates for universal housing and a shift towards a “culture of collectivity.”⁷³ As the largest poor people’s movement in South Africa, they embrace what their president, S’bu Zikode, calls a “living politics”—a politic shaped in thought and in action by ordinary men and women.”⁷⁴ Abahlali contextualizes the poverty and violence on the ground of South Africa for its poor people. For example, on June 7th, 2019 they released a press statement called “Violent Evictions in Cato Manor and Chesterville.”⁷⁵ This document details the destruction of nearly 60 homes at Cato Manor, along with a police raid that took place at Ridgeview settlement in Chesterville in response to their land occupancies. The Land Invasion Unit and municipal security utilized rubber bullets to attack the people who lived at Ridgeview, destroying 40 homes in the process. Abahlali stood firmly in resistance to this abuse of power, and declared “the comrades who lost their homes will rebuild.”⁷⁶ This press statement calls out the political party in control of both districts where this tension continues to occur, the African National Congress—who Abahlali labels the ones who “[continue] to oppress the poor.”⁷⁷ Abahlali baseMjondolo closes their statement with a declaration that connects their circumstances to that of impoverished people everywhere. Signing off, they warn

⁷² Ibid., 73.

⁷³ Nigel C. Gibson and S’bu Zikode, “Forward” in *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali BaseMjondolo* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), vii.

⁷⁴ Ibid., v.

⁷⁵ Mqapheli Bonono, “Violent Evictions in Cato Manor & Chesterville,” Abahlali baseMjondolo, June 7, 2019, <https://abahlali.org/node/16938/>.

⁷⁶ Mqapheli Bonono, “Violent Evictions in Cato Manor & Chesterville,” Abahlali baseMjondolo, June 7, 2019, <https://abahlali.org/node/16938/>.

⁷⁷ Mqapheli Bonono, “Violent Evictions in Cato Manor & Chesterville,” Abahlali baseMjondolo, June 7, 2019, <https://abahlali.org/node/16938/>.

readers that “the struggle continues” and to “Occupy. Resist. [and] Develop.”⁷⁸ Using this movement as an entry point to the questionable meaning of freedom in South Africa, this landscape is revealed as a site upholding the logics of the apartheid regime—which have been remapped onto the livelihoods of resistant, Black people.

Oakland as Racialized Geography:

I introduce Margaret M. Ramirez’s borderland analytic, from “City as Borderland: Gentrification and the Policing of Black and Latinx Geographies in Oakland,” to probe this particular city as a racialized geography.⁷⁹ I attempt to further highlight white supremacy’s capacity to confine marginalized peoples through socially constructed borders. Ramirez theorizes about the conditions that construct arbitrary lines of confinement for Black and Latinx people in Oakland, locating legacies of white supremacist power relations and processes of dispossession in place. Building on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Ramirez conceptualizes neoliberal cities that uphold logics of structural and cultural exclusion as borderlands—“*una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds.”⁸⁰ Through a critical awareness of the U.S-Mexico border as a social construction with several geopolitical implications, Ramirez expands Anzaldúa’s borderland analytic to a local investigation of unnatural, uneven borders, which are produced and policed in sites like Oakland. She highlights racialized projects—including gentrification and the construction of gang injunction zones—and situates them within the larger context of colonialism, the carceral state, and racial capitalism. Exposing Oakland as a

⁷⁸ Mqapheli Bonono, “Violent Evictions in Cato Manor & Chesterville,” Abahlali baseMjondolo, June 7, 2019, <https://abahlali.org/node/16938/>.

⁷⁹ Margaret M Ramirez, “City as Borderland: Gentrification and the Policing of Black and Latinx Geographies in Oakland,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 1 (January 2019): pp. 147-166, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775819843924>.

⁸⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands=: La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Book Company, 19887), 3.

borderland—a racialized geography—is useful as it encourages a nuanced discussion of the way unequal sociohistorical forces are “lived [through], embodied, and resisted daily.”⁸¹

I turn to Feminist scholar Erin McElroy and Geographer Alex Werth to deconstruct dispossession resulting from “tech gentrification”— a process coded with expressions of racialized violence, and one that informs a legacy of structural resistance in Oakland, CA particularly.⁸² Tech gentrification is displacement caused by tech industries (including Twitter and Uber) that replaces marginalized communities. McElroy and Werth borrow from Black Geographers, including Ruth Wilson Gilmore, promoting a spatial analysis of class stratification that is inherently connected to economic development in racial capitalism. They begin their study by tracing corporate property speculation that resulted in the dispossession of Black and Brown communities to the late 1990’s, during the “Dot Com Boom.”⁸³ They distinguish this time period from the “Tech Boom 2.0”— Silicon Valley’s rapid economic growth following the Great Recession.⁸⁴ McElroy and Werth call attention to former Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown’s attempt to “develop” the Uptown area of downtown Oakland during the Dot Com Boom, when Uptown had an “image problem” directly associated with race.⁸⁵ Mayor Brown transformed the space into high-end condos and clubs— all of which were inaccessible to the local residents.⁸⁶ Following a legacy of investment in capitalism and not communities, McElroy and Werth spotlight a moment when anti-displacement activists demanded eviction data from the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP) to preempt Uber’s plans

⁸¹ Margaret M Ramirez, “City as Borderland: Gentrification and the Policing of Black and Latinx Geographies in Oakland,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 1 (January 2019): pp. 147-166, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775819843924>, 148.

⁸² Erin McElroy and Alex Werth, “Deracinated Disposessions: On the Foreclosures of ‘Gentrification’ in Oakland, CA,” *Antipode* 51, no. 3 (2019): pp. 878-898, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12528>.

⁸³ Erin McElroy and Alex Werth, “Deracinated Disposessions: On the Foreclosures of ‘Gentrification’ in Oakland, CA,” *Antipode* 51, no. 3 (2019): pp. 878-898, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12528>, 878.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 878.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 879.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 879.

to move to Uptown in 2015. That year, according to McElroy and Werth, Uber arranged to send 3000 “techies” to a region that had a long history of neglect.⁸⁷ Past data from AEMP revealed that during a push for “redevelopment” in 2012 Twitter moved its headquarters to what used to be an old Furniture Mart on Market Street, and consequently, there was a propulsion of people into Skid Row.⁸⁸ Upon receiving this information, in 2015, community members resisted Uber’s attempt to settle in Oakland, and come 2017 Uber chose to flip the property for a 45% profit and locate somewhere else. This victory was short lived, however, seeing as currently 49% of the houseless people in Oakland are Black and the number of open houses is not the problem.⁸⁹ According to Moms 4 Housing—the Black, community-based housing organization—“there are four times as many empty homes in Oakland as there are people without homes.”⁹⁰ “The Alameda County Homeless Point-in-Time Count & Survey” purports that there are roughly 2,000 houseless people in Oakland, which, based on The Moms calculations, would mean that there are roughly 8,000 vacant properties. Mercury News, a local news station, reports that the 2019 United States Census indicates that there are only 6,000 vacant houses.⁹¹ Acknowledging this discrepancy, it is clear that both Moms 4 Housing and external sources indicate that there are more than enough houses in this region for everyone to be sheltered. Moms 4 Housing mobilizes behind a commitment for universal housing, declaring in their mission statement that “no one should be homeless when homes are sitting empty.”⁹² In solidarity with the Moms 4 Housing, I affirm McElroy and Werth’s identification of a “settler imaginary” within Oakland, resulting from Spanish and English invasion

⁸⁷ A techie is a term, sometimes used negatively, to describe a person in the technological industry.

⁸⁸ Erin McElroy and Alex Werth, “Deracinated Dispossessions: On the Foreclosures of ‘Gentrification’ in Oakland, CA,” *Antipode* 51, no. 3 (2019): pp. 878-898, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12528>, 878.

⁸⁹ Applied Survey Research, “PDF” (Watsonville, CA, 2017).

⁹⁰ “Moms 4 Housing,” Moms 4 Housing, accessed June 10, 2020, <https://moms4housing.org/>.

⁹¹ Leonardo Castañeda and Marisa Kendall, “How Many Vacant Houses Are There Really in the Bay Area?,” *The Mercury News* (The Mercury News, January 6, 2020), <https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/01/05/how-many-vacant-houses-are-there-really-in-the-bay-area/>.

⁹² “Moms 4 Housing,” Moms 4 Housing, accessed June 10, 2020, <https://moms4housing.org/>.

onto unceded Ohlone territory.⁹³ Oakland has been located as “a new urban frontier” within critical urban and geographic scholarship—a place that cares more for profit than people with racialized undertones.⁹⁴

Deeper into a Borderland Analytic:

Returning to Margaret Ramírez’s borderland analytic reveals neoliberal cities to be racialized geographies that hold “tension, ambivalence, and unrest”; these sites should also be understood as a birthplace for resilient subjects that emerge as a means of human survival.⁹⁵ Ramírez scrutinizes the geopolitical dynamics that attempt to naturalize the emergence of an unequal relationship between those who the city deems desirable and those who have been disposed of as undesirables. Drawing connections between mass incarceration—or the prison-industrial-complex—and the policing of borders, Ramírez contends that Black and Latinx communities are confined to carceral geographies as a result of the pervasiveness of white supremacist logics, namely racial capitalist extraction. She contextualizes the criminalization of poor Black and Brown people in Oakland, upholding that “much of the bordering work that marks some bodies as legitimate and others as out of place happens far from the political border itself.”⁹⁶ Within urban centers police agents (including ICE) continue to enforce socially constructed, colonial boundaries, along with ideologies and policies that legitimize Western hegemonic control of space. This is evident through structurally aggressive displacement and eviction practices in gentrifying cities, in addition to increased deployment of police force. While structuring

⁹³ Erin McElroy and Alex Werth, “Deracinated Disposessions: On the Foreclosures of ‘Gentrification’ in Oakland, CA,” *Antipode* 51, no. 3 (2019): pp. 878-898, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12528>, 879.

⁹⁴ Erin McElroy and Alex Werth, “Deracinated Disposessions: On the Foreclosures of ‘Gentrification’ in Oakland, CA,” *Antipode* 51, no. 3 (2019): pp. 878-898, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12528>, 879.

⁹⁵ Margaret M Ramírez, “City as Borderland: Gentrification and the Policing of Black and Latinx Geographies in Oakland,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 1 (January 2019): pp. 147-166, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775819843924>, 147.

⁹⁶ Corey Johnson et al., “Interventions on Rethinking ‘the Border’ in Border Studies,” *Political Geography* 30, no. 2 (2011): pp. 61-69, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.01.002>, 61.

Borderlands as an examination of the friction and brutality that emanates from racialized landscapes, Anzaldua also recognizes the creative potential buried beneath the cracks of these surfaces. Anzaldua and Ramirez suggest that from the liminality of geographies of confinement forges a “new consciousness” that materializes from “intense pain; its energy comes from the continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.”⁹⁷ Essentially, racialized, resistant people form consciousnesses and philosophies that allows them to reconceptualize the foundations of a new world.

Freedom Dreaming:

Robin D.G. Kelley illuminates traces of an imaginative consciousness amongst Black, radical social movements by identifying their capacity to produce—what he terms—“poetic knowledge” in pursuit of a Liberated future.⁹⁸ In his book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* Kelley provides a brief outline of Black radical thought in the 20th century, which displays the “alternative visions and dreams that inspire new generations to continue to struggle for change.”⁹⁹ He pays respect to the surrealist movement, Third World Liberation movements, Marxist thought, along with Pan-Africanism—as organizations of people that were bold enough to dream past the despairing realities of white supremacy. Kelley specifically borrows from Martinican philosopher Aime Cesaire’s essay “Poetry and Knowledge” to derive his understanding of creative knowledge production within radical social movements. He argues that these unconventional organizations “do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather the best ones do what great poetry always does: transport us to another place, compel us to relive

⁹⁷Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands=: La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Book Company, 19887), 80.

⁹⁸Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, iv.

horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society.”¹⁰⁰ Privileging what we are to gain through an emphasis on lived experiences and a critical examination of the “poetics of struggle,”¹⁰¹ Kelley directs us to everyday people and activists as artists and creators of a Liberated tomorrow.

From a Poet of Struggle: Words From Our Teacher Assata

Below I have provided a poem from the *Autobiography of Assata Shakur*. Assata is a Black American revolutionary who renamed herself Assata (‘she who struggles’) Olugbala (‘for the people’) Shakur (‘the thankful one’) in order to break free from her surname passed down through chattel slavery.¹⁰² She is an ex-political prisoner and current political refugee in Cuba. Shakur was a Black Panther activist and is a survivor of America's multiple expressions of racialized violence towards African peoples, including the expansion of the carceral state.¹⁰³ While in government custody (for crimes she has maintained her innocence over) she was beaten, ridiculed, and placed into a men’s prison facility under horrendous conditions.¹⁰⁴ After escaping from prison and fleeing to Cuba, Assata Shakur was placed onto the FBI's most-wanted terrorists list and currently has a bounty of 2 million dollars. I stand in solidarity with Assata Shakur and thank her for her contributions to Black Liberation.

“Affirmation” by Assata Shakur

I believe in living.
I believe in the spectrum
of Beta days and Gamma people.
I believe in sunshine.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 9.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 10.

¹⁰² Jacuma Kambui, “About Assata Shakur,” Assata Shakur Speaks!, accessed March 11, 2021, <http://assatashakur.org/>.

¹⁰³ I have been told the story of Assata Shakur from several of my elders and comrades in Black Liberatory spaces.

¹⁰⁴ Assata Shakur, Angela Davis, and Lennox S. Hinds, *Assata: an Autobiography* (London: Zed Books, 2014).

In windmills and waterfalls,
tricycles and rocking chairs.
And I believe that seeds grow into sprouts.
And sprouts grow into trees.
I believe in the magic of the hands.
And in the wisdom of the eyes.
I believe in rain and tears.
And in the blood of infinity.

I believe in life.
And I have seen the death parade
march through the torso of the earth,
sculpting mud bodies in its path.
I have seen the destruction of the daylight,
and seen bloodthirsty maggots
prayed to and saluted.

I have seen the kind become the blind
and the blind become the blind
in one easy lesson.
I have walked on cut glass.
I have eaten crow and blunder bread
and breathed the stench of indifference.

I have been locked by the lawless.
Handcuffed by the haters.
Gagged by the greedy.
And, if I know anything at all,
it's that a wall is just a wall
and nothing more at all.
It can be broken down.

I believe in living.
I believe in birth.
I believe in the sweat of love
and in the fire of truth.

And I believe that a lost ship,
steered by tired, seasick sailors,
can still be guided home
to port.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1.

“Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud:” On a Collective Black Consciousness and Strides for Global Black Power¹⁰⁶

While this paper is by no means an intellectual history of Black radical social movements or theories of Black consciousness, I believe it would be incomplete without providing further historical context to the abolitionist ideologies emerging from Black American and Black South African radical housing movements of today.

“Black Power” began as a political and cultural revolution in the 1960’s and 1970’s amongst Black Americans in response to the pyrrhic victories of the civil rights movement. The civil rights era gave birth to a wealth of Black organizations committed to granting Black folks in the United States further access to democratic rights and citizenship, including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.¹⁰⁷ Black activism was able to achieve the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, in the wake of these successes and (while they were still being fought for) organizers were murdered and the government was doing nothing about it.¹⁰⁸ Simultaneously, the Democratic Party in Mississippi affirmed the racist logics of this nation by rejecting the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party under the leadership of Fannie Lou Hamer—who was advocating for Black disenfranchised voters. This was all happening during the rise and subsequent assassination of Black radical Malcolm X,¹⁰⁹ and a period of urban rebellions between 1964-1968. These events set the stage for sentiments

¹⁰⁶ James Brown. “Say It Loud - I'm Black and I'm Proud,” track 7 on *A Soulful Christmas*, Vox Studios, James Brown, 1969, vinyl.

¹⁰⁷ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 61.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁰⁹ Rest in power to our ancestor Malcolm who passed away on February 21, 1965.

of Black nationalism¹¹⁰ and self determination to become prominent sentiments in Black activist communities.¹¹¹ SNCC members started to carry guns as a measure of protection; prominent leaders in SNCC—including Stokely Carmichael—began second guessing the civil rights movement’s integrationist ideologies. Soon enough, in the summer of 1966, the phrase “Black Power” was employed by SNCC and CORE radicalists. These organizers grew discontent with the absence of true Freedom in the aftermath of the civil rights era and undertook a new frame of analysis: no more white, liberal compromise. This manifested into an unapologetic proclamation of Blackness as a resistant identity and the formation of a new Black consciousness—Black power.

From this transitional period for Black social movements in North America emerged several radical organizations that were committed to addressing global systemic racism, working-class struggles, and police violence at its core. One such group was The Black Panther Party for Self Defense, a Black Power political organization formed in the 1960’s by college students Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton in Oakland, California.¹¹² The founding document of the Black Panther Party—the Ten-Point Program—names several human rights concerns impacting Black communities up to the present day, including inadequate housing and education. The final demand on The Program summarizes the goals of the Black Panther Party: “land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace.”¹¹³ The Black Panther party was dedicated to directly servicing the needs of Black people, as evidenced through their “survival programs”—including

¹¹⁰ As Robin D.G. Kelley indicates, “Black nationalism” is to be understood as “Black activists’ support for anticolonial movements and Third World Solidarity.”

Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 62.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹¹² Craig Collisson, “Black Panther Party (U.S.A.), August 2, 2019, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/black-panther-party/>.

¹¹³ Black Panthers, “The Ten-Point Program,” Black Panther’s Ten-Point Program, accessed April 11, 2021, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/black-panthers/1966/10/15.htm>.

free breakfast and transportation.¹¹⁴ Another organization, the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) embodied the creative potential for Black solidarity with decolonial movements abroad. RAM grew from the teachings of Black activists and scholars like Vicki Garvin and Harold Cruse, along with Black nationalist and Marxist-Leninist thought.¹¹⁵ Inspired by uprisings and revolutions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, RAM employed a global capitalist framework to further contextualize the Black American struggle through lenses of white supremacy, imperialism and Third World Liberation. From their decolonial analysis, they concluded that a revolution for Black people in the Americas is “inextricably linked to the colonized people around the world.”¹¹⁶ Overall, the Black Power movement was a part of an internationalist Black consciousness movement that embodies an elastic capacity within radical social movements.

Black Consciousness in South Africa:

“Being Black is not a matter of pigmentation—being Black is a reflection of a mental attitude.”¹¹⁷

—Steve Biko, ‘The Definition of Black Consciousness’

Black radical and anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko recognized the growing development of Black Power in the United States, and was able to spearhead the Black Consciousness Movement during apartheid in South Africa. Steve Biko’s theorization of Black consciousness is heavily rooted in Frantz Fanon’s philosophy of liberation. According to post-colonial scholar and

¹¹⁴ “The Black Panther Party: Challenging Police and Promoting Social Change,” National Museum of African American History and Culture, August 23, 2020, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/black-panther-party-challenging-police-and-promoting-social-change>.

¹¹⁵ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 62.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹¹⁷ Nigel C. Gibson and S'bu Zikode, “Forward” in *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali BaseMjondolo* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 43.

Fanon specialist Nigel Gibson, Frantz Fanon's work arrived in South Africa as a result of the organizing efforts of the Black Power movement in the United States.¹¹⁸ Black students in South Africa—the South African Students Organization (SASO) specifically—were receptive to a practical and self-emancipatory philosophy of freedom and were introduced to these frameworks through the writings of Black American theologian James Cone—a Black radical who was extremely critical of mainstream Christianity. Both Cone and Fanon emphasize conceptions of struggle for oppressed peoples and the critical nature of liberation of the mind.¹¹⁹ This led Biko to declare: “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”¹²⁰ Frantz Fanon believed that the path to Freedom requires deep contemplation, directly accompanied by awareness of the lived reality of the marginalized masses. For Fanon, it is only when we view “practice as a product of philosophy” that we will be participating in “enlightened” action; these are measures taken toward the transformation of—and liberation from—geographies of confinement.¹²¹ Fanon's approach to a practical, revolutionary philosophy—taken from his work *Towards the African Revolution*—affirms that everyday people hold the most valuable pieces of knowledge pertaining to a particular region's political climate.¹²² Therefore, for Steve Biko and Frantz Fanon oppressed peoples are the experts on the conditions of their liberation and must employ a proactive consciousness in that liberatory process.

Steve Biko's Black consciousness was grounded in African/Black cultural concepts of collectivity and communalism, along with a philosophy of self-emancipation, and recognition of solidarity as a point of rupture to colonial order. Biko acknowledged the global scope of Black

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹²⁰ Stephen Bantu Biko, *I Write What I Like* (London: Heinemann, 1978), 68.

¹²¹ Nigel C. Gibson and S'bu Zikode, “Forward” in *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali BaseMjondolo* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), xi.

¹²² Frantz Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

consciousness as an ideological movement, arguing that young Black people were becoming empowered and mobilizing behind songs like James Brown's unapologetic anthem "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud." He noted this song as part of "our modern culture: a culture of defiance, self-assertion, and a group pride and solidarity."¹²³ Similarly to Frantz Fanon and Cedric Robinson, Steve Biko believed that a consciousness was emerging as a set of traditions and practices employed towards an end to global systems of white supremacy—namely apartheid, colonialism, and slavery. Black consciousness in South Africa, however, became particularly popular at a time in the 1960's when the apartheid state was banning the gathering of resistant groups, including the Pan Africanist Congress and the African National Congress.¹²⁴ Black South Africans, like Steve Biko, were moved towards a philosophy based on self-determination because they believed true Freedom could be achieved if they realized their potential as conscious beings and created tangible change. Consequently, Black consciousness was simultaneously a political and mental revolution. Biko believed that we can resolve fragmentations towards a collective revolution through solidarity, or actions taken against a common oppressor. He affirmed that solidarity can be understood further as an "alterity of rupture, of conflict, [and]of battle."¹²⁵ It is through this Fanonian conceptualization of solidarity that I, along with peoples across the African diaspora dream of a Freedom that destroys and restores the deep wounds of white supremacy around the world.

Using "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" as a timestamp, from 1969 and onward, Black consciousness was a thriving global, liberatory phenomenon, which was further actualized

¹²³Stephen Bantu Biko, *I Write What I Like* (London: Heinemann, 1978), 46.

¹²⁴ Nigel C. Gibson and S'bu Zikode, "Forward" in *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali BaseMjondolo* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 49.

¹²⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, trans. Charles Lam (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1967), 222.

in South Africa through the Soweto Uprisings of 1976. The Soweto Uprisings were a series of resistance efforts led by a collective of high school students—the South African Student’s Movement Action Committee. This effort mobilized nearly 10,000 people in response to racist educational policies passed by the apartheid regime.¹²⁶ Inspired by the ideologies of the Black Consciousness Movement, the South African Student’s Movement Action Committee demanded an end to institutional discrimination and were met with force. As these organizers marched peacefully on June 16th, 1976 they were attacked by teargas and bullets—illustrating to the world the violent terror of the apartheid state and white supremacy more generally. This uprising only began in Soweto in 1976, and continued to spread throughout the country and into the following year. This moment of Black civil disobedience is said to have been a major catalyst to the end of the official apartheid regime in South Africa. The Soweto Uprisings, along with the global Black consciousness movement, should serve as a guides for social movements of seemingly impossible change of today.¹²⁷

Final Thoughts:

Although this is nowhere near a complete intellectual history of radicalism or Black consciousness as it has been expressed in South Africa, the United States, or the larger African diaspora, I have identified several people and movements across the Black world that employ an abolitionist consciousness in pursuit of a Freedom rooted in human dignity. Applying a diasporic—or transnational—framework in conversation with Fanon’s notion of solidarity, I seek

¹²⁶ “The June 16 Soweto Youth Uprising,” South African History Online, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/june-16-soweto-youth-uprising>.

¹²⁷ “The June 16 Soweto Youth Uprising,” South African History Online, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/june-16-soweto-youth-uprising>.

to further understand what we might gain from placing two contemporary Black housing movements, in Oakland California and Durban South Africa, under the same microscope.¹²⁸

While constructing this literature review, I stumbled upon several Black musicians—across the African diaspora—that either engage in themes of Freedom Dreaming, or blend well sonically with music that explicitly expresses strides for Black Liberation. I have curated a playlist to go along with this study. Enjoy. Dream. Resist.

Accessible on Spotify: “still freedom dreamin”

¹²⁸ Solidarity, for Fanon and Biko, should be understood as a point of rupture to colonial order.

From the Cracks Beneath the Surface: An Analysis of the Survival Tactics and Resistance
Efforts that Emerge from These Racialized Landscapes

Section Precursor:

Before I proceed, I want to take a moment to hold space for the Black lives that have been lost as a result of the violence within Oakland, California, Durban South Africa, and across the world. May every Black soul lost to white supremacy and racial capitalism rest in power. Forever remembering: Jayden Khoza, Leo Williams, and Nathaniel Julius—to name a few people who have been killed by South African police. Since I began this project there have been several Black folks in North America who have been murdered by the state as well, including Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ma'Khia Bryant. May they rest in power.

I want to provide a trigger warning for the passage that follows. I will be discussing the police brutality and systemic violence that takes place within a few cities in South Africa, along with Oakland, California, and the larger United States of America. Acknowledging the weight we all carry to this moment, and traumas that many of us are currently living through, I want to facilitate a collective breath before I move forward.

Stop.

Breathe.

Breathe in from your nose, using your stomach. Let it fill and expand.

Exhale.

Let this exhale be longer than your inhale.

Do this as many times as needed.

“The world has been built on these unsustainable systems of white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism. We are in this moment, right now, where we are seeing the consequences of that directly.”¹²⁹

- Oakland resident, *The Moms of Magnolia Street*

On Global Violence: “The War on the Poor is Everywhere.”¹³⁰

On August 28th, 2020 Abahlali baseMjondolo released a press statement onto their Facebook. This post addresses their struggle, whom it is against, and calls attention to the criminalization of poor, Black people in South Africa. It provides context to the lived experiences of shack dwellers, and in the process reveals this site as a geography that is furthering the legacies of white supremacy. They begin this statement with a brief summary of their resilience:

“In the 15 years of the existence of our movement, we have fought for the dignity of the poor and the marginalised, especially those who live in shacks of indignity. We have built self-management and democratic organisation from below occupying land, building homes, creches and halls, and running creches, gardens and co-operatives.”

Abahlali baseMjondolo is a shack dwellers movement localized in Durban, South Africa that formed out of a road blockade in 2005.¹³¹ They have a membership base in five provinces of South Africa, growing into the largest popular movement in the post-apartheid era. In their press statement from August 28th, Abahlali highlights the state’s response to poverty, which is slander and force. Emphasizing how their struggle has been criminalized, they express how “the organized poor, the strong poor, face particularly brutal and relentless violence from the state and ruling

¹²⁹ *The Moms of Magnolia Street* Documentary, NBC Investigative Unit (NBC Bay Area, 2021), <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/investigations/the-moms-of-magnolia-street-documentary/2479257/>.

¹³⁰ Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement,” Facebook, August 28, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/posts/3562498983780328>.

¹³¹ Abahlali baseMjondolo, “About Section,” Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/about/?ref=page_internal.

party,” the African National Congress.¹³² Drawing attention to the vilified names that have been projected onto them—including “the third force,” “terrorists,” and those “who are hell-bent to make the city of Durban ungovernable”—they demonstrate the extent to which “impoverishment is treated as a crime” as opposed to a human rights issue.¹³³ Abahlali baseMjondolo also uses this press statement and Facebook post to amplify the police killings of several poor, Black people in South Africa. They include the story of Jayden Khoza, a two-year-old baby who was killed by police at the Foreman Road shack settlement in May 2017. This Black baby was senselessly killed as a result of teargas being thrown into Foreman Road after a road blockade. May he rest in power. Another child, Leo Williams was shot in the head and murdered while watching TV in his own home. This nine year old boy was killed in the aftermath of the police “randomly [firing] rubber bullets in response to a protest in Laingville.”¹³⁴ May he rest in power. The last, and most recent, tragedy mentioned in this press release was the killing of Nathaniel Julius on August 26th, 2020 in Eldorado Park, Johannesburg. Nathaniel Julius was a 16-year-old boy with Down Syndrome who lost his life. May he rest in power. In naming the violent circumstances that poor, Black South Africans find themselves in, Abahlali baseMjondolo posits their heightened proximity to death as a condition of this racialized geography and a rationale for their resistance.

Abahlali argues that “the war on the poor is everywhere,” which becomes more apparent when situating this group of shack dwellers in conversation with Moms 4 Housing.¹³⁵ Moms 4 Housing is a collective of houseless and marginally house mothers in Oakland, California that are

¹³² Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement,” Facebook, August 28, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/posts/3562498983780328>.

¹³³ Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement,” Facebook, August 28, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/posts/3562498983780328>.

¹³⁴ Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement,” Facebook, August 28, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/posts/3562498983780328>.

¹³⁵ Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement,” Facebook, August 28, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/posts/3562498983780328>.

fighting to reclaim “housing for the community from speculators and profiteers.”¹³⁶ Forming in 2019, Moms 4 housing is a grassroots organization that utilized land occupancy as an expression of their struggle for Freedom in the United States. These resilient mothers occupied a house in West Oakland (on Magnolia Street) in late 2019 that was owned by Wedgewood Properties—an invasive corporation that buys foreclosed homes around the country with no consultation with community members about livable prices. As Oakland City Council member Nikki Fortunado Bas indicates, “housing has become a commodity” and the state and corporations will protect private property at all costs.¹³⁷ On January 14th, 2020 Moms 4 Housing made an Instagram post that illustrates the intense measures the government will take to protect property over people. They posted an image of the police showing up to their house on Magnolia with military uniforms, weapons, and tanks. The caption on this post reads:

“an actual army descended on Mom’s House under the cover of darkness. They came with a tank and military grade weapons. For mothers and babies. No tanks came to stop banks from stealing houses in the same neighborhood. When Dylan Roof murdered 9 Black people in a church, police put him in a bulletproof vest and took him to Burger King. But they brought a tank to get homeless mothers and babies out of an empty house.” This is an act of war on the Oakland community. #WeStandWithTheMoms #BlackMomsMatter #FreetheMoms.”¹³⁸

Similar to Abahlali baseMjondolo, Moms 4 Housing is unapologetic about who they are fighting for—houseless, Black mothers and children—and alludes to who they are fighting against. Although they do not explicitly name the capitalist interests of the state in this post, it is clear with the mentioning of banks “stealing houses” from community members that this organization of houseless, Black mothers positions itself against corporate America and structural inequality. Their frustration with white supremacy is further exemplified through their mentioning of Dylan Roof,

¹³⁶ “Moms 4 Housing,” Moms 4 Housing, accessed June 10, 2020, <https://moms4housing.org/>.

¹³⁷ *The Moms of Magnolia Street' Documentary*, NBC Investigative Unit (NBC Bay Area, 2021), <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/investigations/the-moms-of-magnolia-street-documentary/2479257/>.

¹³⁸ Moms 4 Housing (@moms4housing), “an actual army descended on Mom’s House,” Instagram Photo, January 14, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B7TrQDRBQwM/>.

who serves as a recent reminder that white violence is rampant in the United States of America. This was the horrific case of a 21-year-old terrorist, who invaded a Black, Methodist church in Charleston, South Carolina and killed 9 innocent Black people. The Mom's express disappointment and resentment for the way law enforcement deals with Black mothers engaging in civil disobedience in comparison to white men who senselessly murder Black people. They are disgusted by the militarized response the state employs against their human struggle for housing. In the NBC investigative series *The Moms of Magnolia Street*, co-founder of the Anti-Police Terror Project Tur-Ha Ak exclaims: “don't let them tell you that they got these tanks, AR-15s, military grade weaponry... for ‘the criminals,’ for ‘the terrorists.’ They got them for mothers and babies.”¹³⁹ For **Black** mothers and babies, if I may add. Moms 4 Housing’s struggle highlights the excessive use of force directed towards poor, Black communities in the United States as whole. Their Instagram post demonstrates their acute awareness of the conditions of war within their particular landscape. It also provides context to their struggle, as poor, Black women in America—resisting legacies of anti-Black racism and heteropatriarchy. I think of their fight for Freedom, and the ways their resistance has been criminalized, in the same way that I understand the mistreatment of Assata Shakur—a Black woman revolutionary who advocated for Black Liberation and was eventually branded a national terrorist. The state demonizes radical Black peoples as they attempt to transform the status quo. The war on the organized poor is truly everywhere.

#HousingIsAHumanRight:

“The peasant who goes on scratching a living from the soil, and the unemployed who never find employment do not manage, in spite of public holidays and flags, new and brightly-colored though they may be, to convince themselves that anything has really changed in their lives.”

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ *The Moms of Magnolia Street' Documentary, NBC Investigative Unit* (NBC Bay Area, 2021), <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/investigations/the-moms-of-magnolia-street-documentary/2479257/>.

¹⁴⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth. Pref. by Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 169.

“The only way Black people are going to overcome anything is to fight for it. And it has to be organized.”

—Elaine Brown, former Black Panther, *The Moms of Magnolia Street*¹⁴¹

Following the Black Radical Tradition, these marginally housed Black peoples organize themselves to directly combat the brutal conditions within their racialized geographies, centralizing their fight for human Freedom in housing justice. Abahlali baseMjondolo and Moms 4 Housing distinguish their conceptualizations of Liberation from those related to nationalism and mainstream politics. Embodying the power struggles of Black peoples around the world and throughout time, Moms 4 Housing and Abahlali baseMjondolo mobilize around humanity by politicizing their personal experiences in pursuit of collective Liberation.

The women in Moms 4 Housing ensure that people visualize much more than “squatters” taking over vacant property in their resistance. They constantly remind followers of their experience as poor, Black mothers and women being displaced and criminalized by the city of Oakland. For example, the first image that appears on their Facebook page is a black and white cover photo of five children smiling with two adults.¹⁴² One of the younger girls in the photo is wearing a shirt that says, “close youth prisons, build youth leaders!” Their organization foregrounds an image of Black families being affected by racialized processes, namely evictions and criminalization. Moms 4 Housing expresses their desire for restorative, human centered alternatives to systemic issues in multiple ways, including advocating for an end to mass incarceration. On December 16th, 2019, Moms 4 Housing posted two photos of one of the mothers holding her son.¹⁴³ The caption reads:

¹⁴¹ *The Moms of Magnolia Street' Documentary*, NBC Investigative Unit (NBC Bay Area, 2021), <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/investigations/the-moms-of-magnolia-street-documentary/2479257/>.

¹⁴² Moms 4 Housing, “Facebook Cover Photo,” Facebook, November 19th, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/moms4housing/photos/a.113768600072298/119485136167311>.

¹⁴³ Moms 4 Housing, “In addition to our legal victory,” Facebook, December 16th, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/moms4housing/posts/132040081578483>.

“In addition to our legal victory—today, Amir said his first words!!! He said, ‘THANK YOU.’ *heart emoji* Babies need homes to grow and develop the way they should at this tender age. This is why we fight. #HousingIsAHumanRight #Moms4Housing #ForTheBabies.”

By providing these images of such intimate moments with one of the mothers holding their beaming child, accompanied by the caption “#HousingisAHumanRight,” Moms 4 Housing is continuing to promote their humanity at their core. This Black housing rights organization demonstrates that their concerns are those of human dignity, and seek to have their needs met outside of the parameters of a biased government. We are witnessing a refusal of political systems and marked landscapes that are infused with logics of colonialism and white supremacy. It is imperative to acknowledge the mobilization of Black grassroots organizations in the United States in a post-Civil Rights and post-Obama Era. These women reclaim their human identities as Black mothers in resistance to displacement and criminalization perpetuated by state, corporate and neocolonial interests.

Abahlali baseMjondolo rallies behind their human identities as well—beginning with their name “Abahlali,” which is *Zulu* for ‘people of the shacks.’ This political movement does not hesitate to distinguish their liberatory pursuits from that of the political officials within South Africa or white supremacist economic structures, which neglect poor people. For example, their cover photo on Facebook is a photo of what appears to be a protest with hundreds of supporters and members from their movement; some of the protesters are holding signs.¹⁴⁴ One of the signs reads: “Abahlali baseMjondolo. Freedom Without Land Means Nothing.” Another one says “rest in peace” with an image of a Black man following. Abahlali firmly contends that freedom, as an ideal, is meaningless without basic human rights—like housing. They continue to uplift the lives

¹⁴⁴Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Facebook Cover Photo,” Facebook, October 8th, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/photos/a.439521092744815/2080567995306775>.

of Black shack dwellers who have died in this senseless war against the poor, reminding us that this is about people's lives and wellbeing. I moved to the comments section of this photo to find one online community member respond “*Amandla*,” which is a *Nguni* word that translates to power.¹⁴⁵ Abahlali is empowering its people by demanding human dignity and access to land, advancing a transformative and inclusive politic. This human-based Freedom is further exemplified through their Facebook post from August 21, 2020. Abahlali posted quotes from an article published by *Independent Online*, a South African news website. The excerpt they highlight includes words from one of their members—Mqapheli Bonono. Bonono says: “Our movement was formed on the basis of fighting for the dignity of all humankind. We believe that a human is a human being wherever they may find themselves”—even a shack.¹⁴⁶ These African peoples—knowingly or unknowingly—embrace the Black Radical Tradition, as their movements embody the development of a Black consciousness that is focused on transformative steps toward a human based, anti-capitalist Liberation.

On the Implications of Solidarity:

“The most powerful forces of oppression operate at a global level, and for this reason the movements that organise resistance need to connect with each other.”¹⁴⁷

—S’bu Zikode, President of Abahlali baseMjondolo

In fighting for access to physical space, these two Black, grassroots organizations utilize social media to express and build relationships beyond their individual struggle; in this light, solidarity becomes a means to continue their fight against geographies of confinement on a global scale. Solidarity is the formation of an alliance between groups on the basis of similar ideology

¹⁴⁵ Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Facebook Cover Photo,” Facebook, October 8th, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/photos/a.439521092744815/2080567995306775>.

¹⁴⁶ Abahlali baseMjondolo, “An activist with the rights group Abahlali baseMjondolo,” Facebook, August 21, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/posts/3539152869448273>.

¹⁴⁷ S’bu Zikode, “S’bu Zikode on the Living Politics of Abahlali,” *Thinking Freedom from the Global South*, (March 5, 2021).

surrounding a particular issue. These two, housing justice organizations demonstrate a willingness to extend their support to other groups struggling against relational articulations of state violence and neocolonial control. As I recognized this, I began to wonder what it could mean—in terms of power and resistance—for people with extremely limited access to space to assist in, or spread awareness of, another group’s localized struggle. I decided to probe the implications of solidarity, as it is applied to struggles against geographies informed by legacies of white supremacy. I asked: how is power amplified across space? To answer this, I examined the Facebook pages of both Abahlali baseMjondolo and Moms 4 Housing.

On August 16th, 2020, Abahlali baseMjondolo posted an article from People’s Dispatch—an international media organization that uplifts people’s movements—onto their Facebook.¹⁴⁸ This article is about the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement, a rural worker’s social movement advocating for housing justice and social equality. Abahlali chose to highlight the portion of this article that mentions the military police in Minas Gerais, Brazil—showcasing the violence sanctioned by the state within this particular region that is similar to South Africa. By articulating similarities in conditions of brutality, Abahlali demonstrates their ability to recognize people around the globe as part of a common struggle. Abahlali baseMjondolo informs their Facebook community that the “military police in Minas Gerais violently evicted families who live at the Quilombo Campo Grande camp.”¹⁴⁹ They continue to emphasize how “the police resorted to violent tactics such as launching tear gas and sound grenades,” in addition to destroying the camp’s educational center.¹⁵⁰ In transferring this information from the Brazilian Landless Workers’

¹⁴⁸Peoples Dispatch, “MST Families Violently Evicted after 60 Hours of Resistance,” Peoples Dispatch, August 15, 2020, https://peoplesdispatch.org/2020/08/15/mst-families-violently-evicted-after-60-hours-of-resistance/?fbclid=IwAR0J2I1cVO1Suorh13IPZ9LaTB_I1FbaGcLisaceM4n5sGtD5OGiMVGzQq4.

¹⁴⁹ Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Military Police in Minas Gerais violently evicted families,” Facebook, August 16, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/posts/3524083397621887>.

¹⁵⁰ Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Military Police in Minas Gerais violently evicted families,” Facebook, August 16, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/posts/3524083397621887>.

Movement to Abahlali baseMjondolo's online community, Abahlali is—knowingly or unknowingly—digging into violence occurrences of displacement resulting from neoliberal forces in Brazil. As processes of neocolonialism have direct geographical implications, Abahlali is challenging the ability of nation-states and the police state to disrupt and divest from poorer communities. Abahlali baseMjondolo's critical reflection—along with their decision to support this movement—makes solidarity, in this way, a decolonial power building tool that alters colonial control of space. These movements are essentially working to construct their own space in theory, praxis and beyond nation-states—not by request from political elites.

Moms 4 Housing used Facebook to inform local community members about an event hosted in solidarity with several community-based organizations—including the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, The Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, Communities United for Restorative Justice, and the Anti-Police Terror Project. These organizations facilitated the event “Board of SuperMoms demands Homes Not Harm” on September 1st, 2020.¹⁵¹ The event description details the traumatic events of January 14th, 2020 when “Alameda County Sheriff's Department spent tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars to evict women and children from a vacant, speculator-acquired property.”¹⁵² In forming this coalition with other human rights organizations addressing common struggles, Moms 4 Housing is exhibiting their ability to build power outside of the state's control. On September 1st, the mothers, who were treated like criminals, stood firmly alongside their comrades at an event that was “calling on the Alameda County Board of

¹⁵¹ Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Moms 4 Housing, et al., “Board of SuperMoms demands Homes Not Harm,” Facebook, September 1, 2021, [https://www.facebook.com/events/1229388384077080/?acontext=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A\[%7B%22surface%22%3A%22page%22%7D\]%7D](https://www.facebook.com/events/1229388384077080/?acontext=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A[%7B%22surface%22%3A%22page%22%7D]%7D).

¹⁵² Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Moms 4 Housing, et al., “Board of SuperMoms demands Homes Not Harm,” Facebook, September 1, 2021, [https://www.facebook.com/events/1229388384077080/?acontext=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A\[%7B%22surface%22%3A%22page%22%7D\]%7D](https://www.facebook.com/events/1229388384077080/?acontext=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A[%7B%22surface%22%3A%22page%22%7D]%7D).

Supervisors to invest in homes, not harm.”¹⁵³ Working with local organizations, including the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights and the Anti-Police Terror Project, Moms 4 Housing works through intersections to defeat the status quo. The organizations affiliated with this rally demanded housing and healing. It is apparent that power within grassroots resistance is magnified through solidarity. This community coalition was angered at the “notoriously racist sheriff’s department” that neglects and inflicts violence upon poor, Black communities in Oakland. Through power building—across multiple issues concerning humanity—Moms 4 Housing used this event to demand an alternative to a failure in leadership. They advocated for a “Board of SuperMoms”—a board composed of Black and Brown mothers directly affected by displacement taking place in Oakland. Additionally, the coalition also came with a list of demands, including defunding the sheriff’s department by 30-50% (reinvesting that money into affordable housing) and cancelling rent. Moms 4 Housing was able to build a network of power that did not rely on state approval or national recognition. Even if the Board of SuperMOMS is rejected because of the city’s refusal to accept this grassroots’ expression of power, these moms have already transformed the conditions of the geography that confines them—through protest, land occupation and formations of regional solidarity.

¹⁵³ Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Moms 4 Housing, et al., “Board of SuperMoms demands Homes Not Harm,” Facebook, September 1, 2021, [https://www.facebook.com/events/1229388384077080/?acontext=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A\[%7B%22surface%22%3A%22page%22%7D\]%7D](https://www.facebook.com/events/1229388384077080/?acontext=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A[%7B%22surface%22%3A%22page%22%7D]%7D).

On the Transformative Potential of Radical Social Movements:

“[...] the hero is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people.”¹⁵⁴

—Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement, February 19th

As the resistance strategies from radical social movements have been historically criminalized, there is unwillingness to accept and uplift the creative elements—or magic—of abolition work. While investigating Abahlali baseMjondolo and Moms 4 housing, I observed each of them employ methodologies that the state has demonized or seemingly ignored. Therefore as the media and white supremacist state are so quick to label these organizers as aggressors, they lose the substance that materializes from these organic locusts of knowledge. For example, Abahlali baseMjondolo released a press statement on February 19th, 2021 onto their Facebook that illustrated their commitment to self-determination and Liberation. They detailed developments within the eKhenana occupation—an extension of their movement in Durban. In response to armed attacks carried out by the government through eviction, this occupation recently constructed a community-based vegetable garden, in addition to a “poultry project,” a community center, and—most intriguing to me—a “Frantz Fanon Political School to enhance knowledge of Ubhahlalism¹⁵⁵ and socialism.”¹⁵⁶ In the spirit of self-management and for communal living, eKhenana occupation has land and housing that is completely free. Similarly, in the NBC Bay Area Investigative Series *The Moms of Magnolia Street* the producers included footage of former Black Panther member Elaine Brown at a housing development in Oakland, California. This

¹⁵⁴Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement,” Facebook, February 19, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/posts/4060433663986855>.

¹⁵⁵This is a term used by Abahlali that is rooted in the *Bantu* word *Ubuntu*, which roughly translates to “I am because we are and because we are therefore I am.” Abahlali advocates for this South African take on humanism that is distinct from mainstream communism or socialism.

¹⁵⁶Abahlali baseMjondolo, “Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement,” Facebook, February 19, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/posts/4060433663986855>.

establishment has a communal garden that is fully employed by formerly incarcerated folks.¹⁵⁷ Free housing and food is something unimaginable in a society that is restricted by the bounds of racial capitalism. And so, radical social movements force us to expand our imaginations and push the socially constructed limitations placed on Freedom and humanity. Black radical peoples encourage us to divest from white supremacist systems and to create our own.

Conclusion:

Frantz Fanon provides a formulation of colonization that is predicated on the violent conjunction of race and space. Fanon argues that we must “reveal the lines of force [that colonization] implies” so that we can “mark out the lines on which decolonized society will be reorganized.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, I turned to two distinct groups of Black grassroots housing movements—Moms 4 Housing and Abahlali baseMjondolo—for insights on the historical tensions and relational violence enclosed within their particular geographies. From here, I worked to uncover what Freedom could mean to marginally housed African peoples as they fight against global processes of white supremacy. As S’bu Zikode, the president of Abahlali baseMjondolo suggests, “the local must always be the road to the global.”¹⁵⁹ Therefore, this transnational study—localized in Oakland, California and Durban, South Africa—has diasporic, as well as decolonial and global implications.

On the Usage of Black/African:

I conducted a transnational study of neoliberal and neocolonial forces that impose restrictions on African humanity, and in the process suggested that we understand the grassroots

¹⁵⁷ *The Moms of Magnolia Street' Documentary*, NBC Investigative Unit (NBC Bay Area, 2021), <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/investigations/the-moms-of-magnolia-street-documentary/2479257/>.

¹⁵⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Pref. by Jean-Paul Sartre (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 38.

¹⁵⁹ Nigel C. Gibson and S'bu Zikode, “Forward” in *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali BaseMjondolo* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), ix.

resistance of two housing movements (across the African diaspora) within the context of the Black radical tradition and Freedom dreams. I found myself using the words “Black” and “African” interchangeably, alluding to Cedric Robinson’s understanding of the particular historical qualities and conditions that characterize African peoples’ resistance against racial capitalism—the Black radical tradition. This tradition makes us question where ideology and consciousness may become relevant in a conversation about resistance against global forces of white supremacy for African peoples. During this study, I was able to locate traces of a radical, abolitionist consciousness that was flourishing across the African diaspora in 1969—arguably a peak for the global Black consciousness movement. This internationalist movement embodies the potential for Black peoples to engage in practices that transform and disrupt Western hegemonic control of space. As African diasporic peoples express notions of Black consciousness we are working against processes that are meant to keep Black peoples separated and disempowered, including chattel slavery, colonialism, and apartheid.

Robin D.G Kelley provides further clarity to the resistance efforts of Moms 4 Housing, Abahlali baseMjondolo, along with other Black radical movements—placing their struggles within the context of Freedom dreams. Kelley theorizes about a tendency for Black peoples to imagine and fight for a world rooted in a type of Freedom that is divested from racial capitalism, the heteropatriarchy and white supremacy at large. He works to illuminate a poetic knowledge within Black radical social movements that has the ability to “transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society.”¹⁶⁰ Contrary to their portrayal as criminals, and affirming Kelly’s analysis, I argue that these Black radical housing organizations should be understood as artists attempting to create a Free world that only they have

¹⁶⁰ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 9.

dreamt of—one rooted in a humanity based Liberation. I used African/Black interchangeably to illuminate my peoples strides for true Freedom across the diaspora.

In revealing points of convergence and divergence between distinct groups of African peoples, I find it crucial to conclude with Brent Hayes Edwards' conceptualization of diaspora; Edward's diaspora provides a theoretical space to embrace a collision across difference that may serve as a gateway to Freedom for Black people across the world. In Edwards' article "The Uses of Diaspora," he traces the genealogy and development of the term diaspora, and directs attention to the African diaspora as a place of refuge and creative Freedom for Black people everywhere. Edwards offers the African diaspora as a tool that "inaugurates an ambitious and radically decentered analysis of transnational circuits [...] that are resistant or exorbitant to the frames of nations and continents."¹⁶¹ Essentially, he frames diaspora as a place of possibility—one that destroys (and simultaneously constructs) reality, as it works against naturalized ideas of nation and geography. Edwards articulates a possibility for African peoples to create our own reality, engaging in the transformative practices necessary for decolonization and world building. Brent Hayes Edward's discussion suggests that we return to Stuart Hall's notion of diaspora as articulated—"related as much through their differences as through their similarities."¹⁶² In tracing the linkages between the diaspora, Edwards argues that there will always be an outline of equal the weight in difference—whether that be through language, gender, nation-state, etc. He contends that each time an articulation of diaspora is made, there will be an "unevenness" that creates *decalage*—a French term that "resists" English translation, but can be understood as a gap or shift in space or time. In articulating diaspora, there is a need to identify motion and "a changing core

¹⁶¹ Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora," *Social Text* 19, no. 1 (2001): 52, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-19-1_66-45.

¹⁶² Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 12.

of difference.”¹⁶³ For Edwards, *decalage* is the struggle that allows for “differences within unity.”¹⁶⁴ His critical discussion of diaspora is what grounds my awareness of the multiple distinctions between Abahlali baseMjondolo and Moms 4 Housing. To say that these peoples are both Black and African is not to say that they are one in the same. While their struggles should be understood relationally, their distinctions hold as much weight. I utilized this concept of diaspora as a guide to a deeper understanding of how dispersed peoples may operate outside the boundaries of nation-state. Additionally, diaspora was helpful to further grasp the implications of solidarity, and waging similar struggles, within a Black diasporic world.

On Solidarity:

One way I observed Moms 4 Housing and Abahlali baseMjondolo engage in world building/freedom dreaming practices was by forming solidarity. I had to think through what forming relationships against a common oppressor could mean for Black peoples actively resisting displacement and extinction. What could that mean for their localized struggles? What ruptures could this cause in global economic processes and how does their resistance alter racialized geographies? Although I am not sure if these two Black housing movements are aware of each other, I would like to imagine The Moms and Abahlali participating in a sort of diasporic solidarity—as they commit themselves to similar struggles against relational logics of white supremacy. I realized in the middle of writing this paper that my mission was not to conflate these groups of Black peoples, rather to uplift their movement characteristics, probe their crossovers (through a relational lens), and explore possibilities for solutions to global issues. White supremacy is a global issue, but how can we attack it locally and transnationally? One way is through diasporic solidarity.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 12.

On Freedom:

These African peoples employ a self-emancipatory politic that rejects both racial capitalism and the hypocrisies of white liberalism. By courageously participating in “illegal” land occupations and criminalized protests Abahlali baseMjondolo and Moms 4 Housing embody a Black radical and, in fact, *Fanonian* approach to Liberation. As discussed throughout this project, Black radical peoples have been pushing the bounds of Freedom and humanity throughout time and across space. This must be the lens that we choose to understand the struggles of these two movements, as opposed to the narrow and racist lens of criminality. I believe that Frantz Fanon would praise these organizations, for he proclaims:

“Let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw their inspiration from her.

Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature.

If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe, and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us.

But if we want humanity to advance a step farther, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries.

....For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.”¹⁶⁵

As decolonial activists and theorists suggest, true Liberation necessitates geopolitical transformation, the dissolution of standards such as development/nondevelopment, and the ability to radically dream. We must uplift people and movements that are already doing this revolutionary work.

¹⁶⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Pref. by Jean-Paul Sartre (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 315.

Where Are These Movements Now?:

At this point, you are probably interested in where these housing organizations are currently. Firstly, it is important to mention that movement work is never “finished.” As activists understand their struggles as part of systemic issues, their resistance persists beyond singular actions and moments. That being said, the mothers at Moms 4 Housing were able to accomplish an agreement with Wedgewood Properties through the Oakland Community Land Trust. The house they were occupying on Magnolia Street is now being used as a transitional house for mothers who need support. However, as their fight for accessible housing continues, they decided to move their advocacy to the realm of local politics. Two core members of the Moms 4 Housing struggle, Carrol Fife and Dominique Walker, both ran and won positions in office. Carrol Fife is currently serving as Oakland’s District 3 Councilmember and Dominique Walker is on Berkeley’s Rent Stabilization Board. It’s worth mentioning, however, that even with this transition to politics, I believe the Moms still have an understanding of their struggle beyond mainstream elections—or their resistance would have been held primarily at the ballot box. As houselessness continues to be a major issue in the Bay Area, these Black women display the tenacious and adaptable energy resisting displacement. Across the diaspora, Abahlali baseMjondolo continues to organize around true Freedom and human dignity as well. Last year, Abahlali celebrated its fifteen year anniversary of resistance to neoapartheid oppression. This shack dwellers movement continues to vocalize their grievances against the failures of “freedom,” while it is perversely immersed in the logics of neoliberalism and neocolonialism. Every year in South Africa there is a national holiday commemorating the “freedom” acquired at the end of legal apartheid; this day is called “Freedom Day” and is held every April 27th.¹⁶⁶ While some people in South Africa celebrate a limited

¹⁶⁶ *The Freedom of This Country Has Been Stolen*, *People’s Dispatch* (YouTube, 2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QqWZCMT6O0>.

conceptualization of freedom on the 27th, Abahlali maintains its anti-capitalist stance on Liberation, as they celebrate their own “Unfreedom Day.” Through the creation of an alternative holiday, this movement draws attention to the unwarranted violence they are subjected to and continues to demonstrate their ability to find creative methods to articulate their vision of a transformed society.

My Reflections As An Organizer:

I am a sister, artist, researcher, community organizer, and Black woman. My entire undergraduate career I have worked with people and organizations that advocate for a complete restructuring of white supremacist systems from the bottom-up. It is only in spaces that prioritize the lived experiences and unspoken trauma of people caught up in systems of oppression where I have witnessed expressions of justice and healing. In the past four years, I have worked to uplift houseless people, undocumented communities, formerly and currently incarcerated people, people on death row, in addition to Black and Brown first generation students. Most of the support I have provided has been in the form of essential resources, including mutual aid, legal assistance, and educational assistance. From my experiences as a community organizer, I have witnessed the value of working to address systemic issues at their root. As such, I have adopted a set of questions, while participating in this transformative work, that I constantly apply to efforts that allege to be liberatory. I ask: “who does [this action] free” and “who does it feed.”¹⁶⁷ This has guided my understanding of decolonization and community care. As an artist, I am constantly figuring out creative, nontraditional ways to engage in liberatory work. Recently, that has included writing social movement science fiction, photo collaging, and curating wellness spaces. My most recent

¹⁶⁷ I came across these questions from one of my comrades who is a Black urban farmer —Jibril.

project is entitled “For My Homegirls and My Homies:¹⁶⁸A Care-fully¹⁶⁹ Curated Space Dedicated to the Healing and Empowerment of Black Women and Gender-Nonconforming Folks.” Through my lived experiences and close study of Black Feminist scholarship, I have realized how critical healing and wellness are to Freedom work. That is why I am stepping into a new phase of my journey as a curator, organizer, and constantly evolving human.

Resist!:

To close, I only *introduced* you to the violence, struggles, and resistance efforts of Moms 4 Housing and Abahlali baseMjondolo. I encourage you to look up their stories of resilience further. I also “name dropped” several Black organizers, radicals, revolutionaries, scholars, and creators that are each worth learning more from. The point of this paper was to remind folks that the work is not done; there are still legitimate fights being waged against white supremacy across the globe. Now it is your turn to stop reading and resist. My hope is that this project inspired you too, to dream.

¹⁶⁸ This project works to provide Black people with an alternative space to call “home,” directly acknowledging and resisting legacies of slavery and colonialism that may complicate our relationship to America as such.

¹⁶⁹ I am intentionally utilizing Sundus Abdul Hadi’s conceptualization of spaces infused with the principles and practices of a care ethic. According to Hadi, “if ‘careful’ implies being mindful of danger, then I mean to approach the word to embody being ‘full of care.’” Hadi, *Take Care of Your Self*
Sundus Abdul Hadi, *Take Care of Your Self: the Art and Cultures of Care and Liberation* (Brooklyn, NY: Common Notions, 2020), 105.

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