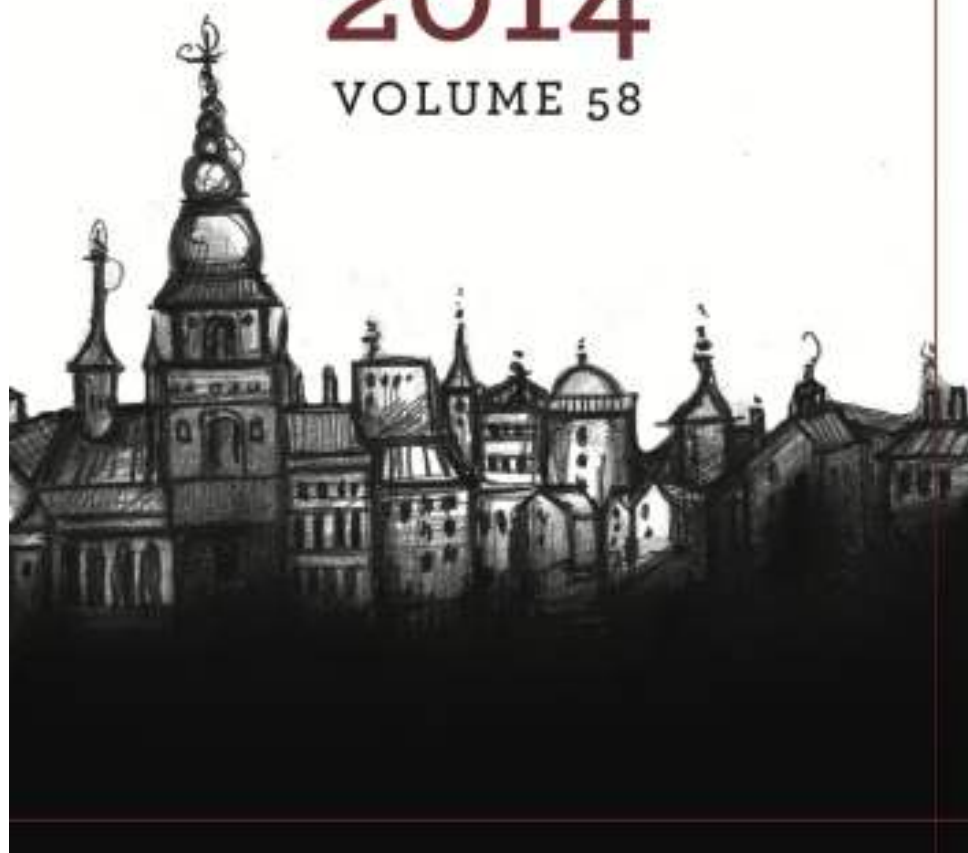


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# Berkeley Journal of Sociology

**2014**

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## EDITORIAL

For almost sixty years, the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* has published pioneering sociological research, foreshadowed the rise of new areas of inquiry, and offered critical perspectives on mainstream sociology. Run by an editorial collective of Berkeley graduate students, the *BJS* published works of graduate students and untenured faculty long before mainstream journals would allow such voices. At different times throughout its history, it has confronted, critiqued, and expanded the frontiers of American sociology by publishing the work of emerging scholars.

Yet the original publishing model of the *BJS* has found itself increasingly at odds with the landscape of academic publishing and within a changing information economy. Most peer-reviewed journals of the social sciences are now frequently publishing the work of current graduate students. They are better positioned to fulfill this task. At the same time, the *BJS* had already begun to publish online forums and critical reviews that intervened in public debates. Some of the journal's most compelling and well-received articles fell into those categories.

The Journal thus found itself in an unfamiliar position: to do justice to its rich history of shaping sociological discourse, the *BJS* had to both reinvent itself and also redefine the purpose and potential of an academic publication in the early 21st century. Indeed, this was a natural next step for a journal that has always directed the gaze of its readers outwards into the world and inwards onto disciplinary conventions and practices. As Michael Winter and Ellen Robert wrote in the 30th anniversary issue, the Journal has walked the fine line between "enough tolerance to promote flexibility, but not a vacuous openness to fashion." This mission remains just as relevant today.

This issue of the *BJS* marks the end of a year-long process of reinvention, and the beginning of a new chapter in the Journal's history. We decided to no longer publish academic research articles. Our efforts will instead focus on writing a "history of the present." We believe that the current informational landscape is marked by an over-abundance of news and a dearth of insightful analyses and perspectives from the social sciences. We believe, too, that sociologists can provide unique insights, interpretations and analyses about history as it unfolds before our eyes. Some of our authors are professional academics; others are activists, organizers or artists who think sociologically. They have contributed essays, commentaries, interviews, and visual narratives about a wide range of topics and places, but are united in their critical and reflexive take on contemporary society. The *BJS* seeks to provide a forum for such voices and to open up a space to re-compose social research into a wide range of written forms, unobstructed by technical jargon and unconstrained by formalistic rigidity.

As graduate students, we seek to broaden the interpretive range, imaginative scope, and prospective application of our research to political struggles, emerging cultural trends, and imagination of alternative futures. We are not content to be

relegated to the sidelines. The point, after all, is to change the world. The task before us is to arm our critiques with power; not only to critique, but to intervene; not only to intervene, but also to gain ground. We seek to provide a forum to wrestle with questions of how to get from Point A to Point B; that help fill in the map of the terrain before us, beyond the internal debates of the academic field.

The Journal does not adhere to any particular school of thought. Nor does it devote its thrust to the translation of research articles into colloquial language. Instead, it is the stated aim of the *BJS* to contribute to public debates by utilizing sociological knowledge to contest unquestioned assumptions, complicate common sense, challenge spurious empiries, supply theoretical frameworks, and mount political critiques—in other words, to regard the interpretation of the social world as a constituent element of attempts to change it.

This has four important consequences:

*Beyond disciplinary publics* – The *BJS* no longer seeks its sole audience among the ranks of current and future professional sociologists. Instead, and drawing on a long history of public sociology and interdisciplinary endeavors at Berkeley, it engages audiences and recruits authors across backgrounds and disciplines, and it encourages the sharing of content across publications and platforms.

*Diverse content* – The Journal has shifted its focus away from the publication of research articles to essays, analysis, commentaries, and topical synopses. It aims for a focus on substance and argument, unobstructed by technical jargon and unconstrained by formalistic rigidity.

*Engagement and reflexivity* – The main commitment of the *BJS* is to engage current topics from the perspective of sociological knowledge. The Journal has reflected on the production of knowledge within the discipline; today, it does so with an eye towards social and political engagement. It seeks to increase its contributions and audiences beyond the US, and to contribute towards more diverse and global perspectives.

*Digital production and broad circulation* – The Journal has shifted towards an “online first” approach. While the *BJS* continues to publish an annual print collection of essays and articles, most material first appears on the Journal’s website. All of our content is available online for broader distribution across the web through a Creative Commons license. Beyond our current institutional subscriptions, our publication is available at select bookstores and easily available through individual subscriptions.

The *BJS* editors

## THE AUDIT OF VENUS *by ALISON GERBER*

*A SIMPLE TAX AUDIT LEADS TO A THURNY BUREAUCRATIC QUESTION:  
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN ARTIST?*

**T**he first time I spoke with Venus DeMars, an artist and musician from Minnesota, she called after midnight from her sister's backyard up on the North Shore. I wanted to talk to her about an audit she was going through with the state tax authorities; I had heard it was something more than a simple mismatch between receipts. She called me late, after playing a concert, and told me her story.

I wondered: isn't the worst-case scenario here just a change in tax status, maybe a little bit of money to pay back? What does it matter? Her voice caught. "It feels like it's discrediting me as a person," she said, "and just throwing my twenty-year career out the window. Saying, 'you were just playing the whole time.' You put your heart and soul out on the line because that's what touches people. And then they tell you that everything you're doing is just pretend. It can crush you."

Beginning in late 2012 Venus was the subject of an audit by the Minnesota Department of Revenue. Venus is an artist and, since she makes money from her artwork, a small businessperson. She doesn't hold a day job and made about \$30,000 from her artwork in 2013—selling paintings and concert tickets, receiving grants for her performance work. For more than a decade she has worked with an accountant to file a Schedule C each year with her tax return. With a Schedule C, she and the twenty-three million other self-employed workers

in this country are able to write off business expenses—everything from tubes of paint to record sleeves—and for many those deductions make doing business possible. But in 2013 the Minnesota Department of Revenue issued a final opinion ruling Venus to be, officially, a hobbyist. She could no longer claim her art practice as a business or deduct expenses.

We might approach this story as one about the classification of artists—who counts, and who doesn't. How to define the population of artists, and to what end, is a lively methodological debate among cultural policy and arts researchers.<sup>1</sup> But this story, and the audit, is about more than that. It's about identity and value and about how the two tie into an auditor's ability to differentiate between installation art and construction work. It's about a place with a diverse and complex cultural life thanks in part to our collective disinterest in policing whether or not anyone is a "real" artist. It's a story about, and not about, Venus, who is unclassifiable but not ambivalent. And, finally, it's a story about rules. Bureaucracy is defined in large part around rule-following, and the best applications of rules can indeed minimize bias and favoritism and promote equality.<sup>2</sup> But rules can also feel restrictive, and many chafe at the slow rate of change in bureaucracies. But in general, in our dealings with the state we do prefer clear, transparent rules.<sup>3</sup> When Schedule C filers are audited, what should be a



straightforward look at the numbers can turn nasty, and artists are hit especially hard. According to the Census, one-third of the two million artists in the United States are self-employed. The IRS and state departments of revenue that use their guidelines say that in order to qualify as a business for tax purposes, the taxpayer must show a “profit motive.”

When I went to visit her, Venus invited me to the home in south Minneapolis that she bought in 1986 with her wife, Lynette Reini-Grandell, a poet and college professor. Inside, a bright porch opens to a richly colored home. The Venus I met that day was a soft-spoken woman screened by lush greenery on her front porch, sitting amid a pile of receipts and creating a detailed spreadsheet like nothing I’ve ever seen. A few days later I said goodnight to another Venus, a slim 53-year-old recovering from the heart surgery he underwent two weeks earlier, wearily heading down to the basement

*Professional artist, serious artist, working artist, real artist. Around here, these are fighting words. They mean so much in part because we don’t agree—can’t agree—on what they mean.*

to knock out a half-hour’s rehab on the treadmill, accompanied by his loving wife of more than 30 years on the exercise bike. Another night, Venus stood alone with a guitar and tight black jeans at the front of a low-ceilinged room, filled the space with her voice, and brought her audience to tears.

Venus came out as trans 20 years ago, and has lived between genders since. She wears heavy eyeliner and her hair is dyed

in a two-tone homage to Cruella de Vil, but these are the only direct nods to her outsider stage persona as the leader of All the Pretty Horses, the genderqueer glam-punk band she has fronted for the past twenty years. Onstage, she wails and growls, all leather and taped-up nipples. We sat on her front porch that first day and snacked on nuts while we talked.

Venus, like most artists, has had a range of jobs over the years—design work at a t-shirt business, some landscaping—but hasn’t held a traditional day job since 1996. She’s best known for her music, but is also a respected filmmaker and performance artist and shows and sells paintings and drawings. She has been awarded the big grants that local artists aim for, and while I’m in town I ask around: everyone in the arts community knows who she is, and knows about the audit, and has a strongly held opinion. Many of them are terrified on their own behalf. If this can happen to Venus, what about me?

Artists are particularly vulnerable to the ambiguous requirements of the tax authorities—the guidelines published by the IRS and used by the Minnesota Department of Revenue (and in other states) dictate that “an activity qualifies as a business if your primary purpose for engaging in the activity is for income or profit.” Motives and intentions are tough to prove. Artists have an especially hard time showing that the primary purpose of their activities is income, since generations of artists have been taught to act as though they make art for love, not money; this distance from filthy lucre is a normal part



photo credit: Wing Young Huie

of the pose of the professional artist. And so a bad rule becomes potentially devastating. Economic life need not pit value against values; while it might be especially apparent in the lives of professional artists, love and money are inexorably linked—for all of us.<sup>4</sup>

Venus and her wife file their taxes jointly, and they both file Schedule Cs: Venus as an artist, Lynette as a poet. They keep their receipts, and they follow the law. As well as they can. When Venus and Lynette found out they were being audited by the State of Minnesota for the tax years 2009 through 2011, they thought they might have inadvertently missed a small payment or expense. Getting audited is a pain, but it's part of doing business; Venus initially compared it to being called in for jury duty. "We thought it was just, assemble your receipts, and make sure the math works..." says Lynette. She breaks off, laughing. She takes a breath, and tells me that they found some receipts they'd missed when they did their taxes, and thought

they might actually come out ahead and get a little refund. She laughs again, more bitterly this time, and shakes her head. "That was incredibly naive." She and Venus spent a few months gathering receipts and other paperwork in the evenings, signed over their power of attorney to their accountant, and sent him to a meeting with the auditor.

John Marg-Patton is the couple's accountant. He said that, after some explanation, the auditor seemed to understand how both Venus and Lynette's businesses worked, and he expected to get a call within a few weeks, maybe to quibble over \$200 here or there. Maybe there was a credit card receipt for gas where the name of the town couldn't be read. Nothing out of the ordinary.

The auditor called John and asked for another meeting. He wanted some clarification on each of the businesses. John asked Venus and Lynette to come in and explain what they do, so they packed up boxes stuffed with evidence

of their long careers: magazine articles, reviews, publications, posters, and records. The four of them met in the Department of Revenue's offices. Venus still has these boxes, and a quick scan of their contents suggests a well-documented independent career in the arts—reviews of her music in foreign-language publications, professionally designed posters from two decades of tours, hard copies of albums, invitations to exhibition openings, contracts. The auditor didn't want to see any of it. The meeting didn't go as smoothly as they'd hoped. Venus tried to show the auditor articles about her but he wasn't interested. "I started showing him all of the magazines, and he looks and goes, 'I don't need that. I know, I know, big transgender rock star. I'm a suburban white guy, I'm over it. I'm a numbers guy, let's talk numbers.'"

The auditor told Lynette that he'd looked her up on [ratemyprofessors.com](http://ratemyprofessors.com). The site encourages students to rate professors on their looks as well as their teaching—"Is your professor hot? Hot professors get a red chili pepper"—and the tone of the ratings are often juvenile and can skew towards the disgruntled. She was horrified, and the meeting was difficult for both of them. But they came out of it satisfied that the auditor now understood how their businesses worked, and they were confident that the numbers would shake out.

The auditor called and asked for another meeting; he said a couple of things still weren't clear, and he needed to understand the businesses better. Venus and Lynette came in for a second meeting. Lynette went through her records to find copies of all of her rejection letters from literary journals. She had to show that she was trying to make money from her poetry—and

that she was failing. Businesses don't always succeed right away, the point, it seems, is to try; to have a "profit motive," in the words of the Department of Revenue. So when you go into your meeting with your auditor, you might have to explain how many more times you've tried and failed, to recount the rejections that never made it to paper. "To demonstrate that I had been trying, and getting rejected, for a long period of time," as Lynette put it. I don't stifle a shocked bark of a laugh, and she laughs too: "I know. We can laugh now, we can laugh now. Yeah. When you're in the middle of it, it just... well."

The IRS calculates nine "factors" they consider when determining whether a given taxpayer should classify their activities as a hobby or a business. Tax attorneys and CPAs know they move in a vast grey area with ample room for prejudice when they try to navigate these guidelines: the factors include "whether you carry on the activity in a businesslike manner" and "whether the time and effort you put into the activity indicate you intend to make it profitable."

Venus and Lynette both received preliminary determinations from the state, reclassifying them as hobbyists. That meant they could no longer file as self-employed or deduct expenses, and owed thousands of dollars in back taxes, penalties, and interest. In nine points, the state outlined its argument against each of them. Lynette had just won a large grant—a realistic source of income in Minnesota, with its highly developed nonprofit arts landscape—but the auditor stated she had not shown that "relying on grant income is a viable business strategy." The auditor criticized Venus for using the same credit card for personal and business expenses, and was not

pleased that she didn't have a written business plan, insisting that "there was no documentation provided that indicated any formal business analysis was conducted."

Venus had tugged posters, advertisements, and published reviews to her meetings with the auditor—that box of materials he wouldn't look at, saying he was just a "numbers guy." Her determination reads, "There was no documentation provided that the taxpayer promoted his 'tours.'" It continues: "There was no oral or written testimony provided to indicate the taxpayer had his music, or art, evaluated by talent professionals." The auditor referred to Venus's commissioned mural and mosaic work not as a part of her artistic practice but as "freelance construction activity."

*In just a few words,  
the auditor's letter calls into  
question a centuries-old  
understanding of art  
as an expression of the  
artist's soul.*

One section of Venus's determination reads, "The presence of personal motives in carrying on of an activity may indicate that the activity is not engaged in for profit." Underneath, bullet points outline evidence against her. In just a few words, the auditor's letter calls into question a centuries-old understanding of art as an expression of the artist's soul. He recasts an aesthetic choice (and savvy brand-building strategy) as a black mark on Venus's record. The first point reads simply: "The music and art are self-created by the taxpayer and based on his life experience and perspective,

and are intensely personal." The exact same dismissal was cut-and-pasted into Lynette's determination: "The poetry created by the taxpayer is based on her life experience and perspective, and is intensely personal."

John received the determinations first, and read them over the telephone to Venus, who paced back and forth as she fumed. She asked him if they should get a lawyer. He paused, then said he thought they probably should. "When he said yes, then I just felt, 'oh my god, this is crazy.' I always trusted the government. I always trusted the machine to do what it should." She told me about when she was a boy in Duluth with a mohawk. She ran down the street because she was late, and was stopped by a police officer. He couldn't believe she wasn't up to no good, but she told him the truth—why she was running and where she was going—and he understood, and he let her go. She's had a lifetime of run-ins with power, and every time other people's individual discretion was at work. And she always told the truth, and everything always worked out. This time, she's involved in a conflict that shouldn't be about her personal qualities, but about marks on paper, about the numbers. And she doesn't know how to think about the fact that the machine seems to be failing her.

Venus and Lynette began to raise money to hire a lawyer—they set up an e-crow account and asked for donations from the local arts community via PayPal, and quickly raised a few thousand dollars. They had another meeting with the Department of Revenue, this time in their lawyer's office. The auditor wouldn't shake their hands. Lynette told me he suddenly had a nervous tic in his jaw; Venus said he was furious, shaking, yelling, and

she was scared. “To see his reaction at the last meeting... you don’t want to face that way with your government. Your government is supposed to be there, supposed to have your back, you know?”

Venus and Lynette were offered the chance to settle with the department for pennies on the dollar, but they declined, as they both would have lost the ability to file as self-employed. Venus told me they had discussed the possibility beforehand, and had agreed not to settle; they saw the money they had already raised as a clear message from the arts community. “We’re fighting a fight that’s beyond us. We’re not stopping. I don’t want the arts community in Minnesota, or anywhere, to be so afraid to call themselves what they are.” After the meeting, they received an official, final determination: The Department of Revenue decided to accept Lynette’s Schedule C as filed, reversing their preliminary determination, but they deemed Venus a hobbyist.

For a while, things were tough. After a blockage in an artery affectionately nicknamed “the widow maker” caused pain she could no longer ignore, Venus underwent heart surgery while her lawyer began work on an administrative appeal. She and Lynette both struggled to work and to keep up the fight despite the emotional and financial costs, but rallied after a few months. Lynette got a contract for her first book, and Venus mounted an ambitious performance piece, had a solo exhibition of her drawings, and booked concerts six months out.

Without the support of the community, Venus and Lynette would never have been able to fight; during their appeal lawyer’s fees reached \$12,000. Few working artists have those

kinds of cash reserves on hand, or the decades of commitment to community that helped Venus and Lynette raise money. When it comes to taxes—as with so many things—the ability to fight is for those who can afford it, as Venus points out. Lynette told me simply, in a low voice, “it would have been nice to not go through this.”

No one can tell if the content of Venus’s work or her personality matters to the Department of Revenue. These people are Minnesotans, so there’s no hyperbole, no accusations. They say they can’t tell. But they bring it up out of nowhere, so they can probably tell. “I don’t want to use the word ‘shocked,’ but basically I don’t understand how the conclusion that the state got to, how they got to that,” said John. “And are there other outside things going on? Is somebody after him or is it, because Venus is Venus?... There isn’t any evidence of that. But there isn’t any logical reason to me why they came to the conclusion they did—that his efforts are going to be considered a hobby.” Lynette apologizes for indulging in her “little conspiracy theories” before suggesting that political actors might be attempting to delegitimize the state’s significant funding for the arts, that Venus’s gender presentation might make some people uncomfortable, that her own position as the family breadwinner might be hard for some to understand. She then dismisses any suggestion of ill intent: “I don’t think it’s even conscious on their part. I think they just find our situation so unusual, it’s something they can’t get their head around... For an institution that you would think is based totally on numbers, it’s very emotional on their side, I think.” I reached out to the Minnesota Department of Revenue for comment, but they sent me only official

boilerplate: “taxpayers expect the Department of Revenue to maintain the confidentiality of their information and we take that responsibility very seriously”—along with an anti-discrimination policy.

Venus’s CV goes back to 1984, when she released her first album. She hasn’t always made a profit, and in some years she wrote off extensive losses and got by thanks in part to her wife’s income. She doesn’t hold a day job, works with her art more than full-time, and made a profit in 2013 through her artwork. Yet the Department of Revenue ruled that she is a hobbyist. She and Lynette owed a total of \$3,335 including interest and penalties; more importantly, Venus could no longer claim her art practice as a business, or file a Schedule C as self-employed. The IRS generally conducts its own audit when the state rules against a business owner, so Venus and Lynette expect further scrutiny, more audits. If their appeal is rejected, Venus and Lynette plan to take the case to tax court, where they hope that it would result in new precedent, would help to blaze a trail for others like them.

Sometimes the line between professional and amateur is a clear, bright one. But in the United States artists are, for the most part, just artists, moving in and out of day jobs and commercial work, employment and unemployment, windfall and drought. Professional artist, serious artist, working artist, real artist. Around here, these are fighting words. They mean so much in part because we don’t agree—can’t agree—on what they mean. In fact, we prefer not to agree, and for our uncertainties we are rewarded with a rich and vibrant cultural life. There are no clear definitions, and absent the occasional obscenity or copyright

trial there are no authorities to enforce the boundaries. The only mechanisms Minnesota uses to determine an artist’s status are those set by the IRS and the Department of Revenue. But they do it without the benefit of clear, transparent rules, and in the end it seems that agents audit people, not their receipts. It’s the auditor who decides: you’re an artist, or maybe you’re not. And as Venus told me the first time we spoke, it can crush you.

As a part of their appeal, in the spring of 2014, Venus and her lawyer submitted a request for her auditor’s notes. After much back and forth, rather than giving them the notes they requested, the Department of Revenue asked them to come in for a meeting with a new auditor—to make a fresh start. One month after that meeting—a year and a half after her audit began—Venus received a notice in the mail. It read, in part: “After reviewing all of the information available, it is our determination that the taxpayer’s art/music activity was engaged in for profit as defined under Treasury.”

At the back of the letter, she found a check for \$70. The Department’s audit showed that Venus was, after all, owed a small refund.

*Alison Gerber is a PhD candidate at Yale University. Her research focuses on artists as workers and on value in working life. A version of this article first appeared in Narrative.*

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Karttunen 1998 ("How to Identify Artists? Deining the Population for 'status-of-the-artist' Studies," *Poetics* 26(1):1-19), Lenz and Lindemann 2014 ("Who Is an Artist? New Data for an Old Question," *Poetics*), and Menger 2001 ("Artists as Workers: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges," *Poetics* 28(4):241-54). Sociological perspectives that attempt to deal with the complexities of occupational commitments to the arts and the particularities of careers in the culture industries range from those that acknowledge professional status among artists as a performance of commitment (Bain, Alison, 2005, "Constructing an Artistic Identity," *Work, Employment and Society* 19(1):25-46) to those that argue for a perspective that simply sweeps the great mass into a bucket of amateurs and volunteers (Brooks, Arthur C. 2002, "Artists as Amateurs and Volunteers," *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 13(1):5).

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber defined bureaucracy in large part around rule-following, and acknowledged that it could seem overly mechanized, even dehumanizing (1978, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley: University of California Press). But he wrote, "the more the bureaucracy is 'dehumanized,' the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation. This is the specific nature of bureaucracy and it is appraised as its special virtue." (1928, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Pp.216, Oxford: Oxford University Press). More recent work from social psychologists would add cognitive bias to the love and hate that we would prefer to avoid in our dealings with tax authorities (e.g. Twersky, Aron, and Daniel Kahneman, 1974, "Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases," *Science* 185(4157):1124-31).

<sup>3</sup> As Charles Farrow wrote in his defense of rule-following, "Some [bad rules] merely reflect the fact that people make rules, and people are not generally geniuses. The problem is not rules in general, but particular ones that need changing." (1979, *Complex Organizations: A Critical Essay*, 2d ed. Pp.26, Glenview, Ill: Scott, Foresman).

<sup>4</sup> An entire generation of economic sociologists writing after Zelizer have shown, again and again, that economic life need not pit value against values. Zelizer showed how we can price even what is most priceless—human life, children, love—beginning forty years ago (for an overview, see Zelizer, Viviana A. 2011, *Economic Lives: How Culture Shapes the Economy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press) and since then other authors have investigated the interplay of money, morals, and meanings in arenas like the trade in human cadavers (Anteby, Michel, 2010, "Markets, Morals, and Practices of Trade: Jurisdictional Disputes in the U.S. Commerce in Cadavers," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 55(4):605-36), sperm and eggs (Almeling, Rene, 2007, "Selling Genes, Selling Gender: Egg Agencies, Sperm Banks, and the Medical Market in Genetic Material," *American Sociological Review* 72(3):315-49), and hearts (Hesly, Kieran, 2004, "Altruism as an Organizational Problem: The Case of Organ Procurement," *American Sociological Review* 69(3):387-404).

<sup>5</sup> State bureaucracies are not known for their frills when dealing with issues of identity; an intersectional approach may be too much to ask. But even a glance through Venus and Lycaete's correspondence with the Department of Revenue shows clearly that the state is indeed having trouble "getting their head around" Venus and her situation.

## WE ARE HUMANS AND NOT DOGS

THE CRISIS OF HOUSING DELIVERY IN  
POST-APARTHEID CAPE TOWN

by ZACHARY LEVENSON

At the heart of apartheid lay the fortification of South African cities as white spaces. Above all, this meant the prevention of non-whites from entering city centers by force if necessary and cloaking this in the rhetoric of legality. A series of key developments in the 1970s and 80s, however, catalyzed a reversal. Most prominently was the repeal of the pass laws in 1986, the set of laws that required non-whites to carry pass books with them at all times and limited their entry into spaces designated as “white group areas.” In the case of Cape Town, designated a so-called “Colored Labor Preference Area” during this period, Xhosa residents were deemed “migrants” and deported over a thousand kilometers eastward to state-created “homelands” in the Eastern Cape. The systematic underdevelopment of these rural bantustans left many so-called “African” South Africans with little choice but to return to cities in search of employment. As the apartheid state began to shy away from the 1960s and 70s model of forced relocations, by the early 1980s, black residents were able to establish squatter settlements in peri-urban locations around the country, seeking jobs in cities and having no other affordable housing options. This is not to suggest that informal settlements were not already present in urban areas—they date back to the 1890s, and above all, to the period of interwar industrialization—but they multiplied at an unprecedented rate during this latter period.

The sudden lifting of influx controls meant a rapid but delayed urbanization. These residents had been forcibly kept out of many cities since at least the 1930s, and certainly since the passage of the Group Areas Act in 1950. With the transition to democracy in 1994 and the African National Congress’ ascension to power, this immediate proliferation of shantytowns was viewed by the ANC as a threat to its own legitimacy. Mandela’s promise of a million houses within a decade was expeditiously fulfilled, with the development of a massive housing rollout plan in 1994 as part of the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). People in need would receive formal 40 m<sup>2</sup> houses, called “RDP houses,” free of charge. Even after the closure of the RDP office two years later, these houses would continue to be called “RDP houses,” at least colloquially, and retain this name even today. Every person in every shack settlement in South Africa who I have encountered knows what “RDP house” means, and this is generally the term used to describe state-provisioned formal housing.

Since 1994, more than 3 million such RDP structures have been delivered.<sup>1</sup> As Tokyo Sexwale, then Minister of Housing, famously remarked in 2010, “The scale of government housing delivery is second only to China.”<sup>2</sup> Assuming the average household size of 3.6 people,<sup>3</sup> this means that nearly a quarter of the South African population has been housed under this delivery program.<sup>4</sup> Yet during the same



two decades since 1994, the number of informal settlements has increased more than nine-fold.<sup>9</sup> Currently, between a quarter and a third of urban South Africans live in informal housing.<sup>10</sup> This might take the form of informal settlements, or sometimes, as in most of Cape Town's so-called Colored townships, it means that people erect shacks in the backyards of formal houses and pay rent to the homeowner. Thus the same period during which all of these people were formally housed saw an exponential increase in the number of people living in shacks. Despite one of the most substantial housing delivery programs in modern history, urban informality mushroomed during the two decades following apartheid.

The overwhelming bulk of this can be attributed to late and post-

*What began as an attempt to resolve the post-apartheid housing crisis has now actually exacerbated it.*

apartheid urban influx, driven above all by the underdevelopment of the bantustans. Frequently too, RDP house recipients illegally sell their homes for a fraction of their value in order to meet immediate needs.<sup>11</sup> If accepting an RDP house frequently requires relocation to a peripherally located site, commuting costs can increase substantially. Given that no transport subsidy is provided and these houses do not come with jobs, they are often sold out of necessity, with residents returning to the same informal settlements and backyards where they were before.

More damningly of the more than

3 million RDP homes constructed between 1994 and 2010, more than 2.6 million of these are at "high risk." Nearly 610,000 of them need to be demolished and rebuilt altogether, and this is according to the National Home Builder Registration Council's (NHBRC)' own figures.<sup>12</sup> Twice that number have workmanship related issues, which the NHBRC estimates will cost on average R12,000 (\$1130) per house. The combined cost of remedying structural defects, minor defects, and non-compliant construction is estimated to be R58.7 billion (\$5.5 billion).

The shoddy construction is largely attributable to so-called Black Economic Empowerment companies, in essence private sector startups given nepotistic contracts with no oversight or accountability in the name of some sort of progressive affirmative action. Given the extremely low profit margins in RDP housing delivery,<sup>13</sup> larger construction companies tend to shy away from applying for these government construction contracts, or "tenders" as they are known in South Africa. In other words, the privatization of implementation means that costs are trimmed at the expense of providing durable structures. When the Department of Human Settlements releases a subsidy for an RDP house, the structure ultimately provided by a private contractor must meet a number of national guidelines in terms of size and quality. But with RDP home provision far from a lucrative industry, these companies have every incentive to cut corners.

What began as an attempt to resolve the post-apartheid housing crisis has now actually exacerbated it. RDP delivery has reinforced the apartheid era geography of relegation

by formalizing peripherally located shack settlements, rendering their far-flung locations permanent. With these houses already deteriorating and residents frequently opting to sell them off, delivery has hardly served as the antidote to proliferating urban informality. Whereas post-apartheid housing protests were initially most common among shack dwellers, cities across the country have witnessed a recent rise in protests by dissatisfied RDP recipients. In Cape Town, these protests have spread across the Cape Flats, from Scenicdene in the northeast to Pelican Park in the southwest. Increasingly RDP beneficiaries are joining the ranks of informal settlement dwellers and backyarders in organizing against the municipal state, the perceived culprit of the post-apartheid housing crisis.

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When I visited one such residential RDP development in Cape Town in early June, I encountered houses much smaller than I was used to seeing—they didn't even seem to comply with the 40 m<sup>2</sup> requirement. This development—Pelican Park—is a flagship project for the City, providing countless photo ops for Mayor Patricia de Lille, Western Cape Premier Hester Zille, and numerous other visitors. Ten years in the making, it is the City's first integrated housing development, meaning that RDP houses, subsidized gap units, and mortgaged housing will exist in the same development.<sup>14</sup> Roughly 2000 RDP houses will exist in Pelican Park when the project is completed in 2017.

Beyond the size of each house though, it was the shoddy construction that was driving recipients of these structures to organize against the City.

Residents were beginning to form various neighborhood committees to contest what they viewed as deficient housing. One recipient of a new home, Layla, took me into her new place. I met her when she was still living in an informal settlement just a few kilometers away, but after years on the waiting list, she finally secured a formal structure at the new housing development of Pelican Park just a few months ago. The internal walls were left unplastered and made of large, light gray concrete bricks. If you rubbed the bricks—and not even particularly vigorously—sandy material would fall away. One could easily rub a divot into one of these bricks in a matter of minutes.

"I must make it livable," Layla told me, pointing to the few pictures and mirrors with Arabic script she'd hung on the walls. I noticed that the molding on the ceiling was actually just white styrofoam glued along the corners. Apparently this was from the contractor—not of Layla's doing. It reminded me of the so-called "New Tech" houses I'd seen in Delft,<sup>15</sup> constructed almost entirely out of styrofoam. I asked her why the walls were left unfinished, and the floor was exposed concrete. "The company that built these houses said they ran out of money from the subsidy. It was all in the plan, and look how cheap the materials they used were, but now they say they ran out of money from the [RDP housing] subsidy, and so they couldn't put tiles on the floors, couldn't put plaster on the walls, couldn't finish it really. So now we have these houses, and we must make it livable ourselves, they say. But how? We have no money. That's why we're in these houses in the first place!"

She took me upstairs. At the top of

the staircase, there were two doors. Each led into a tiny room—barely large enough for a queen-size mattress—also unfinished. Layla pointed to various cracks that had already appeared in the wall. Granted yesterday was one of the coldest days I'd experienced in Cape Town—there was even a bit of snow in Mitchell's Plain, an exceedingly rare sight—but it was freezing in there. The walls provided little in the way of insulation, and there were generous "vents" cut through the brick all throughout the house, effectively rendering inside and outside equivalent temperatures.

We descended the staircase again. At the bottom was the living room, with a tiny kitchen in the hallway leading to the front door. There was a small bathroom—again, with very large cracks in the brick—and then another tiny room—the smallest of them all—right next to the front door.

"They have us now on high consumption," Layla told us, referring to the electricity usage bracket in which each of the recipients is located. Everyone seemed to know the term well. "We're supposed to be on low, but they have us on high consumption. We don't even know how to change it. Then there's the solar geyser they promised us." "It's in the plan—look!" She pulled out the blueprints and official plan for her home, and it was indeed there. I snapped a photo for examination in greater detail later. She also gave me a piece of paper with all of the specifications, but I couldn't find any mention of a solar geyser there. I saved it for later. "It's not even the City that's not giving us the solar geyser—it's Eskom!" They are supposed to, but now they say it's too expensive. But they have to give it to us!

Two women were seated in Layla's

living room—one elderly and heavy-set, the other younger and a bit more middle-class in comportment (though also an RDP house recipient). The older woman took me outside. "Look over there," she said, pointing to a house down the road. "See those men on the roof? They are putting my roof back in. It blew off yesterday, and I just moved in! Seriously, this blew right off. In a brand new house? Are they crazy? Go over. You must take pictures."

Once back inside, the third woman pointed to the walls. "Look," she said, taking us into the bathroom. "It's not cement, but just sand pushed together to look like cement. See all these lines, these cracks? In a new house! What's it going to look like in 20 years? It's all falling out already!" She pulled out her phone. "I must show you these pictures of my house. Give me your number and I'll send them on WhatsApp." She showed me one photo where she'd removed the cover on the light switches, and in the hole behind it, the wall was stuffed with crumpled newspaper. "How is this not a fire hazard? They aren't supposed to put paper in there, but it was cheaper than real insulation or even concrete or sand. They didn't even fill it in." A second photo revealed a sizable crack in the ceiling that was there when she moved in. A third showed a light fixture falling out of the ceiling. "That one they told me they'd fix. Not the crack though." Layla chimed in: "Now Human Settlements wants to come because we're meeting. Before they were trying to run away from me, but now they see we're getting organized." The older woman joked, "There they busy with my roof," pointing in the direction of her house.

Between Layla's house and the older woman's was the entrance to a small

informal settlement. "It's been here for 24 years," Layla told us. "Or rather, they were down the road, but they were moved here 2 years ago to make room for some of the first houses. They haven't been integrated."

"What? They weren't included in the Pelican Park project?" Faeza asked. A backyarder herself, Faeza was visiting the project from the predominantly Colored township of Mitchell's Plain.

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for animals?"*

As the chairperson of a relatively new citywide social movement called the Housing Assembly, she was helping to organize dissatisfied residents in Pelican Park. "No," the older woman answered. "Four of them did get houses a few months ago. But the rest they say are being moved to Delft."

"It must be Blikkiesdorp," Faeza responded. She was nearly moved there herself just a couple of years ago, but refused after visiting the notorious relocation site. "At the end of the day we are humans and not dogs. Did they build these houses for animals?" Layla couldn't contain her frustration. "It's not about quality for them, but just quantity. We gonna be hidden too because the bank houses gonna cover everything up."<sup>22</sup>

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Two weeks later I returned to Pelican Park. Residents had constituted themselves into three committees. The purpose of each committee was to represent RDP recipients in their struggle with the City over the faulty homes. "This is one committee," Layla

told me, "but there are two more. Pelican Park is coming in three phases, and so that means three committees. Each will choose two people, and then there will be six on the umbrella body. That means that six will report back to the Housing Assembly. The rest of the working group is meeting tomorrow." It was interesting to watch how representative bodies formed in the earliest part of this relocation site. The residents in Layla's phase of Pelican Park were meeting to form a local committee, and I'd come to help facilitate an interactive workshop on the RDP housing crisis with a few members of the Housing Assembly. We were holding the workshop and meeting in an empty RDP house; the recipient had yet to move in.

Auntie Winnie, one of the women who had been moved from the same informal settlement as Layla, walked over to me. I hadn't seen her since she lived in Zille-Raine Heights, a small land invasion not too far from Pelican Park. She was mixed about her situation: "This has to be like the happiest time of my life, but it's like a nightmare." She'd waited most of her adult life on the waiting list, and here she was with a defective house.<sup>23</sup> She turned to me: "They said they were supposed to spend R100,000, R100,000 [about \$3400 to \$11,200] on this subsidy, but they didn't spend more than R20,000 [approximately \$3750]. It's a scandal. Where is the money?"

Winnie disappeared to go make sandwiches while the meeting began. Layla gave the introductory remarks. "I'm an activist," she emphasized. "Not ANC, not DA. I come from Zille-Raine Heights where we took land because we were *garval* of backyards, *garval* of being on the waiting list, and *garval* of paying rent." They tried to move us

to Happy Valley, but we refused.<sup>22</sup> We know that the database don't actually work. There's people that's five months on the waiting list that got a house here. But others 30 years, 23 years on... the waiting list!" She was presumably referring to others in Zille-Raine Heights who did not receive houses in Pelican Park. No one was clear as to how the selection process proceeded.

A few days later, when I interviewed the City's head of housing allocations, Alida Kotze,<sup>23</sup> she explained some of these disparities. While typically RDP houses are allocated according to time on the waiting list, "this case was political," she told me. Then Mayor Helen Zille had personally promised the residents of Zille-Raine houses, and so they named the settlement after her.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the land these residents were occupying was owned by a nearby school, and so residents needed to be relocated. Thus while generally RDP provision proceeds according to the demand database, exceptions are made in cases of land invasions and other contingent circumstances requiring immediate attention, or else in "political" cases. Zille-Raine Heights was both political and a land invasion. No answer was provided as to why all residents weren't relocated, but I didn't press the matter.

Beyond the problem of the selection process though, residents remained dissatisfied with their homes, viewing them as haphazardly constructed warehouses for the poor. "They promised us free-standing, but these are not even semi-detached!" one woman inside the meeting shouted. "They showed us the plans, but these houses are 3 or 4 in a row. It's all lies, empty promises. We're being lied to. This is not what we signed for. It's unhealthy here—unhygienic. It's like

a dirbin through my house." More complaints: no sports field or park for the children (as guaranteed in the RDP, claimed Ebrahimi); a lack of amenities—schools, clinics, churches, mosques; there's no library; safety and security is already becoming an issue, and they weren't provided with burglar bars.

"How can we afford burglar bars? We can't! If we could afford them, we wouldn't be here!" another woman interjected. "It's a health risk, living here," added another. "Too many people have asthma to be by these raw walls. Both of my children have asthma. It's cold, it's damp." "And it's already overcrowded, and we just moved in! I stay by my sister, and lots of families are staying with each other here already. I stay in a three-bedroom but have to sleep in the kitchen."

These were residents who had been living in informal settlements or in backyards, many without electricity. On my last visit to Zille-Raine Heights, people were cooking over an open fire in the middle of a field, and some of the shacks I entered had dirt floors and low ceilings. These RDP recipients' standards were not high, yet here they were, organizing a neighborhood council in order to contest the delivery of houses they alleged were substandard and in some cases, already falling apart.

This crisis of delivery in post-apartheid Cape Town is hardly an aberration, but mirrors experiences in municipalities throughout South Africa. The fact that the majority of RDP houses are substandard or pose health and safety risks only two decades after the program's inception is obviously alarming. But even more significant is the fact that rather than mitigating the demands of the post-apartheid

housing crisis, RDP delivery appears to actually accentuate them. If delivery began as a means for the ruling party to both control rapid urban influx and shore up its own legitimacy, the current delivery regime has resolved neither problem. Above all, deficient delivery only intensifies anti-state policies. Far from placated recipients removed from the rolls of the waiting list, residents remain incensed, dissatisfied, and above all, organized against municipal governments.

When analysts write about the recent spike in service-delivery protests across South Africa, it is frequently presumed that delivery will conciliate residents and dissipate this "rebellion of the poor". In other words, delivery and protest are typically viewed as antithetical. Yet as the case of Pelinor Park demonstrates, recipients of the ultimate service—free formal housing—are far from satisfied. Rather than the endpoint of the post-apartheid urban

crisis, deficient delivery reproduces it anew, accentuating discontent in the process. Residents' names are scratched from the waiting list and from the municipal state's perspective, these cases are considered closed. But for relocated residents, this is simply the continuation of their struggle for access to decent housing. Removal from the waiting list without the receipt of houses that they consider tolerable is akin to dismissal and marginalization—far from the "progressive realization of the right to adequate housing" guaranteed by the post-apartheid Constitution in these residents' book.

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<sup>1</sup> Although Black Africans made up perhaps three-quarters of the national population, in Cape Town they composed only about 15%. Whites approached 30%, Coloureds 55%. The Pass Laws had been far more draconian here in the Western Cape than anywhere else, because jobs were racially reserved not only for Whites but also for Coloureds: most Black African labor was excluded. A Coloured Labor Preference Area (CLPA) was formalized, whose boundary ran through the arid mid-Cape interior, buffering Western from Eastern Cape in a manner reflective of nature's climatic buffer at the time of European arrival. John Western, 2000. "A Divided City: Cape Town." *Political Geography* 21: 213.

<sup>2</sup> "Homelands." Prime Minister Verwoerd's euphemism for bantustans, were at the center of the apartheid administrator's claim to shift from white domination to "separate development." In essence, these were simply the apartheid period iteration of the pre-apartheid "native reserves." But the term "homeland" (tribaland) also "signalled a momentous change: it dispensed with the old assumption that 'bantu' were a single 'homogenous' people and instead envisaged the creation of self-governing African territories, supposedly based on historically determined ethnic or 'tribal' grounds." Saul Dubow, 2014. *Apartheid, 1948-1994*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 105. At the core of this shift from reserves to "homelands"/bantustans was an attempt to move from race ("African" in the apartheid terminology) to ethnicity (Xhosa, Zulu, Venda, etc.), thereby fragmenting perceived opposition into rival "nationalities." Four such bantustans were actually deemed independent countries, though no foreign government recognized them as such.

<sup>3</sup> A. W. Stadler, 1979. "Birds in the Cornfield: Squatter movements in Johannesburg, 1944-1949." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 6(1): 83-123; Philip Bonner, 1995. "African Urbanisation on the Rand Between the 1930s and 1960s: Its Social Character and Political Consequences." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21(1): 117-29.

<sup>4</sup> While the current figure is closer to 2.4 million, a definitional change in 2007 [2] means that the program is increasingly oriented toward providing not housing, but "housing opportunities." The irony of this policy shift is that these "housing opportunities" are typically site-and-service schemes and require relocation to greenfield sites—precisely the opposite of the shift toward in situ upgrading promised by the national Department of Human Settlements just a few years earlier.

<sup>5</sup> Republic of South Africa, 2010. Proceedings of Extended Public Committee, 21 April 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics South Africa, 2012. "Census 2011 Statistical Release - P03012." Accessed online (<http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P03012/P030122011.pdf>).

<sup>7</sup> This is a conservative estimate, as the average household size has declined since the transition, and of course, the national population has steadily risen.

<sup>8</sup> Kate Tinsington, 2011. *A Resource Guide to Housing in South Africa 1994-2010: Legislation, Policy, Programmes and Practice*. Johannesburg: Socio-Economic Research Institute of South Africa (SERI): 32, 38.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Misselhorn, 2009. "A New Response to Informal Settlements." *Transformation* 15(3): 16-9; Alison Todes, 2000. "Reintegrating the Apartheid City? Urban Policy and Urban Restructuring in Durban." Pp. 87-29 in *A Companion to the City*, edited by Gary Bridge and Sophia Watson. Malden: Blackwell.

<sup>10</sup> According to the National Housing Code, recipients are prohibited from selling RDP houses for eight years. After this point, they acquire title deeds and can dispose of their property as they wish.

<sup>11</sup> The NHBRC is the national regulatory body of the home building industry.

<sup>1</sup> Sipho Mashini. 2011. "Strategic Corporate Plan 2011/12." Presentation to the National Homebuilders Registration Council, Johannesburg, 16 March 2011. Slides available online (<http://db3sqppoi3ngscloudfront.net/files/docs/110316nhbrppt>).

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Herman Steyn, Manager New Settlements, City of Cape Town Department of Human Settlements (23 June 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Gap housing applies to those whose income is too high to be eligible for RDP houses, but not high enough to qualify for a mortgage or loan.

<sup>4</sup> Delft is another Cape Town township, located 20 km northeast of Pelican Park on the periphery of the municipality. It includes Bliekiesdorp (literally "tin can township"), a relocation camp for homeless and evicted Cape Townians. It remains arguably the most notorious such temporary relocation area (TRA) in the country.

<sup>5</sup> "Geyser" is the South African English term for a hot water heater.

<sup>6</sup> Eskom is the national electricity parastatal.

<sup>7</sup> "Bank houses" or "bond houses" are the colloquial terms in South Africa for mortgaged homes secured with loans from the bank. RDP home recipients and residents of informal settlements frequently view them with disdain as upper class excesses. Whereas the City advertises Pelican Park as an integrated housing development, the RDP recipients with whom I spoke all viewed it as a ploy to hide the RDP structures behind more attractive houses.

<sup>8</sup> The City of Cape Town, like all accredited South African municipalities, runs a demand database for RDP housing. Citizens register based on need, and hypothetically at least, the City then delivers based upon order of registration, with exceptions made for special needs, old age, and veterans. This technology has existed since the late apartheid period, and there is continuity between the apartheid waiting list and the current demand database.

<sup>9</sup> Afrikaans for "fed up," literally "full to the ass."

<sup>10</sup> Happy Valley is, like Bliekiesdorp, a temporary relocation area (TRA) on the periphery of Cape Town.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Alida Kooze, Director Public Housing and Customer Services, City of Cape Town Department of Human Settlements (23 June 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Jessica Thorn and Sophie Oldfield. 2011. "A Politics of Land Occupation: State Practices and Everyday Mobilization in Zille Rains Heights, Cape Town." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 46(1): 118-30.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Alexander. 2010. "Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa's Service Delivery Protests - A Preliminary Analysis." *Review of African Political Economy* 37(123): 25-40.





by **DARREN REESE BROWN** and **MARK JAY**

*Colony Arms is a public housing apartment complex on Detroit's East Side. On November 28, 2010, it was raided by 150 officers from the Detroit Police Department (DPPD), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Drug Enforcement Administration, Michigan State Police Border Patrol, the Michigan Department of Corrections, and a SWAT unit. Detroit's Police Chief James Craig justified the raid on Colony Arms as a coordinated operation against "repeated shooting incidents, narcotic activity, domestic violence" within the apartment complex. Thirty-three arrests were made.*

*Darren Reese-Brown was a resident of Colony Arms on the day of the raid. Together with Mark Jay, he tells his side of the story.*

## COLONY ARMS AND THE DETROIT POLICE DEPARTMENT: A CULTURE OF MUTUAL DISTRUST

**I**t was during the afternoon of November 15 when law enforcement officers began to arrive at Colony Arms. One resident observed: "I saw the Department of Correction school bus out there, [...] cop cars with the sirens blocking off [East] Jefferson for about three, four blocks, [...] some kind of tank blocking the back alley, at least two helicopters doing I don't know what up there. They set up a HQ in the lobby to run everyone's name, and the news was all up in there, making a little show of it. The officers had real, real long rifles. It was like the army or something on Jefferson. Like an invasion."

The police action was just one in a series of raids that have been pushed by James Craig since he became DPD Commissioner on July 1, 2013. Despite Craig's claim that he plans to "institutionalize community policing in Detroit", DFD has consistently and boastfully employed mass raids in the poorest communities in Detroit, on both the East and West side, as a primary response to the perceived "culture of violence." But from the perspective of someone on the inside, things look quite different.

At the time of the raid, my fiancée Cassandra Grimes was an unemployed mother of three. She had chosen to live in the Colony Arms in 2011 after experiencing domestic abuse because a friend had told her that it was a "nice, reasonable place" and because just outside the apartment building was a school bus stop, so her daughter Carissa would have a safe way to get to school. Like all residents, Cassandra was familiar with violence and tensions

at Colony Arms. But one of her main worries was the culture of apathy among Detroit police. Throughout 2013, she had made dozens of calls to the DPD about "fights, shootouts, bad stuff for the kids to be around [...]" but "[the police] never really did anything about it." Other residents echoed her concerns. When asked how long it typically took police to arrive after receiving a call from Colony Arms, they responded: "Hours", "an hour, and then some", and "never".

One example: During the spring of 2013, several members of a local gang were in the hallway on the fourth floor of Colony Arms. They were walking around with their guns out, blasting music, getting ready for "war" with a rival gang. Multiple residents called the police, but by the time the police showed up hours later, the gang members were gone, and the police left without interviewing any residents or handing out an incident report. Cassandra told me, "I know I made at least a couple of those calls. Nothing happened [...]. They was out there with guns, screaming. [The police] come going on a couple hours [...] and if the people ain't right there, then they just left right out."

Marco Freeman, an unemployed, 18-year-old who has lived in Colony Arms with his older sister since the winter of 2012 had this to say about the gang's ongoing presence: "A small circle of people were responsible for the majority of the calls: The Mack Ave. Niggas. None of them got caught 'cause the police tardy, and when they arrive they ain't even really know who they were locking for. Unless they



had your name already in the system, [the police] didn't know nobody from nobody else."

One resident, a single mother who has lived in the Colony Arms building since 2010 let's call her Sierra—estimated that she was responsible for at least eighty of the six hundred calls that year. She called DPD for any number of things, including the incident described above, fights in the lobby, and shootouts outside the building. "It was mostly the same people I was calling about. They never caught them. Never. Not one. And as soon as [the police] left, the criminals came right back out. And so I kept on calling [...] They ain't never catch no one, which to me is messed up 'cause I was calling about some people with warrants on them." Even when a detective met with Sierra, took down her descriptions of specific gang members, and gave her his personal cell phone number with instructions

to call immediately if she saw any person of interest, the results were still the same. "I had a direct line to the detective, and they still came maybe an hour later [...] and ain't never catch nobody, 'cause really who's gonna get caught an hour later?"

Other Colony Arms residents also echoed that one's safety could not be trusted to the police. KP, a 21-year-old, whose baby daughter lives in Colony Arms, said, "I would have to do whatever it takes to survive if someone try something. [The police] are scared of [Colony Arms] they own self." Dre, a father of four, said of the police: "I think they did have some kind of intimidation of the building because they never really came when they said they would."

Once the police arrived, they quickly left the premises if the alleged criminal was not present and immediately apprehensible. The residents' knowledge of who the criminals were

and, often, where they were, rarely made it to the police because the police were busy in their interviews of residents, if these interviews occurred at all. When asked how quickly the police usually spend in Colony Arms when responding to calls, Dre said, "They leave out quicker than bedbugs if you turn the light on." When I spoke to Sierra, she told me that the cops just come and go without talking to residents—so "all [criminals] really gotta do is hide in someone else's room when the cops come and they all go 'cause [the police] don't know what's going on really [...] if they ask around, you could probably actually catch someone."

Detroit Police disagree. As Commissioner Craig argued, "there's a lot of young people in the City of Detroit that have adopted this no snitch policy.... There's this fear that if I talk, I could be hurt." But Colony Arms residents were and are willing to talk to police. How else could you explain those six-hundred calls?

Dre said this about his willingness to incriminate gang members: "That no-snitching shit don't play when it's one of your people in a bad situation [...] people was ready to talk on them—the cops wasn't tryin' to hear it." Marco agreed: "If something happens with my family or my friends, I would go to extreme measures to alleviate the situation, such as calling the police. The code of not snitching don't really apply [at Colony Arms]. That's really more of a hood, gang thing. There's kids and old ladies and pregnant women in the building. If they in danger, yes, I'ma call the police regardless who's doing it [...]. If you ask me, the reason the police ain't catch nobody is they don't follow up on your calls in time and they don't want to talk to people

[if you ask most [residents] who's doing the stuff, they know, 'cause everyone be intermingling, and everyone know everybody's business."

Detroit Police were well aware of the high number of calls they received from Colony Arms. Indeed, when asked about the reasons for the November 15 raid, police officials repeatedly mentioned it. However, it is clear from conversations with other residents that the poor response by the police to these calls only gave rise to more calls as crime continued unchecked. Paradoxically, the justification for the raid was thus also evidence of the poor policing, which, in part, gave birth to rampant crime in the first place. Especially in impoverished areas, the toleration of small-scale crime will only lead to more criminal activity. As KP told me, "if a criminal knows he gonna be able to get away with something, [...] if the police gonna take an hour, [...] then he's gonna do it. Why wouldn't you do it if you know you're not getting caught?"

## WHO WAS ARRESTED IN THE RAID?

**B**ut who was caught during the raid? Police Commissioner Craig claimed that the raid was successful. As he told the press, "there are people with outstanding warrants. Some felony suspects. A parolee for earjacking who was armed with a gun when we made contact with him this morning. This has [...] been a great operation." But despite this vague claim, DPD has yet to publicly release the names or statistics of the arrests made during the raid.

There are two major problems with the official police argument. First, most of those who were arrested



during the raid had nothing to do with violence at Colony Arms. Second, almost everyone arrested was released within three days. The vast majority of arrestees were charged with low-level misdemeanor crimes or were brought in on old court writs. Marco told me, “any person with any little amount of weed on them, just their little personal weed, they was arrested [during the raid] and they made them all seem like real big criminals. That ain’t got shit to do with what’s going on here with people that really do be hurting other people.” Others agree. Here’s Dee again: “Most of the real criminals got away. All they really got was some petty parking tickets, traffic violations, writs, different things like that [...] Only real way to get them real [criminals] is to catch them slipping [...] the only way to do that is to respond to calls. [The police] just don’t be on they job.”

Cassandra was also arrested on a year-old charge for the possession of a nickel-bag of marijuana. Eight months

pregnant at the time of the raid, she spent nine hours in county jail before being given access to medical care and released. And she was not the only pregnant woman arrested during the raid. A pregnant resident named Brianna had also been arrested on a misdemeanor charge: possession of marijuana, without the intention to distribute. Unlike Cassandra, Brianna was forced to spend the night in the jail’s bullpen. The bullpen is where all of the females arrested that day were left until they were processed. New inmates, upon entering jail, stay there for at least 24 hours. There is one toilet for everyone. Sometimes there is tissue paper, sometimes there isn’t. Showers aren’t allowed. This is not where you want to be for any extended period of time, especially if you are pregnant. Brianna was released from the bullpen the next morning without having to pay a fine.

When the police hit the right people, the peace was short lived. Gio,



one of Colony Arms' notorious drug dealers, was arrested in the raid. "They got Gio, yeah — on some tickets, dog. On some parking tickets, dog," Marco said. "That nigga was back on Monday, doing what Gio do."

By my count, 33 of the 33 people caught up in the sweep had returned to the building by the following Monday. Most of those arrested were released without facing any further legal repercussions and were not even given a fine to pay or a record of their arrest. Brianne and Cassandra told me, "they just let us go — no fine, no nothing. Like it never happened."

A week after the raid, it was back to business as usual. As Dre observed, "soon, you know, the 'ackboyz' was put back on they masks and the traphouses<sup>2</sup> were back open for business [...] shoot outs too [...] Within the next couple of

days them 33 people is back getting they guns from wherever they hid 'em at and back doing what they was doing."

Two days after the raid, Cassandra received a knock on her door. It was the police. However, this time, they did not come to arrest her. The officer simply handed her a \$500 gift card to Target, and would not give any explanation for the gift card. I later learned that only one other resident was given a gift card from DPD that day. She did not want me to use her name, but allowed me to say that she was also a mother who had been arrested on a misdemeanor charge for possession of marijuana and had been released the next day. Cassandra said, "I felt like it was a bribe, you know, not to say what had happened."

## MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE RAID

It seems that the raid was thus prompted by a poorly executed policing strategy and failed to achieve its basic aims. Still, the press lauded it almost uniformly. The *Detroit Free Press*, *ABC*, *CBS*, *M-Live*, *Deadline Detroit*, *Curbed Detroit*, and the *Michigan Chronicle* published positive accounts. One common thread of the coverage was the fetishization of the violence in Colony Arms, without offering any larger context for the violence. *Curbed Detroit* began their article with the sentence: "Meet the Colony Arms Apartments, the east side hellhole you've probably never heard of."

None of the media reports mentioned the relatively petty nature of the charges given to arrestees. Sierra explained, "[the media] got it messed up. The building does have some real serious problems [...] but what people need to understand is the people they looked up is not the people we was calling about."

One arrestee was shown prominently in the *CBS* report from Colony Arms. He was led away in handcuffs, wearing a t-shirt with the caption "Original Gangster". But let me give a bit of context: His nickname is Do-Wong, and he is not even a resident of Colony Arms. Do-Wong happened to be there when police arrived, but he had nothing to do with the gang violence that residents were calling about. The media simply got their stories wrong.

Another commonality between the reports was that Colony Arms residents were always depicted to be cheering and clapping as the raid occurred. *Detroit's ABC Nightly News* began their segment by stating that Police

Chief Craig was "making good" on his promise to crack down on crime, and that "cops got a round of applause." 26 seconds into the video, Marco can be seen leaning out of the building on the right of the screen. When I asked him about it, he said of the TV coverage: "That's some bullshit. But that's what they do: they edit." I talked to another resident nicknamed D-Swag, who warned: "Marco actually ended up getting jumped [...] Them people they arrested was right back, [...] and they ain't like that people was said to be cheering." By portraying Colony Arms residents as allies of the police, the media put their safety in jeopardy once arrested criminals returned after a few days. Here's Dre again: "They made a show [...] The news love that. They feed off that. That to be a big ass show. But [the police] should have been discreet. The people who got arrested were back on Monday, so it just led to more problems with the people they thought was cheering on they arrest."

## LIVING THROUGH THE RAID

But there's a bigger problem with the way the media has portrayed Colony Arms residents: We are not "innocent" or "guilty"—we are people, and we were chilled by the police actions on November 15. Dre had this to say about the raid: "For them to come to my residence like that, like I'm the enemy [...] They didn't even have anything on me, [...] but my whole body was shaking. I couldn't even talk right." Even if paramilitary raids can be used to effectively deter crime, the trauma of residents should factor into discussions about whether or not the raid is a legitimate police tactic.

Everyone's experience differs, but

here is one person's account of what it feels like to have your community invaded by armed officers: My own experience of the raid. I was inside my apartment, crouching in a closet. It was a pathetic hiding spot, but it was the best I could do on such short notice. Cameron, my energetic one-year-old, was asleep on the air mattress. There was more banging on the front door—only the police bang this loudly. I looked at Cameron, who had now woken up. He looked at me like only a one-year-old can, and I could feel that he's about to blow my cover. I was scared out of my mind. I thought that they were there at the door for me.

My fiancé was arrested, but I didn't know why. She started calling my name for help, and this point, I was forced to leave my hiding spot. Four officers were standing in my apartment, dressed in all black, their guns out of their harnesses. They were like, "there's another one."

I did not tell them my name, but they found my Medicaid ID and called my name into their walkie talkie. A higher-ranking officer entered and asked for my consent to search the apartment. I was in a state of shock and said yes. A second later, I came to my senses. Did he even have a search warrant? The officer responded that I had already agreed to a search, so he didn't need a warrant.

I was hiding in the closet because I had an unregistered black-market gun. A month before the raid, on the night of my 20th birthday, my fiancé and I had been robbed at gunpoint in the alley behind the Colony Arms building. Everyone in Detroit is armed because you can't trust the police. I knew the gunman—he was a resident of the building, a member of a local crew. He pointed a shotgun at

Cassandra's pregnant stomach, at my unborn son. What I felt in this moment is impossible to describe. Cassandra was screaming out of her mind, and the gunman and I were both warning her to be quiet. Eventually, he took our money and crouched away down the alley. We then entered the backdoor of the building, and coincidentally saw two of Detroit's finest loitering on the back stairs. The cops said that they would handle it. Then they got in their car and drove away. Nearly three hours later, back in our apartment, we received a knock on the door from a different policeman, who came to follow up on Cassandra's call.

After that experience, I knew I had to take our safety into my own hands, but because I had been imprisoned before, I could not legally purchase a gun. Hence the unregistered weapon in my closet.

Back to the day of the raid. Now, several police officers were searching my apartment. My daughter was at school but my two sons were by my side. I was sweating, my heart was about to beat out of my chest. Time seemed frozen. The police searched everywhere, but luckily they didn't find the gun—I had hidden it under a towel. They loitered in the room for a long time, then left without telling me where and why they had taken Cassandra. I still didn't know that their visit was part of a larger raid, but then I looked out the window. This clearly wasn't just about Cassandra or myself.

The police were in the building all day. Gunmen stood by the elevator to make sure that nobody went in and out of any apartment. When you tried to walk down the hall, they would raise their guns and mug you: "Boy get against the wall, where are you going?" After the police left, we all emerged like



survivors and traded our war stories.

When you ask Police Chief Craig about the Colony Arms neighborhood, he has this to say: "This location didn't become bad yesterday [...] It's been years. Years. Isn't that amazing? I mean what were we doing?" That's a good question: What have they been doing? Is swarming low-income areas with militarized officers and TV crews, and locking up everyone with a gram of weed or an outstanding court holding a solution to the problem? Or is it a celebration of the problem?

Marco summed up the state of the Colony Arms Building: "Mice running through the hallways, bed bugs [...] corrupt management [...] It's a bad environment for the kids [...] And the fact that the cops is making a show about putting a fix on it, that don't make me feel good. Coming home, I can feel the negativity all around there." If, as Dre suggested, the raid has offered "no kind of resolution about the problems going on," then it's important to ask why the media universally praised the raid, and, perhaps more importantly,

why Commissioner Craig continues to use large-scale raids as a primary policing strategy throughout the most crime-ridden areas of Detroit even as this tactic seemingly contradicts his stated plan to "institutionalize community policing in Detroit."

When the officers entered the Colony Arms building on November 15th, 2013, they did so with the mindset that it was a criminalized building with criminal residents; everyone, regardless of their legal status, was treated terribly and exposed to police aggression. That day, it did not feel like living in the United States. It felt like living in a different country.

*Darren Beason-Brown is a writer, father and poet from Detroit and a former resident of Colony Arms. Mark Jay lives and works in Detroit. Darren and Mark met at a juvenile detention center in Highland Park, Michigan, where Mark facilitated a poetry and theater workshop through the Prison Creative Arts Project. They have since collaborated on two poetry exhibitions.*

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<sup>1</sup> Slang for thieves.

<sup>2</sup> Slang for a drug house.

<sup>3</sup> Slang for a gang member.

*Potseo Phasha is a Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg's Research Centre on Visual Identities in Art and Design. His interests lie in understanding the city as a living organism and volatile mode of expression for its inhabitants through the photographic medium.*



## SCAVENGER ECONOMIES *by POTSISO PHASHA*

*THE VAST TAILINGS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S GOLD AND COPPER MINES HAVE GIVEN RISE TO AN INFORMAL SCAVENGER ECONOMY. WHAT MANY SEE AS WASTE, THE IMMIGRANT LABORERS OF THE MINE DUMPS SEE AS A VITAL SOURCE OF INCOME.*





In the 1880s, the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand region west of Johannesburg laid the basis for what is today a region of interconnected towns and cities that houses almost 13 million people and contributes one third of the national GDP.

Soil and ore were brought to the surface, crushed, and searched for gold, and the residue was discarded onto dumps that gradually became permanent features of the landscape. More than 250 such mine tailings now cover an area of more than 44,000 hectares.

But with advances in mining technologies and increasing gold prices, they have become sites of economic activity once again. The reworking, in which mining machinery reshuffles the mine dumps, has resulted in an unusual scavenger sub-economy. Every day from dawn to very late in the evening, groups consisting only of men intensively and illicitly work the polluted soil of these pale landscapes in search of scrap metals.



Most of the men on the mine dumps are Zimbabweans. "South Africans do not like these kinds of jobs because they are laborious", says one worker. "You have to work very hard. They prefer better jobs, white collar jobs at the office. Because they have an ID they can access more things like applying for loans. I have to save and take everything back to Zimbabwe. Every time I go home, I take everything I own. When I come back I start from scratch."

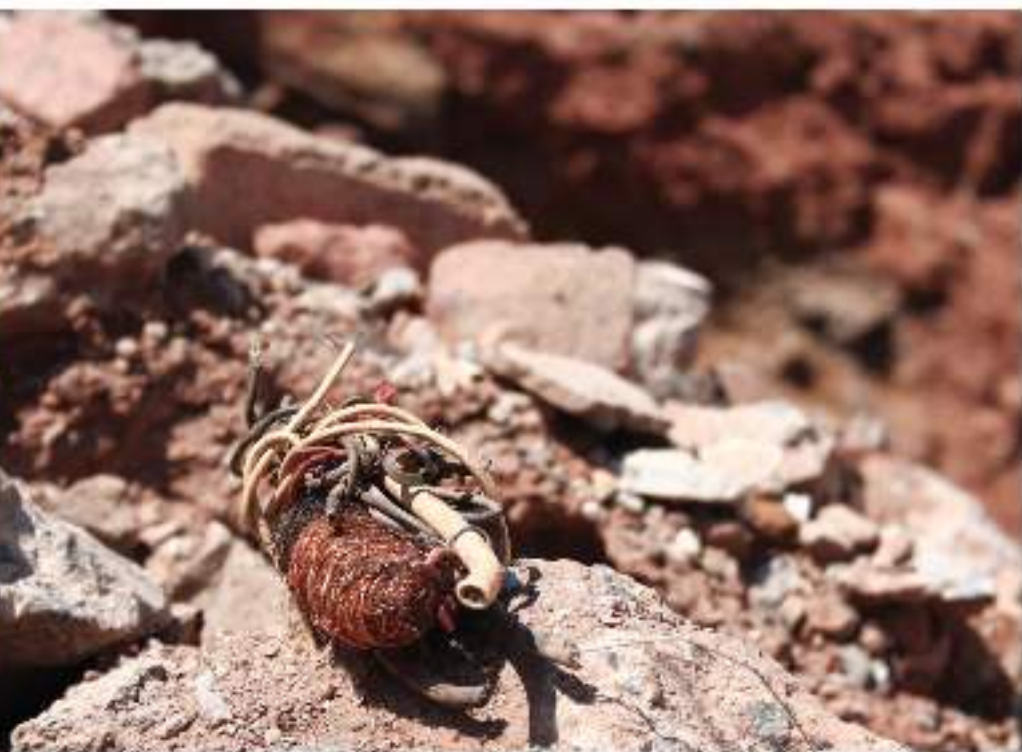


To some of the men, the mine dump has become more than a place of extraction. It is their home. They pay no rent, and they can work for much longer hours. At the Booysens mine dump, a tunnel has been converted into a shelter. "One guy discovered it. It was a small hole and he started to dig that hole more to see what was inside it. He found there was drums, steel drums, about maybe 80 of them. He did not tell anyone. Every day he would come here, take a few drums and go sell them at the scrap yard. He didn't have to dig anymore. The other guys started to wonder what was happening and where this guy was getting the drums, because he would take like three each day, and in 30 minutes he was gone, gone home. So they followed him and found the drums. From then everyone began to take them and sell as well. And now it's a place where people sleep", says one worker. About eight people sleep there every night.

But the diggers aren't the only group of men working on the mine dump. One gang follows the heavy machinery as it moves around the dump and claims ownership over everything that the machine unearths. The gang comprises about 20 men, who are feared for not hesitating to deploy violence. When very little steel is brought to the surface, the gang is also known to rob the other men of the scrap metals they have found. A criminal economy thus feeds off the illegal scavenger economy.

The nearby Booyens site borders a municipal waste dump. There, another group of men scavenge for recyclables such as plastic and glass. They, too, are known to use violence to defend their claim against intruders. To them, garbage is money. While some informal economies gel with ease, others within the same informal economic space are strongly repellent to each other due to the struggle to maximize waste, or money, at the end of the day.





Each metal has its own retail price. Copper is sold at a rate between R48 [\$4.50 US] and R50 [\$4.70] per kilogram; brass is R25/kg [\$2.30]; stainless steel R8/kg [\$0.75]; lead R7/kg [\$0.65]; heavy steel, which is the most prominent of all the excavations, is sold at R2.50/kg [\$0.23]. Light steel trades at R1.60 [\$0.15]. The men are very aware of what is valuable and what is not. Copper is the ultimate prize.

At the end of the day, the men make a quick cell phone call to their scrap yard owner and within 10 minutes his truck stops beside the mine dump. The metals are weighed and the men paid immediately. Immediate access to cash means they are able to attend to daily bills for necessities like food.



In order to remain competitive and to secure clients, the scrapyard owner says he sometimes organizes brons [grill] for the men, and every day he provides soap and water for them to wash their hands. He must show his appreciation to the scavengers: There are many other scrap yards, and he could easily lose the workers as his clients.

This is especially true when the nightly trading process does not run smoothly. Tensions often emerge between the buyer and seller, who both try to maximize gains. The seller sometimes has not cleaned the steel properly—it is still covered with other solids, or the copper wires are still covered with plastic. He may try to add additional weight to his metals, but the buyer then offers a lower price.

At the end, an agreement is reached and final payouts are calculated. The calculator is a powerful symbol because it introduces formal order into this scavenger economy. From sunrise to sunset there are no formal rules—although there are many hidden social codes and boundaries—that govern the way scrap metals are extracted from the earth. The calculator stands as a tool of governance, an important link between the formal and informal economies. It subjects the men to another world of rules and logic, to a numerical system that makes the thrown-away metal fragments materially significant. From this point on, the metals make their way into the formal economy.



## FORUM: STRUGGLES FOR THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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# INTRODUCTION

by CHRISTOPHER HERRING  
and MANISSA MCCLEAVE  
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**A**round the world over the past decade students, teachers, parents and employees have been protesting against the increasing commercialization and privatization of public education. The changes since 2008 have been more fundamental than anything before, and deep changes in the structure and dominant attitude of contemporary market democracies are everywhere putting pressure on the values that have sustained the ideals of public higher education.

This forum brings together a collection of essays and interviews written by student activists on the front lines, with a critical and social scientific eye linking their local struggles with broader social forces shaping the conflicts and opportunities on the ground. The forum is both retrospective and recent: featuring articles focused on the struggles during the first wave of austerity in the wake of the 2008 global financial crises to the more recent ongoing struggles against the continuing erosion of the public university. During this period, the dismantling of public education was often defined within the narrow economic register of tuition increases and reductions of governmental funding amidst fiscal crises. The essays in this forum, sourced from seven different countries, reveal deeper political and economic machinations at work.

On one hand, the articles portray the struggles as over broader stakes of the Public University such as institutional autonomy against corporate and state influence, democratic control against administrative dictatorship, and supporting increased participation in the conditions and educational aims of their institutions. In Ukraine and Chile, the authors highlight the struggles in preserving the faculties and courses of the humanities and social sciences when their ministers ruled such subjects negligent in their political programs of economic growth. While at the City University of New York, the US's largest urban public university, student activists protested not only the appointment of former General Perreus but also his course content, which eerily overlapped with his job description at a private equity firm. At the University of California, Laebe and Holmstrom emphasize the interconnected fate of student and worker in the struggle for workers' rights in the US' largest and most prestigious system of higher public education.

However it is also clear that these are movements that have wider implications, reaching far beyond the confines of the Ivory Tower. At the University of California, the offensive by the Academic Workers for a Democratic Union is striving to reform modes of labor organizing both in and beyond the UC. The struggles against the militarization within CUNY led to the foundation of a collective campaign for Boycotts, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), and Channel Justice describes the critical role played by the student movement at Ukraine's Maidan Square protest and its aftermath. While in Chile leaders of the student movement, including Camila Valejo interviewed here, are now elected officials in Parliament.

In the spirit of the new Berkeley Journal of Sociology, the essays offer social scientific perspectives on ongoing struggles from international authors, while answering a series of practical and tactical questions in terms of how success is defined, lessons from organizing, and what sort of collective vision for public higher education is articulated through reading these struggles together.

# UNION DEMOCRACY, STUDENT LABOR, AND THE FIGHT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

by SHANNON IKEBE and ALEXANDRA HOLMSTROM-SMITH

In recent years, cutbacks at California's premier public university system, the University of California (UC), have dealt a devastating blow to students and UC workers, spawning a fierce resistance struggle across the state. As students have joined together to fight tuition hikes, degraded learning conditions, and undemocratic decision making, labor unions representing UC workers have played an important role. In particular, radical social movement unionism among academic workers represented by the UAW (United Auto Workers) provides a model for connecting labor struggles with the fight to defend public goods.<sup>1</sup> We contend that the increasing proletarianization of academic labor has the potential to break down the age-old separation on the Left between "intellectuals" and "workers" as academic workers gain a greater degree of class consciousness. The persistence of the Left in academia in times of right-wing dominance has contributed to the radical character of academic workers' movements, and offers the prospect of revitalizing militant grassroots labor movements in the US and of defending public higher education as a social right.

## THE CRISIS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE GOLDEN STATE

California's public university system is one of the nation's largest and most prestigious, with a long history of radical activism. The top tier is the UC system, serving 335,000 students across ten campuses. While the famed California Master Plan for Higher Education declared in 1960 that "the University of California shall be tuition free to all residents of the state," at the height of the American welfare state, the principle of free education was gradually eroded by the neoliberal offensive. In the 2000s, the UC Regents moved to further privatize the university rapidly and drastically. Tuition, which was less than \$5,000 as recently as in 2001, has quadrupled within a decade.<sup>2</sup> The increased tuition was used as collateral for construction bonds on campuses and to pay the salaries of an ever-expanding legion of senior managers, the number of which in 2011 exceeded the number of regular faculty for the first time.<sup>3</sup> The capitalist crisis that began in 2007 provided a pretext to drastically reduce state funding for public education, and by 2011, the tuition revenue for the UC system exceeded public

funding, despite being a “public” university? The announcement of a 32% fee hike in 2009 and proposed cuts in state funding for higher education by more than a billion dollars triggered a mass student movement, which was the largest in many years. Sparked by the Wheeler Hall occupation at UC Berkeley in the fall of 2009, mass rallies for public education took place across the state, on UC campuses, community colleges and public high schools.<sup>5</sup>

The neoliberal assault on public education has also had a detrimental effect on livelihoods of academic student-workers (ASWs). While pursuing higher education is a privilege, in the absence of a living wage, many ASWs survive through crippling debt, second and third jobs, food stamps, and foregoing basic necessities of life such as adequate housing and necessary health care procedures.<sup>6</sup> The average graduate school debt for Ph.D. students in humanities and social sciences exceeds \$20,000, in addition to any pre-existing debt.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the prospect of paying off such heavy debt through an academic career is remote as tenure-track positions becoming ever more scarce due to the adjunctification of academia; by 2011, more than 40% of instructors in higher education were adjuncts, and well over half of new hires were for part-time positions without basic benefits.<sup>7</sup> The assumption that the majority of graduate students come from backgrounds with an independent source of wealth gives rise to the perverse logic that people who perform necessary labor should have to rely on personal sources of income in order to do that work, denying the existence of the very system of low-wage exploitation that underlies modern university education. Furthermore, the poverty of our wages and working conditions creates clear barriers to pursuing higher education for those who lack external resources and must fund their education through their labor, reinforcing hierarchies of race, gender and class. Is academia to become a dilettante pursuit for members of the ruling class, who have the time and money to pursue a PhD for fun?

At the University of California, the ASWs’ labor union, UAW Local 2865, played a crucial role in fighting against the capitalist offensive against public higher education. The union represents more than 13,000 teaching assistants, readers and raters from all 9 teaching campuses of the University of California system, making it the largest ASW union in the United States. While the union was rendered inactive for many years by bureaucratic control, a new movement of radical student-workers organized as the Academic Workers for a Democratic Union (AWDU) caucus took power in the spring of 2011, creating a new relationship between labor and the student movement in CA. The union began to organize in solidarity with the student anti-austerity movement and place quality of education and access demands at the center of its contract fight, making the union a potent force for fighting cutbacks. In this article we elaborate the potential of radical labor organizing among graduate students for the preservation of the public university.

*“We love our union because it is a step towards abolishing heteropatriarchal capitalism.”*  
—Academic Worker Activists’ Slogan, May Day 2014

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF GRADUATE STUDENT UNIONISM

For many decades, academic student-workers (ASWs) have comprised around 20% of the entire teaching workforce in American universities.<sup>17</sup> Tens of thousands of graduate students teach college courses to make a living.<sup>18</sup> However, it is our very status as workers that has been disputed, as university management has always sought to deny it for union-busting purposes. Their logic goes that because we are students, therefore we are not workers; indeed, the National Labor Relations Board officially accepted the logic of an inherent contradiction between the statuses as a worker and as a student as the basis to deny grad student-workers at private universities the right to unionize.<sup>19</sup> On these grounds, the UC administration fought against unionization of graduate student instructors for three decades. UC graduate students first made an effort to unionize in the 1960s; at UC Berkeley, the Free Speech Movement directly inspired one of the first efforts in the country for ASWs to unionize.<sup>20</sup> ASWs won union recognition in the 1960s at some campuses, such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the City University of New York; however, most efforts fizzled out in the first wave. At the UCs, another wave of struggle began in 1983, when the majority of grad students at Berkeley signed union cards, and campaigns at many other UC campuses followed with a majority sign-up within the next few years. After repeated strikes over many years on multiple UC campuses throughout the 1990s, including a grading strike on all 8 campuses at the end of 1998, the Public Employee Review Board (PERB, an equivalent of the NLRB for California public workers) finally recognized ASWs as “workers” in 1999, forcing UC management to recognize the union.

Despite the decades of struggle and militant tactics that went into getting union recognition, in 2009 UAW 2885 was not a force to defend public education, or even to fight for a good contract for its own members. While organization and a dedicated cadre of activists is important, bureaucratic control can hinder mobilization, as we have repeatedly seen in the history of the American labor movement. The UAW is notorious for its bureaucratic domination and lack of internal democracy, having been controlled by the tight-knit Administrative Caucus<sup>21</sup> for many decades, which established a cordial relationship with auto companies and the Democratic Party. Following its long-standing pattern of crushing militant rank-and-file workers’ movements—including by physically assaulting picketing workers on a wildcat strike—and negotiating ever-worsening concessionary contracts, the UAW bureaucracy began attempts to control grassroots organizing efforts by imposing their organizers at the expense of democratic organizing by activists, and even invaded activists’ homes to steal union records to prevent them from autonomously organizing.<sup>22</sup> Such tactics disillusioned many activists, creating apathy and ambivalence. The union had difficulties filling officer positions, its meetings were sparsely attended, and its affairs were often effectively run by non-elected UAW International staff and their hand-picked lieutenants.<sup>23</sup> Those who served loyally in the local Admin. Caucus were sometimes given a job in the UAW hierarchy after leaving graduate school. The purge of the American Left from labor unions during the McCarthy era paved the way for repression by conservative labor bureaucracies, which

drastically weakened resistance to assaults from neoliberal capital.<sup>37</sup> However, as the Left has increasingly found its home within academe and academic workers began to unionize, academic unions—in particular within the UAW—have become the frontline of tension between the politics of radical student movements and of bureaucratic control.

However, the difficulty of labor organizing among academic student-workers is not limited to management hostility and union bureaucracy; it is also a question of class-consciousness among the workers themselves. As noted above, universities have not been unsuccessful in asserting that student-workers are not workers. Teaching assistants at private universities and research assistants at both public and private universities in many states are still barred from exercising their labor rights because the law says they are not workers. Even when student workers have the right to unionize and are represented by a union, our experiences have shown that overcoming our fellow academic student-workers' inclination to think of themselves primarily as students rather than workers is a major barrier to organizing. As Marc Beusquest puts it, the difference between employing non-students rather than students to perform labor is the difference between "persons who claim citizenship in the present, not citizenship in the future."<sup>38</sup> Persons who only claim citizenship in the future are cheaper to employ in the present, at least from the employer's perspective.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, in today's late capitalist economy characterized by low wage service employment, precarity, part time labor, and the "sharing economy," the question of who thinks of themselves as workers is crucial to low wage labor regimes in a wide variety of industries. In particular, academic student-workers have had to overcome the pervasive yet misleading conception of ourselves as uniquely privileged and able to "afford" to work low-wage jobs for significant portions of our lives, and thus lacking the deprivation to justify militant union struggles and strong identification as workers. The question of who is a worker and the struggle to develop class-consciousness among workers who might initially see their labor as temporary and incidental to their identities may prove to be some of the most important labor struggles in the current economy.

### ACADEMIC WORKERS FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION (AWDU): FROM A BUSINESS UNION MODEL TO THE GRASSROOTS

**W**hat is the nature of a movement that can challenge these dominant ideas? We argue that only a radical union movement that specifically sets out to widen class consciousness among student-workers can significantly improve living and working conditions for student-workers and provide a robust defense to the public education system. A business union model that does not emphasize grassroots organizing and rank and file participation can never achieve a meaningful change in consciousness, as one's identity as a worker and a union member is only relevant the day that one signs a union card, votes in a union election, or happens to have an individual grievance with one's employer. Furthermore, business union models have frequently sought to separate broad and bitter union struggles from broader social justice struggles like the fight for public education. Finally, a business union model that seeks concessions

to management does not acknowledge the absolutely deplorable nature of our working and living conditions. It is only when we recognize ourselves as having rights to exercise in the present that we are no longer willing to put up with these conditions. In this way, we argue that class-consciousness cannot be a nominal, unimportant category. The labor of organizing has to constantly draw attention to the implications of our situation as academic workers. As workers who are getting paid \$17,000 a year, we have to understand our identity as one which is oppositional to the identity of highly-paid managers who have little to no connection with education provision. Academic Workers for a Democratic Union (AWDU) and affiliated rank and file movements have consistently worked to change these perceptions.

In 2010, activists founded AWDU to transform the union into “a social movement union that supports the empowerment of members through direct action.”<sup>22</sup> Named after Teachers for a Democratic Union (TDU), AWDU’s first major campaign was a “No vote” campaign on the concessionary contract negotiated by the business unionist Admin Caucus in 2010, which lost but garnered 40% of the vote. Nevertheless, AWDU won control of the statewide union in the 2011 triennial election after a hotly contested campaign.<sup>23</sup> AWDU had to occupy the union offices for multiple days to demand that votes be counted, with support from dozens of labor scholars, after the Elections Committee, largely sympathetic to the Admin Caucus, stopped the vote count.<sup>24</sup> AWDU’s efforts to democratize our union opened up space to embrace a broader range of tactics and issues, which is essential for social movement unionism. As demonstrated in the table below, when union mobilizations result in meaningful gains for student-workers, it means that making claims for full citizenship now is worth the effort: we don’t have to settle for poor working and living conditions in the (indefinite) present. Doing so protects our own lives and dignity, helps to make inroads against the poverty and debt that affects so many of our members, and increases access to academic student-workers from working-class backgrounds.

## CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND A RADICAL ACADEMIC

In the 1970s, hundreds of student leftists left campuses to take a job and organize in factories, as a so-called “industrializing” strategy; but today, campuses are themselves sites of labor struggles,<sup>25</sup> as AWDU’s experience illustrates. Graduate student-workers have been at the forefront of the resurgence of radical, grassroots unionism today, which is essential for revitalization of the labor movement.<sup>26</sup> For example, activists in the graduate union at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst also formed a radical caucus that won leadership of the entire amalgamated local in 2013, and have been building a grassroots, active, militant union; and it was the TAA, the graduate union at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, that sparked the month-long occupation of the Wisconsin State Capitol in 2011.<sup>27</sup> In contrast to the declining power of the labor movement generally, ASW unionization has been expanding; for example, ASWs at New York University won union recognition in 2013, with a landslide margin of 98.4% voting in favor.<sup>28</sup> The growing unionization movement among student-workers is evidence that student-workers are making claims to full social citizenship in the



present.” Indeed, the oft-invoked separation between intellectuals and “workers” is increasingly obsolete, as academics, we are ourselves exploited, indebted and/or

	<b>Union Democracy and Social Movement Unionism (AWDU)</b>	<b>Business Unionism (Admin Caucus)</b>
Tactics	Direct Action (Occupy, demonstrations, strikes)	Focus on closed-door negotiations with management, one-on-one member contact
Internal Structure	Democratization (reduced power for the Executive Board and President, rotation of paid union positions, rank-and-file participation through committees, etc.)	concentration of power into the UAW staff and the Executive Board
Aims	Focus on anti-oppression demands	Prioritization of narrowly-conceived economic demands
Party Politics	Independence from the Democratic Party	Maintaining close ties with the Democratic Party
Results for UAW 2865	Stopping proposed 81% fee hikes in 2011, the 2014-18 contract: a 16% wage increase over 4 years; teaching opportunities for undocumented students; all-gender bathrooms; progress on class size; more family leave	The 2010-13 contract: 6% wage increase over 3 years (below inflation), increases in childcare reimbursement, but no notable gains on class size or non-discrimination

**TABLE 1: SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM AND BUSINESS UNIONISM IN UAW 2865**

unemployed due to the corporatization of higher education. Therefore, protecting ourselves from exploitation as workers may also be one of the only ways to protect our lives as students, as it is harder to accomplish one's own research when working as a TA for 25 students and working side jobs to make ends meet. In this way, fighting the proletarianization and exploitation that characterizes the public university is synonymous with protecting the university's mission of research and intellectual life. Furthermore, organizing as exploited academic workers, upon whom higher education is increasingly coming to rely, enables us to struggle in solidarity with students for high-quality, accessible, public higher education. Not only are decent working conditions for teachers essential for provision of quality education, academic workers as workers have the (potential) capacity to disrupt operations of a university, which after all is the fundamental source of power for workers in a capitalist society.<sup>48</sup>

Where Karl Marx saw exploitation at the point of production as the key site of labor struggle, Karl Polanyi also theorized about struggles over commodification in the market. Through this lens, we can see the fight for public education as a Polyanian struggle against privatization, where the movement of academic workers is a Marxian struggle against exploitation. Interestingly, these struggles are happening at the same time, in the same place. Are they one and the same movement? On one level we must answer in the affirmative, as militant labor unionism of ASWs played a pivotal role in California's student struggles against tuition hikes, police brutality and privatization of higher education in general. Furthermore, the fight to improve labor and working conditions draws immediate attention to the fact that academic labor is being proletarianized, thus shedding light on the degradation of teaching and education that is happening in public universities. Yet the ultimate goal of the fight for public education might erode the basis of academic student unions as instructors, if we had a generous welfare state with broad support for higher education, graduate students would be guaranteed a livable stipend, and not have to fund our education through employment for the university. Such a fundamentally radical vision is shared by the fight for public education and labor struggles. Radical scholarship of the last decades has often proclaimed the "farewell to the working-class", and suggested new agents of transformation, such as the "multitude."<sup>49</sup> However, these new agents of social change have failed to halt the strengthening forces of capitalism over the past three decades. In the wake of yet another capitalist crisis, we need new politics of the working-class. Academic student-workers' movements suggest the potential for new, militant, class-conscious labor unionism that combines struggles against exploitation and commodification. Only this type of union movement will be able to show solidarity with radical students movements and become a major participant in the struggle for public education.

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<sup>1</sup>The academic unions at UC campuses originally affiliated with the radical and militant union.

District 65, which had led many efforts to organize academic workers; however, financial problems prompted District 65 to affiliate with the United Auto Workers (UAW), taking many academic unions into the UAW.

<sup>2</sup>California Department of Education, 1980. *A Master Plan for Higher Education in California*. Sacramento.

<sup>3</sup>University of California Office of the President (UCOP), 2011b. *UC Mandatory Student Charge Levels*. ([http://budgetucop.edu/sites/documents/history\\_fee.pdf](http://budgetucop.edu/sites/documents/history_fee.pdf)) Accessed Jul 1, 2014.

<sup>4</sup>Meister, Bob, 2009. "Where Does UC Tuition Go?" *Reclamations 0*. ([http://reclamationsjournal.org/issue01\\_bob\\_meister\\_where\\_does\\_tuition\\_go.html](http://reclamationsjournal.org/issue01_bob_meister_where_does_tuition_go.html)) Accessed Jul 1, 2014.

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<sup>5</sup>Gordon, Larry, 2011. "A First: UC Fees Exceed State Funding." *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 22. (<http://articles.latimes.com/2011/aug/22/local/la-me-college-pay-20110822>) Accessed Jul 1, 2014.

<sup>6</sup>Armstrong, Amanda and Paul Nadal, 2009. "Building Times: How Lines of Care Occupied Wheeler Hall." *Reclamations 1*. ([http://reclamationsjournal.org/issue01\\_armstrong\\_nadal.html](http://reclamationsjournal.org/issue01_armstrong_nadal.html)) Accessed Jul 1, 2014.

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<sup>7</sup>Ellison, Erin, 2013. "A Collective Narrative of Trying to Make It on \$17,000 a Year." *Towards Mediocrity*, Oct 28. (<http://towardsmediocrity.tumblr.com/post/6524874922/collective>) Accessed Jul 21, 2014.

<sup>8</sup>Weissmann, Jordan, 2014. "Ph.D. Programs Have a Dirty Secret: Student Debt." *The Atlantic*, Jan 16. (<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/01/phd-programs-have-a-dirty-secret-student-debt/26926/>) Accessed Jul 1, 2014.

<sup>9</sup>Curtis, John W. and Saranna Thornton, 2013. *The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2012-13*. Washington DC: American Association of University Professors. (<http://www.aaup.org/files/2012-13Economic-Status-Report.pdf>) Accessed Jul 1, 2014.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 7.

<sup>11</sup>Curtis, John W. 2014. *The Employment Status of Instructional Staff Members in Higher Education, Fall 2011*. Washington DC: American Association of University Professors. ([http://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/files/AAUP-InstrStaff2011-April30\\_4.pdf](http://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/files/AAUP-InstrStaff2011-April30_4.pdf)) Accessed Jul 1, 2014, pp. 2.

<sup>12</sup>National Labor Relations Board, 2004. *Drown University v. UAW 1-RC-21365*, July 13.

<sup>9</sup>Dunbar, Hal. 1965. *Berkeley: The New Student Revolt*. New York: Grove Press. Pp. 161-162.

<sup>10</sup>We use the label Administrative Caucus to refer to the United for Social Economic Justice (USEJ) caucus and Student Workers for Inclusive Transparent Change (SWITCH) caucus of Local UAW 2865 because they held close ties to the Administrative Caucus leadership of the UAW International in 2011 and 2014 respectively. The Administrative Caucus of the UAW International has held the presidency continuously since 1940.

<sup>11</sup>Sullivan, Richard. 2009. "Pyrrhic Victory at UC Santa Barbara: The Struggle for Labor's New Identity." In Deborah M. Hartman and Julie M. Schmid (Eds.), *Cops in the Classroom: Factory, the Changing Identity of Academic Labor*. Westport, CT: Praeger. 91-116.

<sup>12</sup>Smith, Sam R. 2014. *What Have Members Got to Lose? A Perspective on the Upcoming UAW Election*. Academic Workers for a Democratic Union, April 6. (<http://awdu.net/2014/04/06/what-have-members-got-to-lose-a-perspective-on-the-upcoming-uaw-election/>) Accessed Jul 1, 2014.

<sup>13</sup>Moody, Kim. 2007. *US Labor is Trouble and Transition: the Failure of Reform from Above, the Promise of Revival from Below*. London: Verso.

Brenner, Aaron, Robert Brenner and Cal Winslow (Eds.). 2010. *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s*. London: Verso.

<sup>14</sup>Bousquet, Marc. *How The University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*. With a preface by Cary Nelson. New York: New York University Press. 2008. Pp. 154.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Academic Workers for a Democratic Union (AWDU). 2011. *A Platform to Change UC and Change Our Union*. (<http://berkeleyuaw.wordpress.com/a-platform-to-change-uc-and-change-our-union/>) Accessed Jul 1, 2014.

<sup>17</sup>Lidlin, Barry. 2011. "Reformers Win in California Grad Union Election." *Labor Notes*, May 30. (<http://labornotes.org/blogs/2011/05/reformers-win-california-grad-union-election/>) Accessed July 1, 2014.

<sup>18</sup>Ashmore, Wendy, et al. 2011. *A Call for the Immediate Resumption of Vote Counts at UAW 2865*. (<http://berkeleyuaw.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/a-call-for-the-immediate-resumption-of-vote-counts-at-uaw-2865-05-02-11-11-00am.pdf?>) Accessed Jul 1, 2014.

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<sup>19</sup>Mohandes, Salim. 2014. "Between the Ivory Tower and the Assembly Line." *Viewpoint Magazine*, March 27, 2014. Retrieved from <http://viewpointmag.com/2014/03/27/between-the-ivory-tower-and-the-assembly-line/>, July 1, 2014.

<sup>20</sup>Brenner, Mark. 2013. "Reformers Reurgent? A Survey of Recent Rank-and-File Uprisings." *New Labor Forum* 22: 78-84.

<sup>21</sup>Walman, Anna. 2012. "Left Strategies for the Academic Workers' Movement." *Left Forum*, New York, NY, May 31. Buhle, Mari Jo. 2011. "The Wisconsin Idea." In Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle (eds.), *It Started in Wisconsin: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Labor Protest*. London: Verso. 22-25.

<sup>22</sup>Greenhouse, Steven. 2013. "NYU, Graduate Assistants to Join Auto Workers' Union." *New York Times*, Dec 12. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/12/nyregion/nyu-graduate-assistants-to-join-auto-workers-union.html>) Accessed Jul 1, 2014.

<sup>23</sup>Bousquet, Marc. *How The University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*. With a preface by Cary Nelson. New York: New York University Press. 2008. Pp. 155.

<sup>24</sup>UAW 2865. 2013. "Towards Medicidity: Administrative Mismanagement and the Decline of UC Education." ([http://www.uaw2865.org/wp-content/uploads/Towards-Medicidity\\_Sept-2013.pdf](http://www.uaw2865.org/wp-content/uploads/Towards-Medicidity_Sept-2013.pdf)) Accessed Jul 1, 2014.

<sup>25</sup>Gorz, Andre. 1982. *Farewell to the Working-Class: an Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*. London: Pluto Press. Negri, Antonio and Michael Hardt. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

# ORGANIZING AGAINST EMPIRE: STRUGGLES OVER THE MILITARIZATION OF CUNY

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The City University of New York (CUNY) is under attack. Over the past academic year, students, faculty, staff, and communities have organized against efforts by the CUNY administration and the US military to increasingly privatize and militarize the university. CUNY is the nation's largest public urban university with half a million students and tens of thousands of academic workers. Its student population is mostly women (57%) and mostly people of color (75%), many of whom are working class, multilingual, from immigrant families, and the first in their family to attend college. As such it has also drawn the attention of reformers who would like to use the sprawling public university system as a testing grounds for militarizing public higher education. The controversial appointment of general David Petraeus to teach at CUNY's Macaulay Honors College, the return of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) to undergraduate campuses, and the intensification of policing and surveillance by CUNY are the most visible symptoms of this militarizing trend.

These recent policy developments uncannily follow steps outlined by the neoconservative think tank American Enterprise Institute in their 2011 report, "Underserved: A Case Study of ROTC in New York City." The report calls for a return of ROTC to large urban public universities in order to diversify the military's officer class. It also recommends the appointment of "warrior scholars," naming David Petraeus as an ideal candidate to capture the hearts and minds of young potential recruits and to improve the military's public image. In addition, AEI argues that CUNY's diverse population might offer the military strategic advantages as it recruits educated immigrant students from countries where the United States is currently undertaking operations. Of course, the flip side of this latter point is that the large population of students from countries where the U.S. maintains its 1000+ foreign military bases may not be predisposed to welcome the arrival of the military on their college campuses. These factors have made CUNY a potential dream recruitment site for the military and simultaneously its worst anti-imperialist nightmare. As ROTC seduces some with scholarships and "job opportunities," it also triggers the ire of activists, disaffected veterans, immigrant communities, and survivors of US imperialism. This is the complex and contradictory terrain upon which the militarization of our university now unfolds.

In this article we begin from the premise that there is intimate link between militarization and neoliberal restructuring at public universities. As public

universities are subject to unpopular corporate-style restructurings, tuition hikes, and flexibilization of their academic labor force, they are also increasing their security budgets to deal with unrest and protests against these changes. In this sense, security, repression, and militarization go hand in hand with neoliberalism. In turn, neoliberal policies have paved the way for the return of the US military to college campuses. As funding for public universities is slashed, schools become more dependent on private donations and rising tuitions. As tenured professors are replaced with precarious underpaid and overworked adjuncts, so too is the power over university governance concentrated in the hands of overpaid bureaucrats and unaccountable board members. The trend towards a corporate model of public university governance has yielded a small elite class who sees great opportunities in the "funding streams" proffered by the US military and private donors. It is these unaccountable bureaucrats who, at CUNY, have helped facilitate the project to reintroduce ROTC, hire David Petraeus, and invite neoconservative donors to open research centers at CUNY.

We use the term militarization to mean (1) the particular incursion of the US military into the City University of New York, most visibly seen through the return of ROTC and the appointment of David Petraeus. By militarization we also mean (2) the general trend towards heightened security and surveillance on campus, the integration of campus security with police departments, and the intensified weaponization of security and police forces, which is also taking place at a broader societal level. At CUNY these types of militarization have taken various forms: increased security budgets, collusion with NYPD spying on Muslim students, academic centers funded by neoconservative donors, intimidation of student activists, and attacks against organizing spaces.

Over the past academic year (2013-2014), a movement against these forms of militarization has emerged. While this militarization has been openly encouraged and abetted from the top by the CUNY administration and Board of Trustees, it has been vigorously opposed below. As former CUNY Chancellor or Matthew Goldstein worked to broker a deal to bring the fallen general to teach at CUNY, student activists worked harder to stage protests and actions building public opinion against his appointment. Similarly, ROTC recruitment officers were welcomed by college administrators and some faculty members as eagerly as they were hounded and shamed by students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community activists, who eventually triumphed in barring ROTC from two campuses. What follows is a chronicle of these struggles, an assessment of the victories and defeats of the past academic year, and an analysis of the frictions between militarization of the public university, neoliberal restructuring, and popular resistance.

## I. PROTESTING PETRAEUS

**I**n April 2013, David Petraeus—former head of the Central Intelligence Agency, four-star General who headed the coalition forces during the Iraq War, and co-author of the U.S. Army Counter-Insurgency Field Manual—was appointed an adjunct professorship position at Maccaulay Honors College at CUNY. Petraeus's appointment joined a trend of high-level security officials moving into academic positions upon leaving their government jobs (or vice versa).<sup>1</sup> Initial news articles protested Petraeus' pay as emblematic of blatant wage discrepancies at CUNY: as

a visiting adjunct professor he was to be paid \$200,000 per year, while adjuncts normally make less than \$3,000 per course. This prompted such outrage that eventually Petraeus' salary was reduced to the nominal sum of \$1, although he still received an undisclosed supplementary amount from a private donor.

However, this pay reduction did not quiet the criticism of his appointment, as the University administration hoped it would. By the start of Fall 2013, an Ad-hoc Committee Against the Militarization of CUNY, made up of students and faculty from a variety of CUNY campuses, emerged to contest his appointment with a semester-long campaign of direct actions that included protesting in front of his class each week and chanting such things as "CUNY will not be a war college." Students also followed Petraeus to and from his lecture every week in a well-orchestrated "bird-dog" tactic. One of these occurrences received international press when activists disseminated video footage of a crowd of students verbally heckling and following Petraeus, calling him a "war criminal" as he walks alone on a public sidewalk. In addition to these confrontational tactics the Free University-NYC held "counter-classes" near Macaulay and Baruch Colleges, offering anti-imperialist learning alternatives to the pro-empire content being propagated inside Petraeus' classroom. At these events students, faculty and staff came together to build a collective analysis of the militarization taking place in their University.

In response to the weekly outrage outside Petraeus' class, the CUNY administration immediately condemned the protesters, citing the need to defend Petraeus' "academic freedom." Meanwhile the recurrent Monday protests quickly led to the brutal arrest of six students on September 17, 2013.<sup>7</sup> The brutality of these arrests (in a video of this incident CUNY student Luis Henriquez is seen being punched several times in the ribs while being handcuffed) prompted a solidarity letter written by CUNY students and signed by over 500 students and faculty calling on the resignation of Petraeus. Despite prominent international media attention, both this letter and the police brutality that prompted it were met with silence by the CUNY administration.

Activists also took aim at the propagandistic content of Petraeus' class. The imperialist message of the course was already clear in its title, "The Coming (North) American Decade(s)." Its syllabus included fracking industry-sponsored articles, funded and written by oil companies, which fell well below the criteria for academic scholarship. The course description itself eerily overlapped with Petraeus' job description at the private equity firm Kohlberg, Kravis and Roberts (KKR), where he works as a consultant. Indeed, KKR has billions of dollars invested in topics and industries about which Petraeus taught. Protesters highlighted these connections and denounced the blatant commercial interests in course materials as well as the university administration's cynical use of "academic freedom" as a protective screen. However, despite the widespread anger and ongoing demonstrations over Petraeus' appointment, Macaulay Honors College announced in April 2014 that Petraeus would remain another academic year to teach the same course.

## II. RESISTING ROTC

Over forty years ago, the CUNY student movement forced the ROTC off of its campuses through sit-ins, strikes, and even building fires. In 2012, ROTC suddenly made a return to CUNY without consulting most faculty and student governance bodies. Nationwide, ROTC programs exist in 489 colleges and universities, with further access to 2,469 more colleges through cross-registration agreements, as a college-to-military pipeline for procuring U.S. military officers. In the process, ROTC radically alters campus life to include uniformed students' drill formations, and ROTC professors' hiring and curricular decisions that are unaccountable to departmental governance procedures. ROTC recruiters often target low-income and working class US citizens aged 17-27, who must upon graduation serve in the military for up to ten years (or pay the money back), offering scholarships based on "merit," not financial need.<sup>2</sup> That recruiters themselves refer to campuses as "hunting grounds" is emblematic of the predatory methods used by ROTC to pressure disadvantaged students into military service. Despite this, in 2012 the CUNY administration welcomed the ROTC program to York College and in 2013 to City College and Medgar Evers College.

ROTC's return has been opposed by many across CUNY, some even recalling when it was last jettisoned from the university. In response a September 2012 town hall at the College of Staten Island gathered people from across CUNY to hear anti-war veterans and audience members debate pro-ROTC speakers. This event led to the successful resistance of the program's arrival there and served as a model for a mid-February 2014 town hall at Medgar Evers College (MEC). This town hall was strategically timed to occur before a vote by the college's highest governing body, which subsequently decided by majority to remove ROTC from its campus. The removal of ROTC from Medgar Evers College marked a huge success for the anti-militarization movement, meanwhile these campaigns and their town hall style political education events will provide a template for ongoing organizing against ROTC at City College and York College in the coming years.

During this period, a newly formed committee against militarization in the Professional Staff Congress (PSC-CUNY) union developed a solidarity network to coordinate these town halls and governance voting strategies. The committee also submitted a FOIL request on exchanges between the CUNY administration, the US military, and the American Enterprise Institute to ascertain how intimately the military industrial complex funds and colludes with people in the university. Notably, the committee's resolution to oppose ROTC at CUNY was roundly passed in May 2014 by the union's executive council and delegate assembly. In effect, this now sets the stage for university-wide faculty and staff actions against the US military's presence at CUNY, which can in turn further politicize current contract negotiations.

These are only some of the experiential lessons in organizing against ROTC recruitment that we take from this past year at CUNY. Through political education and diverse conditions, our efforts successfully thwarted ROTC's ambitions at two campuses. We believe that ROTC can be pushed (back) out of CUNY entirely, but only if the university's various communities can widely stand together against militarism. We must continue to build wide democratic support for anti-



militarization campaigns, which in part implies working against the tendency towards a student activism model of small self-selecting groups proclaiming actions on behalf of everyone else.

### III. INTENSIFIED POLICING AND SURVEILLANCE AMIDST

A wider view of this academic year's organizing shows that when early fall 2013 actions against Petraeus and ROTC picked up momentum, the CUNY administration responded with a series of repressive blows and surveillance efforts that disoriented and redirected our collective focus to defend activists and movement spaces. By Spring 2014, as some anti-militarization campaigns stalled, others picked up steam or formed powerful new bridges.

On October 20, the Guillermo Morales/Assata Shakur Center was seized by the campus police at City College in Harlem. This educational organizing space—won through a 1989 CUNY student strike against proposed tuition increases that had served as an activism resources hub for over 20 student clubs and community organizations—was a crucial space for students and community members who planned the Petraeus protests. Overnight, CUNY administrators and security dismantled the community center, confiscated personal property, and painted over its iconic stenciled door (a pencil-holding fist), swiftly converting the space into a low-resourced, staff-run career center annex. In response, furious students and community members carried out an ongoing campaign and legal case to retrieve their belongings and reclaim the space. This activity received national media attention and solidarity statements from various social justice organizations, but was ultimately unsuccessful in returning the space to students. The year of 2013 was a benchmark for militarization at City College, which in May also renamed its entire division of Social Sciences as “The Colin L. Powell School of Civic and Global Leadership.” The opening of Colin Powell School and the closing of the Morales/Shakur Center are emblematic of current transformations at CUNY. The loss of Morales/Shakur was also by far the largest blow that the CUNY movement suffered this year.

Surveillance and physical repression of students also kept apace. In the aftermath of CUNY and NYPD surveillance of Arab and Muslim students from 2003 to 2006, activists discovered that a section of the Graduate Center's CUNY TV station was secretly turned into a security surveillance hub, and student-employees were ordered to monitor campus protests for CUNY and NYPD purposes. The collusion between CUNY security and the NYPD continues to be a violent brew, as manifested in the beating of several CUNY activists at Petraeus protests, and in disturbing irregularities around the suspensions and arrests of student leaders and a union. In late October, Revolutionary Student Coordinating Committee (RSCC) activists Khalil Vasquez and Tafadar Sourav were first suspended from City College, and then ordered by the New York City District Attorney's office to turn themselves in to spend a night in jail for attempting to incite a riot on campus. Before the university's own disciplinary procedures had run their course, CUNY security recommended that these activists be arrested by the NYPD for acts they had allegedly committed one month prior. This unprecedented act of intimidation upon these students shows new forms of repressive collusion being practiced at CUNY.

The CUNY Board of Trustees also briefly proposed, and then quietly retreated, a “Policy on Expressive Conduct,” aimed at more broadly stifling free expression across the university. This policy would have imposed a rule requiring students to receive advance permission from CUNY security to hold organizing meetings, public assemblies, or even to distribute flyers and other informational materials.<sup>6</sup> However, activists quickly mobilized thousands of signatures and fomented a universal outrage from teachers and students across the university, forcing the Board of Trustees to retreat and retract their proposal. This struggle was emblematic of how the administration is attempting to silence dissent, as well as how we can organize against these attempts with broad alliances of students, faculty, staff, and community participants.

Internally the CUNY student movement also faced severe challenges around coalition-building, organizing styles, and political disagreements. All too often, factionalism and vanguardist machismo-ridden styles of organizing disrupted attempts at wider CUNY movement work. This is perhaps captured most poignantly by the fate of the Revolutionary Student Coordinating Committee (RSCC), a Marxist students of color group on several CUNY campuses who conducted a series of powerful early fall 2013 actions. However, after being repressed by CUNY and NYPD forces and gaining considerable sympathetic attention, RSCC quickly alienated their allies, the broader public, and some of their own members through sexism, self-aggrandizing ideological sermons, zealous public denunciations of their would-be allies at broader coalition meetings, and petulant in-fighting. By the end of the fall 2013 semester, this bright flame had been rapidly extinguished, having caused some notable damage along the way, and the group has yet to recover as a visibly impactful part of the CUNY movement.

#### IV: INTERNATIONAL LINKS: BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, SANCTIONS

**A**fter a volatile Fall 2013 semester left many uncertain of future possibilities, in Spring 2014, some crucial new developments emerged in opposing the tide of CUNY militarization. Namely, several of these aforementioned campaigns and projects linked up with the international Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement that is proliferating across U.S. universities opposing Israeli apartheid. Inspired by the successes of academic boycotts by the Association for Asian American Studies and the American Studies Association, and divestments around the University of California system, a range of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapters around CUNY held regular informational events, speaking tours, and visible actions during Israeli Apartheid Week. In addition, CUNY Graduate Center students held dialogues that critiqued apolitical discourses of academic freedom, instead calling for academic solidarity and anti-imperialism to link our contingent work and freedoms with those of students, teachers, and staff living under Israeli occupation.

In one of the most notable Spring BDS events, Brooklyn College’s SJP chapter welcomed Ali Abunimah to discuss his book *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*, which was widely attended despite a few vocal Zionist student government opponents.<sup>7</sup> The push for organizing around BDS is one crucial way that the

CUNY movement is making international links with global struggles against militarism. In the tradition of activists like Assata Shakur (briefly a CUNY student herself), who interwove campus organizing alongside Third World struggles, the CUNY movement today opposes militarization on our campuses as part of global struggles of oppressed peoples. As we actively oppose the current U.S. government-funded and Israeli government-conducted mass carnage inflicted on the people of Gaza, many are redoubling BDS and related Palestine solidarity efforts at our CUNY campuses as integral to these struggles.

## REFUSING TO CONCLUDE

CUNY is a social movement riddle. With the dozens of radical groups which appear, vanish, flourish, shrink, collaborate, usurp, stabilize, antagonize, inspire, and dishearten within the daily upheavals of university life, the question of political organization has perplexed students, faculty, staff, and community members long since the first last time. Organizing the vast and dispersed array of people affected by militarized classrooms, the lure of ROTC recruiters, racial profiling and surveillance, and intense financial vulnerability has proved a major challenge in the 2013-2014 wave of dissent. Learning from both our successes and defeats this year will provide an important stepping stone for building a wider movement. With creatively sustained mass activities, a CUNY movement against empire can potentially dissuade other universities from accepting their own marching orders.

In order to contest militarization at CUNY, we find ourselves grasping for new ways to define and articulate being "militant." As an antidote to some of the disorganizing tendencies we faced this past year, we seek to develop humanizing creative experimentation, encourage diverse solidarities, and develop urban decolonizing strategies that don't refashion the macho mystique of armed struggle. We must develop broad-based coalitions led by working-class people of color at CUNY, political education, and "militant" anti-imperialist efforts without reproducing the hierarchical, masculinist and heterosexist, and tokenizing practices of the U.S. military. Ousting the U.S. military from one of its most valuable university targets requires a patient radical vision beyond one protest, one communiqué, one revolutionary tradition, one school, one semester, one year, perhaps even one decade. As former CUNY educator Toni Cade Bambara wrote in 1970, during the last major series of our university's transformations:

*Instant coffee is the hallmark of current rhetoric. But we do have time. We'd better take the time to fashion revolutionary selves, revolutionary lives, revolutionary relationships. Mouths don't win the war. It don't even win the people. Neither does haste, urgency, and stretch-out-now insistence. Not all speed is movement.*

It is with these words in mind that we look to the future of confronting empire at CUNY.

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<sup>1</sup> Other examples include Homeland Security chief Janet Napolitano's Fall 2009 appointment to presidency of the University of California system; and Condoleezza Rice's 2000 appointment from Stanford University Provost to National Security Advisor under George W. Bush, and subsequent return to Stanford.

<sup>2</sup> These students were charged with multiple offenses including disorderly conduct, incitement to riot, resisting arrest, and the obstruction of governmental administration.

<sup>3</sup> Recruitment begins even younger. As Ann Jones reports, "Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine JROTC units now flourish in 3,400 high schools nationwide—80% of them in the South—with a total enrollment of 132,139 kids." ([http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/126784/tomgram%3A\\_ann\\_jones\\_after\\_the\\_children](http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/126784/tomgram%3A_ann_jones_after_the_children)). The American Enterprise Institute report also states that in New York City alone, "Francis Lewis High School in Queens, New York City's second-largest high school, hosted the largest JROTC program in the country in 2006, with nearly seven hundred cadets... At Xavier High School in Manhattan, over one-third of the student body is enrolled in JROTC." (<http://www.aei.org/papers/society-and-culture/underserved-a-case-study-of-rote-in-new-york-city/>)

<sup>4</sup> The BoT claimed that such a policy was initially urged by CUNY faculty to establish guidelines for campus dissent. In fact, this faculty demand was originally made as a gesture of solidarity with dissent after a November 2011 incident at Baruch College, in which CUNY police and NYPD attacked students, faculty, staff, and community members peacefully trying to enter a public hearing on a five-year tuition increase, which resulted in dozens being injured and 15 arrested.

<sup>5</sup> At a January 2013 Brooklyn College SJP event featuring Judith Butler and Omar Barghout, organizers also faced attacks by Zionist student groups and several prominent City Council members who sought to cancel the event. These Council members leveraged their political power to threaten defunding the entire college. While they were ultimately ineffective and the event gathered a packed supportive house, this chain of events transformed the political climate and contributed to SJP's wider recognized presence at CUNY and in the city.

# FLEXIBILITY AND FRAGMENTATION: STUDENT ACTIVISM AND UKRAINE'S (EURO)MAIDAN PROTESTS

by EMILY CHANNELL-JUSTICE

The first fest on Kiev's Independence Square—known locally as Maidan Nezalezhnosti—on November 21, 2013 belonged to students. They demanded that Ukraine's president Viktor Yanukovich put the country on the path toward Europe through an Association Agreement with the European Union. The agreement would have opened new markets to the weak Ukrainian economy and rejected Russian encroachment through Vladimir Putin's Customs Union. The first blood on Maidan was also shed by students, who were beaten by the Berkut riot police so that a New Year's tree could be erected. When Yanukovich fled the country after much violence had been inflicted on Maidan protesters, the first new faces in the Ministry of Education and Sciences were students who peacefully occupied the building in order to demand a new Minister of Education and better education policies.

Students from universities across Ukraine thus played an essential role in generating the critical mass in what became the (Euro)Maidan<sup>1</sup> protests, the most massive mobilization in the history of independent Ukraine. The protests gave students from various political organizations and backgrounds a unified platform to link the Association Agreement and violence against protesters to issues in higher education, and they used the momentum from their first days on Maidan to bring attention to attempts to improve Ukrainian universities and quality of life for students and faculty through new legislation.

This article is based on research with student activists throughout the existence of the Maidan protests and following the May elections. I worked closely with the independent student union Direct Action—which drew participants from organizations across Kyiv—and with members from Kyiv and Lviv of the Studentska Koordinatsijna Rada (Student Coordinating Committee), the student governing body created to participate in the Maidan Council.<sup>2</sup> I participated in multiple student actions related to Maidan, including organized protests and demonstrations, strikes, assemblies, and the occupation of the Ministry of Education. These events started to unfold on November 21, 2013, and culminated in the students' occupation of the Ministry from February 18–20, 2014. A new Minister of Education was named on February 27, and recent actions have focused on legislative change rather than occupations.

Student actions on Maidan responded to shifting targets within the educational sphere and the Ukrainian political landscape. First, mobilizations centered on

demands that the president sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. His refusal cut off access to a Europeanized education system, along with access to a Europeanized economy and jobs. When students who were sleeping on Maidan were beaten on November 30, the focus of the protests shifted toward police violence and state-sanctioned repressions. In January 2014, the government responded by passing the so-called Bondarenko-Oliynyk Laws (also known as the January 16 laws), which made it illegal to participate in “mass disruptions” or wear helmets or uniforms at protests, permitted the government to cut off Internet access, granted impunity to police officers who used force against protesters, and increased fines and prison terms for protesters.<sup>8</sup> Despite these laws, students continued to organize campaigns on Maidan through the Student Assembly, a group that was formed to coordinate student actions through consensus-based decision-making and regular general assemblies in an occupied building near Maidan. Finally, following the violence, the students occupied the Ministry of Education and Science. They formulated demands to improve higher education, to ensure the transparency of the Ministry’s budgets, and to guarantee that student participants on Maidan would not be prosecuted under the temporary government.

### A SHORT CHRONICLE OF STUDENTS ON MAIDAN

Students in Ukraine have been active as protesters since the country gained independence in 1991. However, before the fall of 2013, student activism was organized largely by disparate groups, and particularly through self-organized student governments and independent student unions.<sup>9</sup> The mass mobilizations that began in November 2013 were initially a response to President Viktor Yanukovich’s refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. Despite potential problems with the Association Agreement—including loan offers from the International Monetary Fund that were tied to major austerity requirements, and the lack of any guarantee that Ukraine would ever be offered full membership in the EU—students from multiple Kyiv universities and various student organizations supported the Agreement. Their support was based in part on hopes of bringing the Ukrainian education system in line with Europe’s, increasing the mobility of Ukrainians who hoped to study or work abroad, and strengthening Ukrainian universities that hoped to attract professors from foreign universities. On November 27, 2013, students went on strike to support the protests on Maidan. Students from Kyiv Mohyla Academy, one of the most prestigious universities in Ukraine, had the support of their administration and their rector, Serhiy Kvit. However, students from other universities were prevented from striking and even from attending the protests, as administrators insisted on attendance counts at classes and encouraged students in dormitories to turn in their fellow classmates if they participated in the protests.

Despite the peaceful nature of these strikes, riot police appeared in full force in the early hours of November 30. Protesters who had occupied Maidan and were sleeping there—most of whom were students—were beaten and removed from the square. Several dozen of them were arrested. After this unprovoked attack on peaceful protesters, the rhetoric on Maidan quickly shifted. On December 1, a mass march in Kyiv drew thousands who were no longer protesting for Europe



*photo credit: Emily Chapman Justice*

but against police violence, and particularly against a state that sanctioned such violence in the name of erecting a New Year's tree and a Christmas market. Student protesters also adopted this rhetoric and used it to launch a new strike. University administrations' responded as well. Several administrations came out in support of students and against the violence and repressions against protesters. The attitude towards mass mobilization had generally shifted.

The use of violence also encouraged an increase in radical (although still relatively nonviolent) tactics. While government buildings around Kyiv were occupied, students blockaded the entrance to Drahomanova Pedagogical University, one of the universities still actively trying to prevent students from protesting. On December 4, students marched on the Ministry of Education itself, demanding that Minister of Education Dmytro Tabachnyk condemn the repressions against students. He did not. Students picketed the offices of the Berkut, demanding the release of students who had remained imprisoned since the police attack. During these weeks, student rhetoric shifted from claiming "Ukraine is Europe" to slogans that included "Less to the Berkut, More to Education" and "Students Against Violence." Students began linking state repressions to their concerns about education and education reform, and began

to use protests against violence as a step toward larger claims.

These larger claims began to take shape in January 2014 after the first protesters died in a standoff with Berkut in Kiev. The following day, students and recent graduates organized a final strike at Kyiv Mohyla Academy and occupied one of the main university buildings. This strike continued for three days, but Serhiy Kvit—the rector who had previously supported student strikes—refused to back student demands. He instead closed the university, claiming that the situation in the country had become too precarious to require students to come to classes. This effectively ended the occupation, while also allowing the administration to appear supportive of the strikers. However, when Maidan activists occupied the Ukrainian House on the edge of Maidan Nezalezhnosti on January 26, student organizers were able to secure space for the striking students in that building the next day. From there, the Student Assembly was born. The Assembly was a space and meeting site for students and activists with various goals. Organizers held regular general assemblies in which activists shared ideas for protests and other actions, while volunteers organized working groups for each of these initiatives. Surrounded by medical checkpoints and kitchens, students organized lectures and film screenings for anyone who was using the Ukrainian House as their home base.

I was scheduled to give a lecture about Occupy Wall Street and the tactic of occupation on February 18 in the Ukrainian House. Instead, Maidan burst into flames as Yanukovich and his ministers attempted to clear the square by violence means. Protesters set fire fires around the square to create a smokescreen and protect themselves from police snipers and from Berkut units that tried to breach the barricades. All public transportation was shut down and many of us were glued to our computer screens as we watched a live stream of protesters fighting against Berkut and snipers. When the violence ended on February 20, at least 110 people had been killed, mostly by snipers. Student activists, many of whom were caught up in the violence, were motivated to escalate their demands and to condemn the reprehensible violence. While non-student protesters focused on holding Yanukovich accountable (although he had already fled from Ukraine), students returned to the Ministry of Education on February 21 to demand accountability from Tabachnyk. When they arrived at the Ministry, a representative came to speak with the thousands of students who had gathered in the middle of the afternoon on a working day. He said that Tabachnyk was not in his office, and he did not have his phone numbers to find out where he was. The students decided they would wait inside the building for Tabachnyk, but the minister never came. Instead, the students stayed in the Ministry until Yanukovich's government disappeared and a new one, in which they would have a say, was put into place.

### OCCUPY THE MINISTRY!

**S**tudents who occupied the Ministry of Education acted quickly to secure the building as a legitimate place to stage their protests and make demands. They allowed workers to leave and lock their offices, placing tape on every door to make sure no offices were broken into and no documents were stolen or tampered with. The students organized their own self-defense brigade (a common practice on Maidan, known as a *sotnya*), some of whom came directly from the brigades



on Maidan and many of whom came from other organized groups of activists. They made calls requesting food and medical supplies, which arrived in troves at the Ministry. The *sotnya* guarded the gates of the building and only allowed in students and occasionally professors (and interested foreigners like myself). Every evening they held a general assembly based on the same principles that made the Student Assembly of the Ukrainian House so successful. They elected "representatives" to work as liaisons with government deputies that were putting together a new cabinet, although the necessity of having such representatives remains disputed. The students decided that their main concerns were having a say in who would become the next Minister of Education, and in creating a "road map" for higher education reforms.<sup>8</sup> Students discussed possible minister candidates at their assemblies and selected three, two of whom accepted this "nomination." Lilia Hrynevych, who has worked in education and education legislation since Ukraine's independence, and Serhuy Kvit both came to the occupied Ministry to make their case about why students should support their candidacies. In the end, both candidates were accepted by the student general assembly. Kvit was eventually named the new Minister of Education, and Hrynevych continues to work in education legislation as the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Science and Education.

The "road map" for education reforms included a list of demands to improve education standards in Ukrainian higher education: Accountability and transparency within the Ministry of Education were to be increased through the publication of budget documents and through online administrative systems. Universities were to be granted more autonomy in their degree programs, their finances, and their administrative organization. The number of courses any professor could teach in a given year was to be limited, and assessment standards for professors were to be developed and implemented. The document also demanded student participation in university decisions and the right to recall administrators, including the Minister of Education. When Kvit arrived at the Ministry on February 28 to take his post, he quickly met with students from the road map working group to approve a short list of demands, and later signed a document in full support of their demands.

However, most students recognize the limitations of this commitment. First, in order to separate himself from his predecessor, whose administration was widely condemned in part because of his total disconnect from students, Kvit had little choice but to sign the document. A refusal to sign would have made him look too similar to Tabachnyk's constant ignorance towards student demands. Second, the implementation of these demands falls only partially under the personal authority of the Minister of Education. Much of it must be done through extremely bureaucratic channels. Many of the administrators working in the Ministry are still the same people who worked there under Tabachnyk. It remains to be seen how willing they are to implement reforms.

Recently, many education activists and students have focused on Law 1187-2 for higher education reform, passed by the new Ukrainian parliament in early July 2014. This law puts into practice some of the demands described above, particularly concerning university autonomy and increased flexibility for students. It will also increase student stipends and the quantity of students

who receive stipends over the next four years.<sup>6</sup> Now, students must focus on encouraging the minister and his deputies to implement these changes, even with parliamentary elections looming in late October.

### POSSIBLE FUTURES FOR STUDENT ACTIVISM

That students were able to shift their targets so quickly throughout the course of events on Maidan shows an amazing flexibility among Ukrainian student activists. This flexibility is perhaps enabled by the fact that the student movement in Ukraine is not unified, which allows student protesters to change their focus or their organizational form as protests unfold. Anarchists and radical leftists insisted on non-hierarchical structures and organized the occupation of the Ministry of Education, but they remain skeptical to declare that the appointment of a new Minister of Education constitutes a victory. More moderate students supported the occupation of the Ministry, but focused on choosing a minister and electing representatives to work closely with him on education reform. Many students from all parts of the political spectrum have supported Law 1187-2 in hopes of major, long-term changes in higher education. All of these participants are necessary to the energy of student activism in Ukraine.

At the same time, fragmentation means that not all students can claim to be represented in the student movement. While student activism has taken its own form in eastern cities like Kharkiv and Sumy, the Maidan movement was almost exclusively made up of students from Kiev's universities. As the situation in Eastern Ukraine deteriorates, the likelihood for problems in implementing education reform is great, particularly as student activism is centralized in Kyiv. Along with political divisions, these regional distinctions should become more prominent concerns for student activists across the country.

While the events on Maidan provided a platform for students to make vocal demands and to influence the formation of a new government, the direction of post-Maidan developments remains contested among student activists. Many students remain skeptical of whether the new minister and new legislation can be effective in changing education policy for the better. However, student activism on Maidan was essential to the dynamism of the Ukrainian protest movement, and success of students during these mobilizations has generated a new motivation and enthusiasm for student activism in Ukraine.

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<sup>1</sup>A note on terminology: the protests were known as “EuroMaidan” in the initial weeks, as the main demand of participants was that Yanukovich sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. However, as the protests continued, and as protesters’ demands changed, the mobilizations lost their link with Europe and were known more generally as “Maidan.” I am concerned that referring to “Maidan” as a single, unified movement erases the multitude of voices present at the protests, but I reference “Maidan” here as a shorthand when necessary to signify a general trend; otherwise, I specify a group or event “for Maidan.”

<sup>2</sup>The SKR was made up of various “strike committees” from each university in Kyiv; each university had two representatives on the SKR. The SKR also had several members from Lviv (Western Ukraine), but universities from Eastern Ukraine were not represented on the SKR. The SKR coordinated with independent student organizations as well as other youth organizations, such as youth wings of political parties, and with the general Maidan Council, created in December, which saw itself as the governing body of Maidan.

<sup>3</sup>For a summary of the main issues targeted by these laws, see <http://citizenjournal.info/wp-content/uploads/dictatorship-en.jpg>.

<sup>4</sup>Universities also have “student unions” which are funded through the university and therefore subject to pressure from university authorities. These unions are not focused on political participation and did not play a role as organizations in the Maidan protests, although individual members may have been present.

<sup>5</sup>Another important result of the Ministry occupation was a successful initiative to require the Ministry to make its accounting and financial information available online. This is a continuing initiative that activists hope to impose on other ministries and as such merits more discussion than is possible here.

<sup>6</sup>More details about this legislation can be found at <http://www.cedoa.org.ua/uk/osveta/yak-zakonoproekt-1187-2-zmnyt-vyschhu-osvitu> and <http://osvita.ua/vnz/reform/41918/>. (Both links are in Ukrainian.)

## INDIGNATION IS ONLY THE FIRST STEP: A DISCUSSION WITH CAMILA VALLEJO AND NOAM TITELMAN

INTERVIEW BY ZOLTÁN GLÜCK

TRANSLATION BY MARY KATE DONNOVAN

Camila Vallejo and Noam Titelman were two of the most prominent leaders of the wave of Chilean student mobilizations that began in 2011. This interview was conducted in October 2012 when Vallejo and Titelman were invited to Washington, DC to accept the Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award. During this trip they visited New York City to meet student organizers from the US and Quebec and give a talk at the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center where student leaders from across the Americas discussed strategies, tactics, organizing structures, and lessons learned from the past year of intense student mobilization. It was in this context that this interview was conducted.

Since the time of this interview a number of new developments have taken place in the Chilean student movement. In 2013 Vallejo and three other student leaders were elected to the Chilean Parliament and have begun trying to reform the educational system from within the channels of established power, while the leadership roles in the main student organization have passed to a younger generation of activists who are more skeptical about such parliamentary politics. This shift in Chilean student politics is captured perhaps most emblematically with the election of an anarchist, Melisa Sepulveda, as president of the Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile (CONFECH), a post formerly held by Vallejo, an outspoken member of the Communist Youth. The necessity of "taking power" is a topic that emerges towards the end of this interview, and is a theme that Vallejo has not been shy to speak publicly about elsewhere. As if foreshadowing her own bid for power within Chilean parliament, she states clearly her own understanding of the relationship between social movements and political power: "When social movements are political, their politics will always have to contend with existing power; if you don't wield power yourself in some way in order to realize your proposal, it will always be others who are speaking for you."

We are including this interview in our collection of writings about student movements as it marks an important moment in the recent history of international student mobilizations. It grapples both with broad themes of neoliberalism, representative democracy, and horizontalism, as well as practical nuts and bolts organizing questions, such as the structures of decision-making within the Chilean movement. The interview also captures Vallejo and Titelman at an interesting and transitional moment in their own political trajectories.

**ZOLTÁN GLÜCK:** What is the relationship between the student movement and broader expressions of resistance against neoliberalism in Chile. Would you say that the student movement in Chile is an anti-capitalist movement?

**CAMILA VALLEJO:** Well, the Chilean student movement, and I think this is true of social movements in general, don't usually define themselves as anti-capitalist in their slogans. Although in practice of course we promote the fight against capitalism. In our demands there is a social vision that is opposed to the capitalist system and its neoliberal expression in Chile. For example, when we say that the Chilean state should become a true guarantor of material rights, that is certainly antithetical to the neoliberal capitalist vision, which turns rights into a business to be regulated by the market. We champion the redistribution of wealth; we don't believe that a single group or class should control all wealth or appropriate all our natural resources and they certainly should not be allowed to concentrate all of the country's financial capital. We believe there must be a redistribution of wealth as well as a diversification of the means of production so that they are not in the hands of a cadre of elites or transnational corporations. We contend that the neoliberal model is contrary to democracy because it concentrates all power in the hands of the few—in Chile that means in the hands of approximately 4,500 families—while the rest lose out and struggle to get by. But our primary battle in Chile is not capitalism in its totality. Rather, our demands articulate a proposal for an alternative model for education and a radically different social vision. I won't say that we champion "socialism" in some simple ideal form, but we are definitely talking about a radicalization of democracy and a radical departure from neoliberalism.

**ZG:** I have a question, which is about the concept of *horizontalidad* or "horizontalism." Here in New York, and particularly throughout Occupy Wall Street the concept of horizontalism has been quite an important part of the political language. For example, a lot of people have been inspired by the Argentinian example of *horizontalidad* and how it functioned in neighborhood assemblies. I'm wondering how, if at all, the Chilean movement grapples with the concept of horizontalism.

**CV:** A part of our organic maturation as a movement, and as political subjects, has entailed learning how to balance the use of representative democracy with more participatory or direct forms of democracy. Throughout, we have consistently worked to protect spaces for debate, like the assembly, which are horizontal spaces within our political structure. But remember, we also have to maintain our existing organizational forms that are more structured and perhaps hierarchical. I don't think that it's enough to simply maintain the spaces of horizontality without the larger representation-based structures; rather, we're trying to reach a kind of synthesis. And I do think we have made progress in terms of knowing how to complement representative democracy with spaces of direct democracy. This approach has been more or less effective in terms of the attitude it generates within the movement, and it has also been effective in terms of how we approach leadership, maintaining bases, and avoiding a dissipation of political energy.

I think it's important to remember that *horizontalidad* (in and of itself) often struggles to bring about the kinds of united actions that voting at each step of the way can achieve. But we could also see this unity of action coupled with voting each of step and horizontal debate, as a kind of synthesis that eventually produces something like horizontal democracy.

**NOAM TITLEMAN:** Yeah, I think that *horizontalidad* is a two-way street. And you have to remember that it's a means to an end and not an end itself. Why do I say this? Well, first let me say that I think the Chilean movement does place a special emphasis on its decision-making processes and does truly want to involve everyone in these processes. But one of the reasons that the movement has been able to build such strength has been its ability to concentrate its collective force in an organized fashion. That is, not just leaving decisions to the sort of ritualistic or experiential feeling of being in one place with a lot of people and discussing things, but actually putting them into action. And this obviously requires a high degree of organization. I think there is a danger in that by criticizing institutions, we end up criticizing organization and that's really a big mistake. I think that *horizontalidad* allows us to make sure that the decisions are made by everyone, but in the execution of those decisions we need to have some sort of organization, otherwise we are doomed to be in a beautiful, noble, and naïve movement but not a not very efficient one.

**ZG:** Does the actual concept of *horizontalidad* come up in the discourse, or at your meetings, or in the ideas of student leaders in the union?

**NT:** Well, I think we had a different concept—similar but different—it's called "*los bases*." *Los bases* literally means "the bases," the foundations, or the "grassroots." The idea is that it's the bases that have to make the important decisions. So, for example, every time the government came up with some proposition or offer, we'd tell them that it would take us some time to answer because we would have to take their proposition back to our bases and discuss it. The form that this took was rather elaborate. You see we have the CONFECH, which, instead of having a single president, is run by a sort of "roundtable" composed of about ten presidents of different federations and around which everyone is supposed to be equal. Those ten presidents are, for example, the representatives that would go to a meeting with the government and when the government puts forward a proposition it would be these ten that would have to take the proposition back to the rest of the student federations, which in total could be about forty federations. Those student federations would then take the proposition to the student centers in their respective universities—and usually there are student centers for every department. Those student centers would then bring the proposition to their principle decision-making body, for example a general assembly, where any student can go and vote.

Another way to put it is that each department has its own student center and its assembly, which makes decisions. At the next level, the directorate of each of the student centers (e.g. the president, vice-president, general secretary, etc.)

come together in a larger assembly in which they are meant to represent the will of and execute the decisions made by the smaller department-level assemblies. The decisions then made at this level are taken to the Confederation which is where all of the federations come together and make a decision. Finally, this confederation elects certain federations (these are the 10 presidents I was talking about) as an executive group (that is, as the executors of the will of the whole confederation). So, you see, once a decision is made at the bottom level, it is taken all the way back up to this round table at the CONFECOH which would be responsible for executing the decision. But of course there were other times when the round table had to make quick decisions and that was also very important—well, not the most fundamental decisions, but some decisions.

Anyways, I think we learned a lot. Of course, we have a lot of past experience with social movements—this isn't the first time that we've had a massive rally or strikes or things like that. But on the operational level I think we've learned how to be more efficient and how to achieve what we want to do, while at the same time, not letting the most visible faces of the movement overshadow the importance of the bases, which are our foundation.

**ZG:** I'd like to ask a question about how the Chilean movement has politicized the student body. In some ways I think that the situation here in the United States shares important similarities with situation in Chile, in that the general privatization of education has been taking place for so many years in both places and the idea that education is a commodity is already seemingly deeply embedded within our cultural common sense. I'm wondering how it was that you were able to counteract this idea of education-as-commodity and build within the student body a more radical conception of what education is or could be.

**NT:** That's a very good question. I mean we could begin by asking: how can a student strike affect anything other than the students themselves? It's not like a workers' strike where it's obvious that the owner of the company is going to be affected if there is a strike. I think that a student strike is a really effective way to communicate a message. And the effectiveness of the strike depends on the effectiveness of the message. I think the big struggle (and it is still a big struggle) is to change what is taken as common sense in our society. And that has to do with the control of the media. I think that the media makes it very hard to force a change in the common sense. But there are ways to overcome those things. For example, what really helped the movement become a mass movement was the creativity in the way we rallied and mobilized. Using things like flash mobs, "Thriller" skits for education and zombie rallies, massive theatrical suicides, or "die-ins" for education and so many other things that were done over the past year, like running 1,800 laps around the office of the president (representing the 1,800 million pesos it would take to fund higher education), and so on. And all of these actions contributed to communicating more or less efficiently the message, partly by using the media, and partly by directly showing that this is something that is close to the people. It's not some fringe or radical movement, it's just normal people asking for normal rights that they should have had all along.

**ZG:** How has the question of debt factored into the dynamics of the student movement?

**NT:** I think it was essential, especially at the beginning, because debt was an issue that allowed the movement to have more than just a student-oriented politics and become a movement about citizenship more broadly. It became a movement for everyday people because debt was something that everybody could relate to. People in Chile are deeply in debt, and especially in these last years—most of the economic growth has been due to the growth of debt. And here I mean debt in many other forms; because we've had such strong privatization not only of the educational system but also of the health system, of the housing system, of the old-age pension system, everyone went into debt just to survive. So when the student movement came along, people felt that the problem of debt was a problem they could relate to; it made a lot of sense to people and that's what helped turn the movement into more of a mass movement.

**ZG:** What does solidarity mean to you? How do you see our struggles as connected, and how can we as students and activists here in New York stand in solidarity with the Chilean student struggle?

**CV:** First, we have to recognize that neoliberalism, and the capitalist system in general, is global in its reach. Its effects are not simply restricted to one country but rather worldwide in its repercussions and only a few countries have managed to successfully combat the neoliberal agenda. It is a general condition that affects us all, which is to say it strips us of our basic rights, our work, our vital energies, our natural resources, and thus creates inequality and generates an accumulation of economic power in the hand of the few. So when you look at movements, it's a question of understanding both their particularity and their generality. The Chilean case is particular, but the things we are fighting against (and for) have global and general dimensions. Neoliberalism functions as a global system and for that reason we will always have a lot to fight against, not just locally, but at the global scale as well. So, in this sense solidarity is really important, but not the kind of solidarity that limits itself to producing declarations of support; rather, the solidarity which seeks to generate enduring spaces for long-term organization and collective struggle. Because if you're not getting down to the real issues, and only producing testimonials of support when mobilizations are already happening—I mean, that's all well and fine, but that kind of organizing is not going to endure in the long run.

We must also be able to formulate proposals and elaborate alternatives to what we are criticizing. If we remain at the level of indignation I don't think it will serve us very well. Which is to say that indignation is only the first step, the next step is taking action, and to take action you need to have a plan. In order to propose solutions one must be sure that these solutions are effective, or rather that they can be materialized. And in order for such solutions to materialize it's not enough just to march and demonstrate in the streets; I believe that our solutions need to be proposed and then supported by the broader social world in an organized and articulate fashion and must be expressed in spaces of power. When social



movements are political, their politics will always have to contend with existing power; if you don't wield power yourself in some way in order to realize your proposal, it will always be others who are speaking for you.

And this is something that the movement has not done yet. We've questioned the established order, put the dominant class in check, etc. But at the end of the day, if we are unable to take power we'll end up losing perspective and become disillusioned, and this is how movements disperse, disappear and perhaps after ten years reemerge. I really think that we can't afford to let this happen. And here, in terms of "international solidarity," what we have to do is say to ourselves, "listen, we have identified the problem, but now we have to be responsible for the solution and actively begin constructing alternatives for my country, and all the while we must fight for a global perspective." This means having a political impact in institutional spaces.

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## FORUM: POWER AND PREFIGURATION

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# INTRODUCTION

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The recent global wave of revolt has reinvigorated a crucial (and longstanding) question on the Left: what kind of a politics is to be pursued, here and now, if we are to build a more democratic and egalitarian society? The prevailing narrative suggests that contemporary social movements provide us with a novel answer: a kind of politics that eschews hierarchy, leadership, and perhaps even power altogether. “Prefigurative” and “leaderless,” such movements, it is argued, are playing an entirely different game than previous movements, political parties, or labor unions, and thus avoid many of the pitfalls that such challengers ultimately faced.

But is this narrative really representative of the majority of political organizing today, and of the relationship between movements, the state, and power? Are internal dynamics within contemporary movements really all “horizontal,” or do different forms of leadership and organization still exist? Is “prefigurative politics” the dominant mode of organizing against contemporary global capitalism, or are other forms of politics still flourishing? This forum is a space for counter-arguments to this prevailing story, including and beyond the recent uprisings.

The four pieces in this forum address prefigurative politics in varied ways. They are theoretical, analytical, and strategic. They cover a range of empirical cases. Their geographic scope extends from the Americas to Europe to the Middle East and North Africa.

In his piece on Occupy Wall Street, Jonathan Spector employs a Gramscian conception of the political to address not only why it is unfair to characterize Occupy as an exemplar of prefigurative politics, but also how doing so impairs our ability to accurately diagnose, and thus overcome, the movement’s shortcomings. Similarly, Chahar Tuğal’s assessment of the situation in Egypt takes up the question of leaderlessness and the inability of movements there to capitalize on successive popular mobilizations, in both 2011 and 2013, and fundamentally challenge the existing role of military, security, judiciary, and business elites. In her essay on Brazil’s Landless Workers Movement, Rebecca Triaú blurs the state-society distinction and explores the necessary question of whether, to what extent, and when it is viable for movements to engage or eschew state institutions. Thomas Hintze’s interview with Jón Ólafsson provides an overview and appraisal of the Icelandic case, discussing its form, goals, and trajectory in relation to both the themes of the discourse on prefigurative politics and Iceland’s specific political configuration.

Taken together, the contributions seek not only to complicate predominant narratives, but also to shed insights and draw lessons that can aid both scholars and those at the very forefront of collective action.

# CAN PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS REPLACE POLITICAL STRATEGY?

by  
JONATHAN  
MATTHEW  
SMUCKER

## WHAT IS POLITICS?

In this essay, I examine so-called “prefigurative politics” as it played out in Occupy Wall Street (OWS)—through Gramscian and Habermasian theoretical lenses. My analysis is informed by my experiences as an active participant in the movement.

Before delving into the question of whether the concept of *prefigurative politics* is genuinely descriptive of OWS—let alone of the broader wave of global uprisings—let us first clarify what we even mean by *politics*. The words *politics* and *political* are often thrown around casually and without precision. What does it mean for something to be political or, for that matter, apolitical? For Antonio Gramsci, whether a certain tendency is political or not ultimately comes down to its engagement with extant power relations and structures. When Gramsci calls certain tendencies *apolitico*,<sup>1</sup> his argument is not that these tendencies are not informed by or in reaction to political events or structural relationships, or that their adherents have no political opinions. He is asserting, rather, that the actions of some ostensibly political groups are not genuinely intended as political *interventions*, i.e., strategic attempts to shift relationships of power as well as the outcomes of those relationships. Here we see an important distinction: between actions (or opinions) that are informed by or in reaction to a political situation, on the one hand, and actions that are designed to be political *interventions* to reshape the world, on the other. The expression of one’s values or opinions, while informed by political realities, will not automatically amount to political intervention—even if expressed loudly and dramatically.

To be *political*, then, is not merely to hold or to express political opinions about issues, either as individuals or in groups. Rather, to be political, requires engagement with the terrain of power, with an orientation toward the broader society and its structures. With such a political understanding, Gramsci saw the essential task of aspiring political challengers was “the formation of a national-popular collective will, of which the modern Prince is at one and the same time the organizer and the active, operative expression.”<sup>2</sup> With the term “modern Prince” Gramsci was referring to a revolutionary party that must operate as both the unifying *symbol* and the agent of an articulated collective will, i.e., an emerging alternative hegemony that brings disparate groups into alignment.

How does Occupy Wall Street measure up to Gramsci’s political vision? OWS did not have a revolutionary party, in the sense that Gramsci elaborated. Indeed, Occupy shared many features with the anarchist movement that Gramsci

criticized.<sup>8</sup> Yet, despite this anarchism—with all of its ambivalence and hostility towards the notion of building and wielding power, leadership, and organization—OWS did, in its first few months of existence, step partially into this dual role of “operative expression” and “organiser” of a newly articulated “national popular collective will.” Indeed, OWS’s initial success in the realm of contesting popular meanings was remarkable. Practically overnight the nascent movement broke into the national news cycle and articulated a popular, albeit ambiguous, critique of economic inequality and a political system rigged to serve “the one percent.”

Moreover, OWS managed momentarily to align remnants of a long fragmented political Left in the United States, while simultaneously striking a resonant chord with far broader audiences. Its next logical political step, had it followed a Gramscian political “roadmap,” would have been to build and consolidate its organizational capacity by (1) constructing a capable and disciplined organizational apparatus, and (2) activating the above mentioned latent and fragmented organizations and social bases into an alternative hegemonic alignment capable of shifting political outcomes (i.e., winning).

Occupy, however, was deeply ambivalent about even attempting such operations. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that a tendency within OWS did make such attempts, and even enjoyed notable successes, however localized or limited these may have been. Broadly speaking, and certainly oversimplifying for the sake of clarity, there were two main overarching tendencies within the core of OWS. One tendency leaned toward strategic politics and the other toward prefigurative politics.<sup>9</sup> To follow a Gramscian roadmap, the former tendency would have had to build a mandate within the movement for strategic political intervention, to a greater extent than it did. As for the prefigurative politics tendency, Gramsci would likely not have considered much of its “politics” to be politics at all. This latter tendency viewed decision making processes and the physical occupation of public space as manifestations of a better future now (i.e., prefiguration), rather than as tactics within a larger strategy of political contestation. The prefigurative politics tendency confused process, tactics, and self expression with political content and was often ambivalent about strategic questions, like whether Wall Street was the named target or most anything else in its place.<sup>10</sup> It celebrated “the act for the act’s sake”, struggle for the sake of struggle, etc.<sup>11</sup>; Gramsci may well have called it “apoliticism.”

Among other related phenomena that Gramsci criticized, Occupy’s prefigurative politics tendency resembled his descriptions of voluntarism, marginalism, and especially utopianism. “The attribute ‘utopian’ does not apply to political will in general,” he argued, “but to specific wills which are incapable of relating means to end, and hence are not even wills, but idle whims, dreams, longings, etc.”<sup>12</sup> Gramsci’s elaboration of utopianism goes further than the popular notion of rosy eyed visions of how the world could one day be. He dismisses utopianists not for the content of their vision of the future, but for their lack of a plan for how to move from Point A to Point B, from present reality to realized vision. In other words, dreaming about how the world might possibly someday be is not the same as political struggle—even when the dreams are punctuated with dramatic “prefigurative” public spectacles.

## LIFEWORLD

I want to suggest that in the “prefigurative politics” on display at Zuccotti Park, Gramsci’s negative concept of utopianism interacted with Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the *lifeworld*—specifically the latter theorist’s discussion of subcultural tendencies oriented towards the revitalization of the *lifeworld*. Again, prefigurative politics purports to be about modeling or prefiguring visions of utopian futures here and now. Indeed, such prefigurative spectacles did seem to create a palpable feeling of utopianism at Zuccotti Park. *Utopianism as a feeling* is hardly about the future; rather, it is felt here and now. During my time as an active participant and organizer at Zuccotti Park, I began to wonder if the heightened sense of an integrated identity was “the utopia” that many of my fellow participants were seeking. What if the thing we were missing, the thing we were lacking—the thing we longed for most—was a sense of an integrated existence in a cohesive community, i.e., an intact *lifeworld*? What if this longing was so potent that it could eclipse the drive to affect larger political outcomes?

Habermas argues that under a system of advanced capitalism and bureaucracy, both bureaucratic and capitalist logics have penetrated and colonized the *lifeworld*, encroaching upon, and even annihilating, the realm of traditional and organic social practice and organization. In such contexts, social movements have dramatically shifted in their political contents, forms, demographics, and the motivations of their participants. Social movement participants in advanced capitalist nations may be more likely to emphasize fine distinctions between their own groups and the broader society than they are to look for commonalities. That is, they are more likely to marginally differentiate themselves and their groups as a means of finding and deepening a sense of solidarity and belonging that they feel themselves lacking. Habermas writes:

*For this reason, ascriptive characteristics such as gender, age, skin color, neighborhood or locality, and religious affiliation serve to build up and separate off communities, to establish subculturally protected communities supportive of the search for personal and collective identity. The revaluation of the particular, the natural, the provincial, of social spaces that are small enough to be familiar, of decentralized forms...all this is meant to foster the revitalization of possibilities for expression and communication that have been buried alive.<sup>3</sup>*

My point here is not to diminish the importance of a group’s internal life and the sense of community, meaning, and belonging experienced by participants. I would even posit that such spaces are indispensable to social movements’ ability to deepen political analysis and foster the level of solidarity and commitment that oppositional struggle requires. The problem here is a matter of imbalance: when a group’s internal life becomes a more important motivator than *what the group accomplishes* as a vehicle for change. To the extent that a group becomes self-content—encapsulated in the project of constructing its particularized *lifeworld*—what motivation will participants have to strategically engage broader society and political structures? Why would group members want to claim and contest

popular meanings and symbols if the group's individuated lifeworld can be further cultivated by an explicit rejection of such contests? If participants are motivated by hope of psychic completion by community and a strong sense of belonging and such motivation is insufficiently grounded in instrumental political goals, their energies will likely go into deepening group identity over bolstering the group's external political achievements. The problem is that the group's particularized lifeworld can be strengthened without it ever having to actually win anything in the real world. Indeed, this may help to explain why some ostensibly political groups have been able to maintain a committed core of participants for decades without ever achieving a single measurable political goal.

In short, the various forms of apoliticism described by Gramsci are encouraged by the extraordinary motivational shift described by Habermas. The latter theorist discusses two factors that combine to encourage this motivational shift: (1) the drive to construct a refuge from the pervasive logics of capitalism and bureaucracy, i.e., an intact lifeworld, and (2) the backdrop of an expanded middle class whose members can take for granted a certain level of material sustenance and comfort, so that individuals are freed up to expand their political concerns beyond basic material needs, thereby diminishing the imperative to articulate common class interests or build effective vehicles for their advancement. In Habermas' words, "The lifeworld, more or less relieved of tasks of material reproduction, can in turn become more differentiated in its symbolic structures and can set free the inner logic of development of cultural modernity."<sup>11</sup>

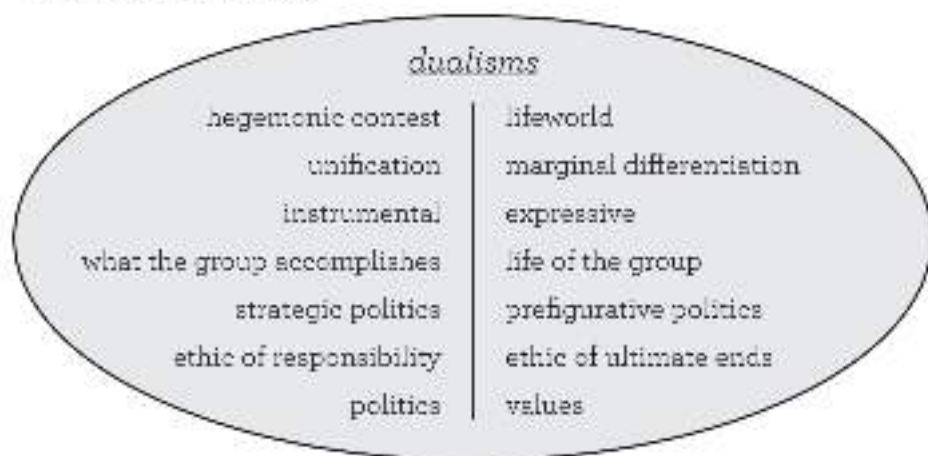
Political scientist Ronald Inglehart makes a similar argument, based partly on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Once our basic survival and material needs are provided for, we can then focus our attention on social networks and individual self-expression. Projecting this scheme onto generational shifts, Inglehart posits an explanation for why dramatic outbursts of a remarkably new style of collective action hit every highly industrialized society in the world simultaneously in the late 1960s.<sup>12</sup> This argument dovetails with a precient framework put forward by David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* over a decade before the social upheaval and social movements of the 1960s. Riesman argued that a new "other-directed" character structure, arising from a backdrop of material abundance, was becoming predominant in the United States. Young people who were socially molded into this character structure—in contrast to their inner-directed parents—were more concerned with the life of the group than with what the group produces.<sup>13</sup> It is not hard to see how such shifts could encourage "apoliticism," as it has been defined in this discussion: action "for the act's sake" that is effectively disinterested in political instrumentality, strategic calculus, and broader outcomes.

*What if the thing we were missing, the thing we were lacking—the thing we longed for most—was a sense of an integrated existence in a cohesive community... an intact lifeworld?*

## TWO TENDENCIES

As OWS launched, its *prefigurative politics* tendency was the most visible, as it celebrated the utopian microcosm it created in Zuccotti Park, and fixated on its own decision-making process. There was, however, another strong tendency, though often less visible, that bore a greater resemblance to a Gramscian approach to political struggle. This *strategic politics* tendency was simultaneously succeeding in injecting strategic political messages (most notably, “We are the 99%”) and aligning hitherto fragmented political actors—such as labor unions, community groups, and national organizations—behind the scenes. In the beginning of OWS, prefigurative politics and strategic politics co-existed uneasily; many core Occupy participants engaged in both kinds of tasks or oscillated between the two tendencies. Within three months, however, core members factionalized, and the tendencies became much clearer—i.e., closer to *ideal types*. Admittedly, Occupy was comprised of an impressive number of moving parts, so it is a gross simplification to try to categorize such variegated components into two overarching tendencies. Nonetheless, it is my assessment that these two tendencies each had enough coherence and adherents to be reasonably treated as *things* (even if their parameters blurred).

FIGURE 1: dualisms



I introduce the dualisms in **Figure 1** in order to shed light on underlying logics of these two tendencies in OWS. The dualisms overlay each other, but are not identical. Starting at the top, I juxtapose Gramsci's conception of a *hegemonic contest*—a strategic intervention into the realm of politics (with the aim of prevailing)—with Habermas' elaboration of the *lifeworlds*, which, in advanced capitalist nations, can function as a kind of sacred refuge from political-instrumental logics. The second dualism relates to the first: unification, a necessary operation and orientation within a hegemonic contest, is juxtaposed with the tendency toward *marginal differentiation*—i.e., emphasis on distinguishing particulars, which Habermas



argues becomes more prevalent as the middle class expands in post-scarcity societies. Following this is *instrumental/expressive*, a dualism often discussed by social movement scholars.<sup>12</sup> The term *expressive* misses something important, however, insofar as it can imply *self-expression* and individualistic motivation. Seeing this motivation as profoundly group-oriented, I prefer the next dualism, *what the group accomplishes / life of the group*.<sup>13</sup> Moving down, I situate so-called *prefigurative politics* on the right side of the dualisms, to suggest that the concept is highly related to the dualism halves above it—*lifeworld*, *marginal differentiation*, *expressive motivations*, and the *life of the group*—and is highly ambivalent or even hostile towards the opposite halves. This dualism corresponds with the next one down: Max Weber's juxtaposition of an *ethic of responsibility* versus an *ethic of ultimate ends*; *strategic politics* stems from the former, and *prefigurative politics* from the latter. The final dualism, *politics/values*, contains the two distinct levels of analysis that I argue are indispensable in apprehending collective political action; this dualism roughly encapsulates all of the above dualisms.

FIGURE 2: subjective layers of action

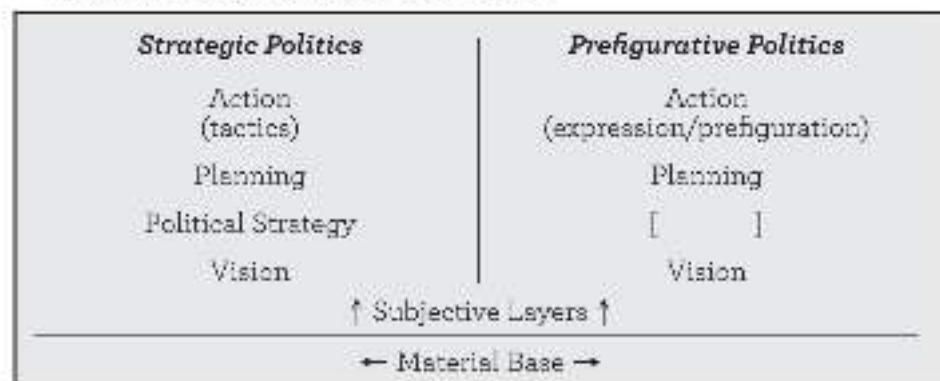


Figure 2 depicts subjective layers that precede collective action, under two models, as ideal types: *strategic politics* and *prefigurative politics*. Both models of political subjectivity are constructed upon, and shaped by the details of, a material base. The *strategic politics* model starts with a vision of the world that the collective actor desires: the ultimate goals it hopes to attain. On top of this ground is the layer of political strategy, where the actor assesses what parts of its vision might be achievable when—and how. This is where the actor assesses the terrain in which it must operate: its opponents, allies, potential allies, targets, resources, constraints, opportunities, etc. Informed by this layer, the actor engages in planning for its actions. Its actions (the top layer) then can be seen as tactics designed to move forward an underlying political strategy, which is designed to move the actor closer to realizing its vision (or to achieve measurable pieces thereof). The *prefigurative politics* model likewise starts with the layer of vision

(also atop a material base), but it skips over—and glosses over—the layer of political strategy. Instead it plans actions to directly manifest the essence of its vision. As such, its actions are not tactics—insofar as tactics are steps to move forward a strategy—but are rather direct expressions or *prefigurations* of the actor's vision. *Means and ends* are one and the same in this model.

In Figure 2, the two models can easily be confused. On the one hand, the *strategic politics* model incorporates *prefigurative* elements into its design: its tactics also reference and “prefigure” the actor's vision, as part of a strategic communication operation aimed at mobilization. But these operations are subordinate to political considerations. The famous lunch counter sit-ins in the US South during the civil rights movement are an excellent example of this kind of prefiguration of the actor's vision for the world—as a key communications component within a larger political strategy. On the other hand, the *prefigurative politics* model often uses buzzwords like “strategy” and “organizing” without ever defining them, misappropriating a political vocabulary, while mistakenly assuming that any plan of action automatically implies the existence of a strategy. In this case, the implicit “strategy” was to inspire more and more people to spontaneously join the prefigurative action, led by the hope that the revolution would come and the system would eventually collapse, by way of spontaneous mass defection.<sup>15</sup> As more and more people occupied more places, the Occupy movement would keep expanding. Such notions amounted to little more than wishful thinking.

That *prefigurative elements* can (and often should) be included within a *strategic politics model* is an important point. With Occupy, my aim is not to diminish the value of the movement's prefigurative elements, such as the People's Kitchen, the People's Library, 'mic checks', and so on. Indeed, I found many of these elements deeply inspiring; I took part in them and I celebrate them. My argument is against a theory of change that is comprised of *only* these elements, without attention to whether they fit into a larger political strategy. I am neither against manifesting our visions and values in our internal organizing processes, nor against staging actions that put these visions and values on public display; my critique, rather, is of the notion that such practices can somehow substitute for strategic engagement at the level of political power. Insofar as prefigurative elements supplement a strategic politics, I am all for it; however, in its contemporary usage, I interpret the phrase “prefigurative politics” as a claim to replace strategic politics (as defined here) altogether.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, both sides of the dualism shown in Figure 1 can be contained within the *strategic politics* ideal type shown in Figure 2, but the same is not true of the *prefigurative politics* ideal type. The former *qua* ideal type has to achieve an optimal balance between *instrumentality* and *expressiveness*—when manifested as a working model, it strives for this balance—while the latter ideal type does not have to even recognize the legitimacy of the need for such balance. Following the logic of the dimension of *values expression* in which it has emerged, *prefigurative politics* is equipped to only see the dimension of politics negatively; the *whole* dimension is labeled and shrunk down to a single negative point of reference within a particular narrated values dimension (i.e., *lifeworld*). From this vantage point, anything that is associated with power, authority, or politics proper, is considered to be a part of or imitative of a monolithic system, and must be

opposed on principle.

This is all to say that I am not convinced by the prevailing narrative about OWS having “no leaders” and amounting to a new kind of “prefigurative politics.” My argument is not only that such an approach is politically unviable, I am also suggesting that it did not actually happen, except as mythology and public performance.<sup>2</sup> It is clearly part of the story, but it could not have existed without the existence of a more politically instrumental tendency. Moreover, what I have been building up to is a conceptual framework in which to situate so-called prefigurative politics: squarely within the *life of the group*, and in contrast to the strategic politics that groups engage in to achieve ends beyond their own existence. I do not accept prefigurative politics’ account of itself. In many instances, I do not even accept that it is politics at all.

If prefigurative politics has its basis in attempts to construct a particular *lifeworld*—i.e., in expressing values and affirming the *life of the group*—and it eschews engagement and contestation in the larger common realm of power and politics, then we might ultimately view it as a project of private liberation. A private endeavor need not view itself as such in order for it to be functionally so; if the benefits of its efforts are limited to its own participants, it is functionally private. To be clear, my intention here is not to diminish the value or meaningfulness of these internal benefits to group participants, but, rather, to argue for balancing this with a broader political orientation. All of this points to the need—perhaps greater than ever before in history—to intentionally ground our projects of liberation in concrete political goals and accompanying political strategies. We have to acknowledge and be strategic about “what’s in it for us,” in terms of our sense of identity, community, and wholeness (i.e., the *life of the group*). We have to navigate and find a balance between the expressive and the instrumental aspects of collective action; between within-group bonding and beyond-group bridging; between the *life of the group* and what the group accomplishes aside from its own existence. Because, frankly, we (i.e., social movement participants in advanced capitalist nations) have material circumstances and a disposition that incline us towards self-involvement to the point of insularity.

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<sup>1</sup> Gramsci, Antonio. 1991. *Prison Notebooks*. Pp. 147. Ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 153.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 149.

<sup>4</sup> Wini Breines introduces this juxtaposition of strategic politics and prefigurative politics in her scholarship on the New Left. (1982. *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal*. New York: Praeger.)

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, consider the bizarre attempt to occupy land owned by Trinity Church on December 17, 2011, a what may have been the most epic single moment of Occupy's unraveling.

<sup>6</sup> Gramsci, Antonio. 1991. *Prison Notebooks*. Pp. 147. Ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 175.

<sup>8</sup> Habermas, Jürgen. 1984. *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume II*. Pp. 355. Boston: Beacon Press.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 385.

<sup>10</sup> Inglehart, Ronald. 1977. *The Silent Revolution*. Vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Riesman, David. 1950. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Polletta, Francesca, and James M. Jasper. 2001. "Collective Identity and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27:283-305.

<sup>13</sup> Riesman, David. 1950. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Pp. 120-128. Eds. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Richard J. F. Day sees such defection unfolding over a longer period of time; a process that he sympathetically describes as "the exodus from the neoliberal order" (2006. *Gramsci Is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*. Pp. 215. Ann Arbor: MI: Pluto Press.)

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps some advocates conceptualize prefigurative politics in a less totalizing way than I have defined it here; my critique may not apply to their conceptions. Yet, this is not my own novel interpretation of the phrase; many of prefigurative politics' most vocal and theoretically developed contemporary proponents would not disagree with my claim that it aims to replace strategic politics (especially if the latter is defined in terms of hegemonic contestation).

<sup>17</sup> Smucker, Jonathan M. 2013. "OCCUPY: A Name Fixed to a Flashpoint." *The Sociological Quarterly* 54(2):219-225.

# END OF THE LEADERLESS REVOLUTION

by CIHAN TUĞAL

In June 2013, millions of Egyptians mobilized against a clumsy autocrat, the elected dictator Morsi. The rallying cry was “a second revolution,” referring back to the toppling of Mubarak as the first one. However, the revolution—neither the first, nor the second—ever arrived. And it is dubious that a revolution can ever take place in the absence of a leadership. In fact, the leaderless revolution bore its bitter fruits as soon as July.

The June mobilization ultimately led to a military-judiciary seizure of power, with the support of centrist politicians and clerics. Call this what you like: coup d'état, elegant coup, or people's power (these were the labels in circulation in the second half of 2013). None of these labels change the nature of the intervention<sup>1</sup> and its aftermath: popularly supported military rule, by more or less the same military-police-judicial-business elements who were in power during Mubarak's reign and who had struck a (shaky and incomplete) coalition deal with Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood (MB).

The Tunisian and Egyptian revolts of recent years sparked the imagination of many activists around the globe as “leaderless revolutions.” Yet, the strange amalgam of revolution, restoration, coup, democratization, and authoritarianism that persisted throughout the Egyptian process hints that different lessons need to be drawn from the Egyptian situation.

## FROM A PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN TO THE REASSERTION OF ELITE RULE

Tamard, an unprecedented people's campaign, collected millions of signatures and called for the downfall of president Morsi. Huge crowds gathered all around Egypt on June 30, 2013 in order to enforce the campaign's call. Millions of people took to the streets, making this presumably the biggest rebellion in Egyptian history.

Ironically, the main sentiment among the protesters was pro-military. There were even groups that openly called for a military intervention.<sup>2</sup> Among the protesters were not only pro-Mubarak civilians, but also thugs and Mubarak era security personnel who came to the square in their uniforms. Actually, during the month of June, it had become increasingly clear that the military intended to use the rebellion as an opportunity to intervene and moreover some politicians, who had previously made fierce statements against military rule, now welcomed the possibility in roundabout ways.

There were also other hegemonic forces bent on capitalizing on the process and reinforcing their domination. For instance, Gulf intellectuals rejoiced in the troubles of the Brotherhood. They wanted a real Erdoğan as Egypt's leader, not a “Taiwanese” version; they embraced the Turkish conservative leader as

an alleged model of development and democracy, while mocking the Egyptian conservative autocrat as a bad imitation (of the original, and back then US-endorsed, commodity).<sup>4</sup> They chose to ignore that their criticisms of Morsi (power-grabbing, ultra-centralization, authoritarianism, etc.) applied equally to their favorite Muslim leader. Regional hegemons thus suggested that the only way out of the Egyptian crisis could be another established path—rather than a truly revolutionary one.

There were calls for a general strike during the protests of June 30, alongside the louder calls for military involvement. In fact, the national situation that set the scene for Tamarod had a class dimension, though this was not articulated firmly as a part of its platform.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, some groups in Tahrir such as April 6, Strong Egypt Party, and Revolutionary Socialists openly protested against the military, not just the Brotherhood.<sup>6</sup>

None of this, however, culminated in a roadmap that delineated the way out of the Brotherhood-military coalition (leaving the military and its new allies as the only actors capable of dictating the famous roadmap).

The uprising's immediate result was the resignation of six ministers.<sup>7</sup> Had a revolutionary political will crystallized in Egypt during the last two and a half years, it could have capitalized on this opening and declared an early victory; that is, it would have intervened before the Kornilovs of Egypt transformed it into their own victory.

When the military intervened, the few anti-coup speeches and slogans were drowned by the overall pro-military atmosphere in Tahrir. The unfounded optimism that anti-militarist forces would remain in the square until the military left<sup>8</sup> did not change the main dynamics. Nobody mobilized Tahrir to fight their erstwhile torturers. Millions came back only in order to prevent the square from the Brotherhood.

Ultimately, July 2013 witnessed not only the removal of an unpopular president, but the making of a full-fledged dictatorial regime: A hasty crackdown rounded up hundreds of MB and non-MB Islamists. Many television channels were closed down. And most important of all, the military appointed an old regime judiciary figure to replace the president. The massacres that followed were the necessary ingredients that accompanied any military takeover.

## MISINTERPRETATIONS

Most of the initial responses to the military intervention missed the crucial point: Under the Brotherhood-military coalition, Egypt was quickly moving from popularly supported authoritarian rule to popularly supported totalitarian rule. Tahrir activists had the radicalism and the will to slow down this transformation, but did not have the tools to stop it without the military's pernicious "aid." Procedure-focused liberal critics of the military intervention completely ignored that under certain conditions, an elected president can help build a totalitarian regime that will render all future elections simple plebiscites. The street needed to act to defend the Egyptian revolution and perhaps even to recall the president. Liberal accounts, with their pronounced fear of the mob,<sup>9</sup> ruled out not only such risky moves, but all other forms of participatory democracy.

Just as dangerous were the (perhaps well-intentioned) accounts that listed the abuses of the Brotherhood-military regime, but stopped short of discussing the calamities a non-Brotherhood military regime could produce. Those who called the military coup a “second revolution” quickly pointed out all the autocratic moves of the Muslim Brotherhood regime.<sup>25</sup> But they did not explain in what sense the regime that would replace it had the potential of becoming a democracy. (A broader circle of pro-Tamarad intellectuals focused on the illegitimate moves of the toppled president, without going into whether and how these legitimized the moves of the military and judiciary after he was deposed.)

The assertion, frequently seen in both English and Arabic,<sup>26</sup> that “all the factors that render January 25 a revolution also legitimize calling June 30 the second revolution” ignored one historic fact (along many others): 2013 was not 2011. Over the course of two years, the social and political possibilities dramatically shifted. During these two years, the priority could have been organizing popular power, alternative institutions, and revolutionary leadership in order to prevent (or at least slow down) the increasing authoritarianism of elected powerholders, rather than toppling them to open the way for the old enemies of the revolution.

In July 2013, some commentators still insisted that neither the military nor the National Salvation Front (the coalition of anti-Brotherhood centrist politicians) represented the masses in Tahrir, whose real demand was democracy and early elections. This disclaimer on behalf of the apparently pro-military millions does not alter one of the rules of thumb of politics: Those who cannot represent themselves will be represented.

## THE FRUITS OF THE IDEOLOGY-LESS “REVOLUTION”

**T**his old statement regarding the French peasantry warns us against the idealization of non-organized masses, a romanticization now in high fashion. Multiple anti-representation theses from rival ideological corners (anarchist, liberal, autonomist, postmodernist, etc.) all boil down to the following assumption: when there is no meta-discourse and no leadership, plurality will win. This might be true in the short-run. Indeed, in the case of Egypt, the anonymity of Tamarad’s spokespersons initially helped:<sup>27</sup> the spokespersons (who are not leaders, it is held) could not be vilified, demonized as partisan populists. Moreover, thanks to uniting people only through its negative identity (being anti-Brotherhood), as well as to its innovative tactics, Tamarad mobilized people of all kinds. Still, the mobilized people fell prey to the only existing option: the old regime!

When the revolutionaries do not produce ideology, demands, and leaders, this does not mean that the revolt will have no ideology, demands, and leaders. In fact, Tamarad’s spontaneous ideology turned out to be militarist nationalism, its demand a post-modern coup, its leader the *faïouf* (remnants of the old regime). This is the danger that awaits any allegedly leaderless<sup>28</sup> revolt: appropriation by the main institutional alternatives of the institutions they are fighting against.

It is time to globalize the lessons from the global wave of 2009-2013. Let’s start with the U.S. and Egypt. What we learn from this case is that when movements don’t have (or claim not to have) ideologies, agendas, demands, and leaders, they can go in two directions: they can dissipate (as did the American Occupy), or

serve the agendas of others.

We are living in interesting times. Unlike the depressing three decades that stretched from 1980 to 2010, “the people want the system to fall,” as the Arab slogan goes. And the system is very likely to fall, not just in Egypt but in many other places throughout the world. If we keep in mind how reactionary and reform-averse the current leaders and elites—all the way from the White House to the colonies—are, they simply do not want, or are incapable of imagining, New Deal-type frameworks, which could in fact absorb the revolt.

Yet, it is not sufficient for the system to fall. What will replace it? We have been avoiding an answer—for meta-narratives are allegedly dead; well, all meta-narratives but liberalism. We now have to wake up and realize that if we do not develop solid alternatives (and organizations and institutions that will implement them), the downfall of the system will not mean the making of a better world.

### LEADERFUL REVOLUTIONS

What happened since July 2013? The Egyptian military perpetrated its pro-American and pro-Israel foreign policy, its time-tested authoritarianism, and (albeit more timidly) Mubarak and Morsi’s neoliberalism. Many sectors of the left already expect nothing from the military; they need no conversion on this issue. But just like the Muslim Brotherhood quickly alienated millions of people in one year of rule, the “new” military regime (which has refurbished itself through appropriating a revolutionary uprising) is already showing its real face to those who have supported the coup with naively democratic expectations. The democratically backed authoritarian “new” regime the military has been constructing could very well pave the road for a third revolutionary uprising. The Left (including not only socialists, anarchists, communists and feminists, but also the left-liberals and left-wing Islamists) needs to use the intervening time to organize the inescapable dissatisfaction with military rule. It has to construct solid alternatives to military democracy and conservative-totalitarian democracy. Based on its experiences throughout the last three years, it should build the leadership, the institutions, and organs of popular power that can implement its alternative vision. In short, this time around, the Left needs to be ready.

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The end of the leaderless revolution does not mean the end of the Egyptian revolutionary process. But it spells the end of the fallacy that “people’s power” can result from a scene without an agenda, an alternative platform, an ideology, and leaders. The leaderless revolution has turned out to be the wrong substitute for the status quo and revolutions that end up in a cult of the leader. Centralized leadership, we know, robs people of their power. Yet leaderless revolt quickly dissipates or loses its direction; disorganization runs rampant and is even reproduced by activists through a cult of leaderlessness. What we need is leaderful rather than leaderless revolutions.

Activists need to build flexible and democratic leadership structures. A new form of leadership for a sustainable post-neoliberal transformation will require an ability to learn from the grassroots, a willingness to interact with popular energy, institutionalized checks and balances, and constant immersion in alternative



institutions and co-education. The global revolutionary wave of 1905 had put its stamp on history through the consolidation of a new organizational form—the centralized revolutionary party—which is now “history” with its successes, failures, and sins (which provide treasures to learn from, rather than a model to adapt or reject). We may look back at the global wave of uprising that kicked off circa 2009 as helping to bring about a new (more democratic, yet still efficient) form of revolutionary organization. The nuclei of such a new form might already be under construction. Efforts to build—or uncover and further develop—the 21st Century model of leadership will nourish the revolution much more profoundly than romantic illusions about leaderlessness.

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<sup>1</sup>A version of this article first appeared at Counterpunch.org

<sup>2</sup>For an early and lucid diagnosis, see Amra al-Shalqaqi, “An al-Khaliyya al-Shabiyya li al-Inqilab al-Azqiyya,” <http://www.shorouknews.com>, July 6, 2013.

<sup>3</sup>“Army is the only answer, say MCD protesters,” [www.madarnas.com](http://www.madarnas.com), Sunday, June 30, 2013.

<sup>4</sup>“Morsi Erdogan Muqallid,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 2, 2013.

<sup>5</sup>The first half of 2013 had witnessed countless strikes and now worker-led, now multi-class civil disobedience. The reasons why this activity could not be transformed into a political platform will be analyzed elsewhere, though this too was partially related to the lack of nationwide leadership.

<sup>6</sup>“Anti-military revolutionaries take part in protests,” <http://www.madarnas.com>, July 2, 2013.

<sup>7</sup>“Mohamed Morsi clings to office in Egypt,” <http://www.theguardian.com>, July 2, 2013.

<sup>8</sup>Beent Abou-El-Fadl, “Three Days of History: Making It and Waiting For It,” <http://www.jadaliyya.com>, July 3, 2013.

<sup>9</sup>Noah Feldman, “Democracy Loses in Egypt and Beyond,” <http://www.bloombergview.com>, July 3, 2013.

<sup>10</sup>Hani Shakrallah, “Egypt’s second revolution: Questions of legitimacy,” <http://english.ahrn.org.sg>, Jul 4, 2013.

<sup>11</sup>Khaled Jahrai, “al-Shariyya wa al-Ishwara,” <http://www.shorouknews.com/>, Jul 5, 2013.

<sup>12</sup>Ahmed al-Sawi, “Thawrotan wa Inqilaban,” <http://www.shorouknews.com>, Jul 5, 2013.

<sup>13</sup>Adel Iskandar, “Tanzarot: Egypt’s Revolution Hones its Skills,” <http://www.jadaliyya.com>, June 30, 2013.

<sup>14</sup>It is questionable that the Egyptian revolts of 2011-2013 were really leaderless. E.g. see the discussion in Cihan Tugal, “Egypt’s Emergent: Passive Revolution,” <http://www.jadaliyya.com>, June 29, 2012.

# THIRTY YEARS OF LANDLESS WORKERS DEMANDING STATE POWER

by  
REBECCA  
TARLAU

In February of 2014, fifteen thousand peasant-activists from across Brazil came together for the Sixth National Congress of the Landless Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, or MST). The MST is one of the largest agrarian reform movements in Latin America. Over the past 30 years, through occupations of privately and publically owned landed estates, the MST has succeeded in forcing the government to redistribute land rights to approximately 150,000 previously landless families.<sup>1</sup> Currently, tens of thousands of families are still occupying land across the country, waiting for their claim to this land to be officially sanctioned.

Beyond visioning and strategizing, one of the main objectives of the MST's Sixth National Congress was to show the movement's force and strength to the Brazilian government. This objective became clearest on the third day of the congress, when 15,000 conference attendees marched several miles to the presidential palace. At the palace, a group of MST activists tried to push past a police barricade and enter the building, and were only stopped from doing so by tear gas and clubs. Another group of activists tried to set up a memorial of crosses for all of the landless peasants who have died in the struggle for agrarian reform. The police also prevented these actions, angering several activists who reacted by throwing the crosses at the police. This led to an escalation in police force, with more tear gas shot into the crowd and people breaking out running and screaming. A group of MST leaders tried to de-escalate the situation by leading everyone away from the police line and the presidential palace. Immediately following this confrontation, President Dilma Rousseff of the left-leaning Workers' Party (PT) agreed to meet with several MST leaders about their demands.

## MOVING BEYOND THE "AUTONOMY VERSUS COOPTATION" DEBATE

What is the significance of these confrontations between MST activists and the PT government, given the MST's close relationship to this political party over the past thirty years? Are these protests and confrontations solely public performances? What are the implications of the MST's relationship to the government, given the government's current support for large agribusiness?

These questions about power and politics are of utmost importance. A common narrative about social movements is that once activists engage the state and attempt to take state power, they become co-opted and move into a period of demobilization and decline. This idea can be traced back to Michels's iron rule of oligarchy, and his argument that political parties become more bureaucratic

and hierarchical over time, thus suppressing grassroots mobilization. Piven and Cloward<sup>3</sup> took up this idea five decades later, arguing that once movements become formalized, adopt hierarchies, and begin working within the state, contentious action is difficult to organize.

In a more recent expression of this position, Lowenkron<sup>4</sup> argues that the MST's relationship to the state has effectively turned it into an NGO: "It [the MST] seeks to influence state agencies from the inside, while building an international network of NGO and agency support. In effect the MST has begun to conform to the image of a developmental NGO." This argument directly supports the position that once social movements become entangled and embedded within the state, they lose their nature as grassroots, mass-based, and contentious organizations.

The goal of this article is not to dismiss this position, as aspects of the argument resonate with the everyday reality of MST-state relations in Brazil.<sup>5</sup> The MST's relationship to the state is extremely complicated, and at times it can clearly serve to demobilize the movement. However, despite these risks, the MST is not afraid of taking power; rather, activists have been attempting to do so for more than thirty years. In direct contrast to the Zapatistas in Mexico, MST activists are making demands on the state as citizens of the Brazilian polity. Nonetheless, this goal—to take power and demand concessions wherever and whenever possible—has led to a huge predicament: while MST activists strive for structural transformations, such as the end to large-scale industrial agricultural production, the movement's current relationship to the PT directly contradicts this goal by stabilizing a hegemonic bloc that includes large agribusiness.

From a Gramscian perspective these contradictions are, of course, an inherent part of state-society dynamics: resistance movements are part and parcel of the hegemonic terrain, simultaneously protecting the state from a frontal attack while also representing the "trenches" in which contestation must be organized.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, social movements—regardless of their relationship to the government—are never fully autonomous from the state. In this article, rather than framing the state-society debate as "power is bad" versus "autonomy is good," I clarify how the MST developed its complicated relationship to the Brazilian state. I also discuss the nature of the MST as a movement with a large social base, and I argue that—despite the contradictions—the MST has consciously chosen to entangle itself with power as a response to the needs of these families. This has had real repercussions for the movement, including several internal divides. Does this confirm the perils of dealing with power? I argue that a more interesting question is not whether power is good or bad, but how movements engage the state, and the real tensions that challenger movements must navigate through this process.

## HISTORICIZING MST-STATE RELATIONS

The MST was born in a moment of military dictatorship, in the early 1980s, when social movements of all types and ideologies were united in calling for a return to democracy. At this time, land occupations were almost entirely funded by solidarity groups and the Catholic Church. During these early years the line between the movement and the state was thick and unquestioned. The early 1980s was also the period when both the PT and the oppositional labor

movement, Central Union of Workers, (*Central União dos Trabalhadores*, or CUT), were founded. In other words, the PT, CUT, and the MST were all born at this same historical moment, and there was a lot of overlap between participants in these different social struggles. Almost all of the founders of these three groups were connected to grassroots Catholic organizers, and especially in the MST's case, to rural Catholic groups such as the Pastoral Land Commission (*Comissão Pastoral da Terra*, or CPT). Contemporary relationships between the PT and the MST cannot be understood without analyzing this historical context, and these movements' similar ideological formations.

In the 1990s, even before the PT won power at the federal level, the MST's relationship to the state became more complex as the movement's leadership began demanding resources for its social base. Again, a key point to remember is that the MST is not the Zapatistas. MST activists are not fighting for autonomy from the Brazilian state; rather, they are fighting for the government to fulfill its responsibility to the citizens of Brazil. For the MST, these responsibilities include providing education, health care, housing, infrastructure, agricultural assistance, and other public goods to all citizens. In addition, the MST insists on participating in the provision of these goods. In other words, MST activists do not just want public schools built in their communities, they also want to train the teachers who are going to work in those schools.

Given these goals, how should we conceptualize the nature of the MST?

A national MST leader tried to answer this question for a group of international solidarity groups attending the Sixth MST Congress. He said,

*The first question to be clear on is the political nature of the MST. Some think of us as a big NGO or a labor union, and some think of us as a political party. Our political nature has a lot of these elements, but we are a social movement. And our political nature is to negotiate with the government and to demand what our social base needs: we have a responsibility to our social base...*<sup>5</sup>

In other words, although the MST does engage in some "NGO-type" activities, such as literacy campaigns and agricultural development projects, the MST is not an NGO. Similarly, although the MST fights for the rights of landless workers and sometimes campaigns for certain political candidates, the MST is also not a labor union or a political party. The MST activist continued,

*When we interact with the state and government, we are still a social movement. Why do we not break with the state or government?... The NGOs can say that they do not receive money from the state, the NGO can do this, but our movement cannot do this because we have a social base that has rights, and those rights are the responsibility of the government.<sup>6</sup>*

The MST believes it is necessary to negotiate with the government, in order to win concrete material benefits for the families participating in the movement. This process necessarily involves having a relationship with state power.

These developments have created many interesting and complex situations for the movement. For example, in the area of public education, MST activists



*MST organizers march to the presidential palace to demand agrarian reform, Feb. 2014.*

have been able to convince the Brazilian government to sanction a whole series of pedagogies that support the struggle for agrarian reform in the countryside.<sup>9</sup> On April 17, 1998, the two-year anniversary of a massacre of nineteen MST activists, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso created the National Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform (*Programa Nacional de Educação na Reforma Agrária*, or PRONERA). This program has funded hundreds of literacy classes across the country, in addition to providing access to higher education to over fourteen thousand people living in areas of agrarian reform. In August of 2012, forty seven students graduated from a PRONERA law degree program at the Federal University of Goiás; many of these graduates are now lawyers for the MST, directly contributing to the movement's internal capacity.

Sometimes, the relationship between the MST and the state becomes so complex that it is unclear whether the situation is more accurately described as the state co-opting the MST or the MST co-opting the state. For example, for over a decade in Rio Grande do Sul, the MST obtained permission from the state government to administer "Itinerant Schools" in their occupied camps. These were legally recognized public schools allowed to "move" with the "movement" of the MST camps. When the MST leadership in Rio Grande do Sul organized a march to the state capital in 2001, occupying a federal building, the Itinerant Schools in each of the MST's camps travelled with the families, setting up their classrooms within this building occupation. In this case, the boundaries between state and movement became completely blurred, as the state actually became part of the mobilization of the social movement itself.

At every level of government in Brazil, MST activists develop relationships with state officials and demand concessions for their settlements and camps. I witnessed this when I helped to lead a delegation of U.S. community organizers

to an MST settlement in the state of Goiás. During this visit, the vice mayor of the town asked to come to the home where we were staying, and in preparation our MST host listed all of the issues she wanted us to demand for her settlement. When the vice mayor arrived, we each introduced ourselves, duly noting the lack of schooling, agricultural assistance, and medical facilities in the community. At every level, MST activists see these types of interactions with political officials as opportunities to obtain concessions for the movement. However, as our host emphasized, these concessions only ever materialize when the movement also takes to the street. This is similar to the "dual strategy"<sup>18</sup> that Latin American feminist groups have engaged in for the past three decades, simultaneously working with policy actors and engaging in contentious political actions.

Although the MST's connections to the Brazilian state have always been full of contradictions, these relationships became even more complex when the PT took power at the federal level in 2003. Although the MST has an official position of autonomy from political parties, many activists have deep connections to the PT and some have even chosen to run for office through the party.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, while the MST is not affiliated with one party, before every election MST leadership bodies do "analyses of the political conjuncture," taking positions on which candidates to support. At the national level, the MST came out in support of PT candidate Luis Inácio da Silva (Lula) in 2002 and 2006. While the movement did not take an official stance in the 2010 presidential election, one of the most prominent leaders of the MST, João Pedro Stédile, actively encouraged MST activists to vote for PT candidate Dilma Rousseff.

Although there was a general assumption when President Lula first took office in 2003 that he would implement a program of agrarian reform based on expropriation, the Lula administration did not take any immediate actions concerning this issue. Furthermore, instead of breaking with the policies of the previous government, President Lula continued many of the market-based agrarian reform initiatives over his two terms in office.<sup>20</sup> During Lula's administration there was also a huge expansion of industrial soybean, corn, and sugarcane production, driven by both government programs (including the promotion of sugarcane ethanol) and an increased investment by international capital in Brazilian agriculture.

These developments have not been entirely negative for poor populations in Brazil. While agricultural exports are used as the principal source of income for the federal government to pay off external debt, the PT government has also invested this money into poverty relief programs such as *Bolsa Família*, *Bolsa Escola*, and *Luz Para Todos*. In addition, the PT has invested an unprecedented amount of money into agrarian reform settlements, through rural development programs. In other words, the GDP growth driven by the agribusiness export industry has been used to build the houses that MST families live in, the agricultural cooperatives that fund the movement, and the public schools that MST activists use to teach children about the struggle for agrarian reform.

Herein lies the contradiction: when the MST was entirely funded by outside solidarity groups, the amount of resources available to the movement was quite limited. Thus, in the 1990s, MST activists began forming closer relationships to

the Brazilian government, demanding public services and goods as members of the Brazilian polity. The movement also demanded to participate in the provision and governance of these services. Access to these resources and spaces for participatory governance increased when President Lula took office in 2003. Yet, these developments came with less expropriation of land and more investment for industrial agricultural production. Therefore, the concessions that the MST has successfully won for its social base during the PT rule have been primarily funded by an economic system that threatens the future existence of the movement.

### CONCLUSIONS: POWER, POLITICS, AND CONTESTATION

What should we make of these contradictions? Should we understand the MST's failure to achieve large-scale agrarian reform as a consequence of its relationship to the state? Or should we understand these state concessions as significant victories, despite the fact that agrarian reform might never have occurred? Even Piven and Cloward<sup>12</sup> admit that, "What was won must be judged by what was possible."

These questions are difficult, if not impossible, to answer. However, as a movement with a social base of families who have concrete needs, the leaders of the MST argue that they do not have the privilege of disengaging from public power. Not everyone within the movement has agreed with this position. In October of 2011, over a dozen activists chose to leave the MST, publishing a public letter that critiqued the movement's relationship to the government and the lack of autonomy this has produced. Interestingly, the responses from MST activists who have stayed in the movement have not been outright denials of the legitimacy of these critiques. Rather, they acknowledge that the MST's relationship to the state is complicated and may, at times, suck energy away from more contentious actions.

These activists argue that the MST has to acknowledge these contradictions while continuing to take advantage of the gaps in state power that push forward their struggle. These gaps include funding for university degree programs for MST activists, government markets for agricultural products, and loans for constructing collectively owned small-scale agribusinesses. As political scientist Deborah Yashar<sup>13</sup> writes, "We cannot assume that states are competent, purposive, coherent, and capable . . . To the contrary, we must analyze states and state projects in light of the reach of the state." In other words, the "state" is not an all-powerful entity; there are always gaps in state power that the movement can use to push forward its struggle. However, the MST always combines this political maneuvering with contentious forms of protest, illustrating to the Brazilian government that the movement's demands are backed by "soldiers"<sup>14</sup> on the ground.

The case of the MST illustrates a need to reframe the debate about power and political mobilization. Rather than asking whether or not engaging the state is the correct strategy, a more interesting task is historicizing these state-society relations, and assessing the real tensions that come with directly confronting power, and partially taking it. In the hundreds of MST settlements and camps

across the country families are “prefiguring” the world they hope to see, organizing collective housing, agricultural cooperatives, and student administered public school systems. However, the MST is neither leaderless nor dismissive of state power. With limited resources available, the state is an important actor the MST can hold accountable for providing these public goods. Through contestation, street protest, and yes, political negotiation, the MST has been able to win concrete concessions for hundreds of thousands of landless families across the country. While “leaderless” movements that lack a social base might be able to reject state power, mass based organizations such as the MST do not have this privilege.

*Rebecca Tarlau is a Visiting Professor of Educational Leadership and Societal Change at Soka University of America and a Visiting Scholar at the UC Berkeley Center for Latin American Studies.*

<sup>1</sup> Miguel Carter and Horacio Martins de Carvalho, “A Luta Na Terra: Fonte de Crescimento, Inovação E Desafio Constante Ao MST,” in *Compreendendo a Desigualdade Social: O MST E a Reforma Agrária No Brasil*, ed. Miguel Carter (São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2009), 329.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1915).

<sup>3</sup> Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, “Normalizing Collective Protest,” in *The Breaking of the American Social Compact* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 545-74.

<sup>4</sup> Joe Poveraker, “Grassroots Movements and Political Activism in Latin America: A Critical Comparison of Chile and Brazil,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35 (2003): 856.

<sup>5</sup> This article is based on seventeen months of ethnographic research with the MST between June of 2009 and December of 2012, in four Brazilian states, as well as participation in the Sixth MST National Congress in February of 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1915 - 1935*, ed. David Forgues (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 233.

<sup>7</sup> Notes from a MST leader’s presentation at a “Friends of the MST” meeting held in Guarana, São Paulo, February 16-18, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the MST’s attempt to implement these alternative pedagogies in public schools, see: (Tarlau, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Sonia Alvarez, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women’s Movements in Transition Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> If an MST activist chooses to run for a political office, even with the encouragement of the MST leadership, she or he is asked to leave the decision-making processes of the movement.

<sup>12</sup> João Márcio Mendes Pereira and Sérgio Sauer, “História E Legado Da Reforma Agrária de Mercado No Brasil,” in *Capturando a Terra: Banco Mundial, Políticas Fundiárias Neoliberais E Reforma Agrária de Mercado*, ed. Sérgio Sauer and João Márcio Mendes Pereira (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2006), 198.

<sup>13</sup> Piven and Cloward, “Normalizing Collective Protest,” xiii.

<sup>14</sup> Deborah Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Possibility of Challenge* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>15</sup> A commonly used Portuguese phrase to refer to a social base of people willing to take to the streets.



## A NEW RESPONSE TO CRISIS? JON OLAFSSON ON THE CASE OF ICELAND

Interview by THOMAS HINTZE

Few know more about democracy and governance in Iceland than Jón Ólafsson. Well before 2008's financial crisis plunged the tiny nation into upheaval (what many would later call the "outcry revolution"), Ólafsson, who is professor of philosophy at Bifrós University and a member of the Comparative Cultural Studies Department at the University of Iceland, had been studying Iceland's social justice movements and their relationship to democracy and state power. So when the Icelandic government was forced to resign as a result of popular mobilizations in the winter of 2009, Ólafsson was there, closely monitoring the transition of power, the election of the Icelandic Constitutional Assembly, and the process that led to a new constitution in 2011. His paper on the subject, "Experiment in Iceland: Crowdsourcing a Constitution?" offers the most complete critique of the Constitutional Assembly's methodology and process, recounting the movement's ultimate failure to ratify a new constitution in the Icelandic Parliament.

Ólafsson and I corresponded electronically from June 18 to June 29, 2014 to construct this interview. Our conversation revolved around questions of prefiguration and the revolution in Iceland while addressing other key matters such as the utility of mass mobilizations, the influence of performative politics, narrative constructions of the movement, and the enfranchising of radical identities in Iceland's political system.

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**THOMAS HINTZE:** To start with, let's get to the bottom of this: do you believe that it is fair to characterize the Icelandic Revolution of 2009 as "prefigurative" and/or "leaderless?"

**JÓN ÓLAFSSON:** If we go back to 2008-2009 we can see that the movements created in the wake of the financial crisis had organizers rather than leaders. They were leaderless in the sense that one cannot characterize them by any particular leader—some charismatic figure with demands or slogans. But the movements created the environment that made it possible for some new leaders to emerge. The crisis meant that the general public was receptive to much more radical ideas and demands than had been the case before. So the social movements served as a channel into politics for people who were able to go for it, as "ordinary" politicians stood by. This is why the situation was truly revolutionary. Power had evaporated from the hands of officeholders and into the streets—or that's at least how it felt. As to whether the movements were prefigurative in the usual sense of the word—I don't think so. Within the movements there were radical ideas but radical in the traditional sense: general demands for better administrative practice, transparency, more deliberative democracy, along with specific demands, such as that the government resign (which it eventually did), that the director of the Central Bank be fired (as he eventually was).

*A close and sharp look at many of the events will reveal skilled organizers behind the scenes.*

TH: Some critics have neatly folded the protests in Iceland into narratives about the cycle of uprisings that began in 2011, and therefore much of the analysis about Iceland has failed to recognize key differences.

JÓ: Right, Iceland doesn't fit in that narrative. But, you see, the thing is that the protest in

Iceland was very spontaneous: it was easy for the organizers to set up a simple structure and make it work. This consisted of public meetings every Saturday in the Parliament square where new people would give talks, three each time, or holding town meetings that were sometimes directly broadcast on national TV. Publicity was easy, participation enormous. Participants and organizers gave interpretations of their own actions afterwards. And they were happy to accept the available narratives being offered to them.

A close and sharp look at many of the events will reveal skilled organizers behind the scenes. That's the case with the series of town meetings, some of which were broadcast live on national TV. It's also the case with the meetings in front of the parliament where Höður Torfason, the musician, provided the brains and effort necessary to give them a structure and meaning. Some of those who later became MPs or were elected to the Constitutional Assembly made their first appearance at one of the meetings Höður organized every Saturday for most of the winter. But the sharp look may cause some disappointment.

TH: What do you mean by disappointment? Disappointing for whom?

JÓ: I think that Icelandic activists have been influenced in interesting ways by interpretations offered by external observers. They have in some cases used narratives offered by observers to reinterpret their own goals and motivations. But that puts an ironic twist on Icelandic democratic activism as such: The concept of crowd-sourcing was for example never mentioned in the preparatory stages of the Constitutional Council (CC). When external observers insisted that the constitutional draft was being crowd-sourced, CC members partially adopted it to describe their efforts. Thus the Icelandic movement has grown into the global narrative and to some extent refigured itself to embrace it. But outside observers tend to overlook this and conclude that the Icelandic movement either played a leading role in a global sense or was spontaneously acting in parallel ways to movements elsewhere.

TH: Judith Butler has written about the "performative politics" of recent movements, specifically the performance of dispossession. Was there a kind of performative politics at play in Iceland?

JÓ: Dispossession played an important role in the original protests and was also the element that continued to fuel discontent. This was true of dispossession in the sense that the crisis created a strong sense of betrayal by those who may have thought before the crisis that they were citizens in a democratic country, but saw

themselves after the crisis as having in fact been powerless subjects. It was also the case in a more acute and palpable sense for those who actually faced personal bankruptcy because of the mortgage loans based on foreign currency that were common in Iceland at that time and obviously became an intolerable burden for middle class people when the Icelandic króna lost most of its worth.

One of the results of this second kind of dispossession was the creation of an association of homeowners, "Defenders of Home Interests," which continued to press the government to create solutions for people who had technically become bankrupt in the crisis. The association successfully argued that the government as well as the banks assumes at least a part of the responsibility of paying the debts of homeowners.

*TH:* The movement in Iceland certainly did not fully eschew power, but in fact engaged with existing structures in an effort to shift power within the system.

*JÓ:* Right. Actually I think that after the government stepped down in January 2009 and a new left wing coalition took power, most of those who had been engaged in protest action and new movements were willing to work with the government. After all it was generally believed that a revolution had brought this new government to power, and that it would act very differently from past governments. Sadly, I think that assessment was only partially true. The perception now is that the new government failed to change policy-making and decision processes in fundamental ways. But on the whole protesters channeled their effort into established political frameworks. Discontent with the performance of the new government increased interest in new political parties rather than to more intense grassroots activity.

*TH:* What were some other strategies the movement used during the revolution? Were they what we might call "traditional" or did they mark a departure from the way movements have previously organized?

*JÓ:* This is a central question in my view. I am inclined to say that the movements did not depart in significant ways from traditional strategies. That said, one must also point out significant characteristics of the Icelandic movement which are a departure from the traditional. One is communication between very different groups. The first wave of protests brought together people who had earlier perceived themselves as opponents. Later diverse groups converged on projects such as the Constituent Assembly and various kinds of democratic innovation (e-platforms such as "Better Reykjavik" e.g.).

My feeling is that the grassroots activism which as such lasted maybe for a couple of years created a new kind of political awareness which brought new groups into politics, groups that had earlier been effectively marginalized because they could not connect to political parties or elites. The people brought into the Reykjavik City Council by Jón Gnarr, a comedian who led the Best Party and was mayor of Reykjavik 2010-2014, are a good example. Did they bring radical ideas or radicalism to this body through their sweeping victory? No, they did not. But they brought an entirely new kind of people in.

People wonder in what way these new parties differ from traditional center-left parties. I think they should not be looking at policies or ideologies to answer that question, but rather acknowledge that a stagnated political system such as the Icelandic one, has now been thoroughly infiltrated by people who have perspectives that radically differ from old style politics. This includes a disdain for the argumentative and hostile kinds of communication that people often take for granted in everyday politics.

*TH:* Once we separate the Icelandic Revolution from the uprisings of 2011, what lessons should students of social movements learn?

*JÓ:* There are really some interesting lessons about activist-establishment relations (if we can put it that way), which I think can be drawn from the Icelandic experience. Given that motivation in Iceland was mainly to reform and change political culture I think the movement can be seen by and large as a success. Now it is commonly acknowledged that the movement has made mass mobilization much more likely when political decisions are met with general discontent. Politicians therefore must be aware of a larger arsenal of extra institutional tools with which their policies can be challenged, for better or worse, whenever they are dealing with difficult and contested issues.

On the other hand the movement also showed the limitations of mass participation. The Constitutional Assembly was able to produce a complete constitution but its activist edge alienated it from establishment politicians, which to the end robbed it of the support that was needed to actually have the constitutional bill passed. The successes and failures also illustrate clearly the enormous impatience inherent in mass mobilization. The goals that were announced in 2008-2009 were simple: throw out the government, get rid of the Director of the Central Bank and the director of the financial supervisory authority. Once these demands had been met things quieted down.

*TH:* Iceland has been in the news most recently for protests against the government's decision to abandon talks to join the EU. The public outcry seemed less to do with the decision and more to do with the exclusionary process that led to the decision.

*JÓ:* It has been a very interesting experience to see protest reemerge. Sure, it was about the process, not the content. But I would like to put it into a more general context. The protest action of 2008-2009 made the public see how fast, forceful (yet peaceful) protest action can paralyze the government.

Moreover the 2008-2009 protest clearly had created a channel, one could even call it a mechanism, through which swiftly organized petitions together with meetings and enormous social media activity, simply could build up strong public resistance.

*TH:* Before the revolution, how was power distributed among Icelanders? How did that change after the overthrow of the government?

*JÓ:* The simple answer is to point out that before the crisis a group of wealthy people and their leading managers had become the real power in Iceland. This new power was not hidden. The argument was openly made that through the international financial activities of our banks and businesses the country was growing rich and powerful far beyond what anyone could expect on an island in the North-Atlantic with 330,000 inhabitants. It was therefore surprisingly easy to convince the public that serving internationalized Icelandic businesses and financial institutions should be a governmental priority—the top priority in fact. After the crisis this power structure has simply disappeared. It will not be possible in the near future for business to gain such enormous influence and to hold the government hostage. The power has shifted to politics again.

*Thomas Hirtzo is a writer, reader, photographer, and Know Your Rights trainer interested in social movements at the intersection of art, literature, and culture. He is a contributing editor at Tidal Magazine and a doctoral student at UC Davis in the English Department.*

FFM

EXACTLY JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY



# JANUS, MY CAPTIVATING DIARY

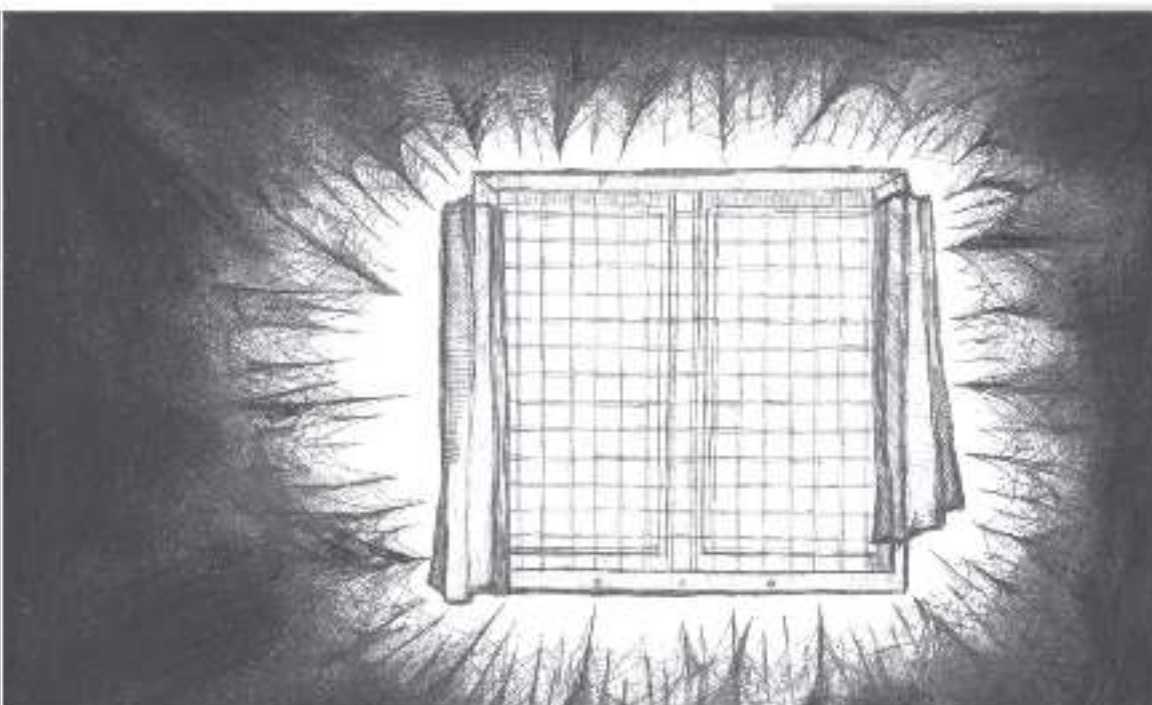
WRITTEN BY TEA TORBENFELDT BENGTTSSON  
ILLUSTRATED BY SARA BUSCH

*How do incarcerated young people experience the ultimate exclusion from society? Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in the juvenile prison system, Danish sociologist Tea Torbenfeldt Bengtsson and graphic artist Sara Busch tell a fictional story about life behind bars.*

I'm 16 and stuck in a cell. I'm never going to miss its stink and its cold walls. I'll always remember the disgusting margarine on toast and waiting for footsteps in the hall. Footsteps that may unlock my door. The only thing I'll miss is my neighbor Ibrahim.







Ibrahim's my friend. He knocks to me at night, and he helped me that first day in the yard. They called me 'Danish pig', and Ibrahim helped me. Everyone knows Ibrahim, and Ibrahim knows everyone, even the adult prisoners. He's been here lots of times and can get hold of anything. But not booze. In the beginning, it was tough not being able to drink. My bones were so cold, I thought they would break when I was sweating like a dog. It feels good to puke, but it's Ibrahim's hash that helps most.

I visit Ibrahim and Ibrahim visits me, when we're allowed. We hang out, smoke cigarettes and chat. Play checkers. I never win. Ibrahim knows everything. He lives in town. When we get out, we're going to move in together into his uncle's apartment. Then he'll teach me everything, and I'll be able to help with his business. I'm not going back in, that's for sure. Living in town with Ibrahim. It's going to be cool.

After 26 days in the cell, I was

transferred to the room with the flowing walls. It's a month until my seventeenth birthday. I didn't manage to get out. I was in the room and tried to get the walls to flow, but they decide that for themselves. It's mostly at night that they become like water, so I can see straight through them. It didn't happen on my birthday. I couldn't get out then. No one came in either. They baked a cake and gave me some deodorant as a present. I was happy anyway, unfortunately.

I'm going crazy in here. The other boys get on my nerves. I want to get out, out, out! It doesn't help. No one tells me anything. Maybe I'll be here forever. Allan's been here almost a year, but he's crazy. He stabbed his friend with a knife. That's crazy. Even if you're on drugs. You don't stab your friends. I could never stab Ibrahim, no matter what. He's my friend. My only friend. The ones back home are a bunch of idiots. I'm not going to see them anymore. But I have Ibrahim.



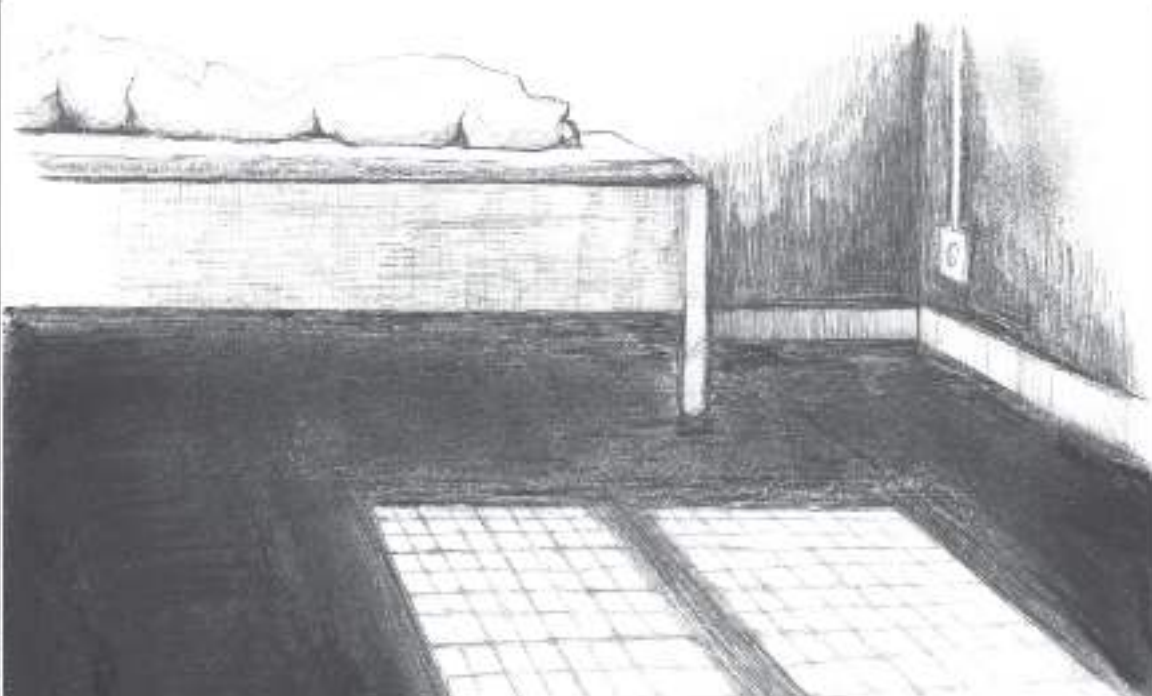
Allan thinks he decides everything here. The adults let him decide everything. Like he's something special. It makes me want to puke. Rahl, my new neighbor, got hold of some hash. It helped. It's great to have a laugh and just flip out about how dumb the social workers are. They don't know we have hash. There's a lot they don't know. Some of them are OK. Let us watch movies and stay up late. But some are just a bunch of bitches. Especially Rna. She was sweet-talking. Talk, talk, I understand you, you can talk to me, talk, talk. Fuck her. I should never have told her about the flowing walls. Big mistake.

She talked. Of course she did. Talked with all the others. They thought I should speak with some kind of psych-person. Like I'm crazy. I should never have fallen for her social work shit, but I know that now. I don't talk to anyone. I refuse to talk to anyone other than my lawyer. He says they can't force me to talk to anyone.

Rahl's OK, but not like Ibrahim.

Rahl punched Allan. Allan stuck his gross hand down into Rahl's chips. They didn't notice a thing even though Allan was crying like a pussy all day. It was a laugh. Rahl's actually OK. He's going to court soon. I hope he's not going to get released. But with that bank robbery, he's not getting out.

I went through the wall and visited mom. She was happy. She sat in the green chair by the window and smiled. I know she wants to visit me here. But she's not allowed. She's not allowed to call either, so she doesn't call. Allan's mom calls the adults all the time, and then Allan cries. Luckily, my mom never calls. She knows I can take this. I've looked after myself and her. So she knows I can take it. It was good to see her happy last night. So she's probably alone. That idiot Claus must be gone. Then I can move back home. I'll have to talk with mom about that. If only I could call her.

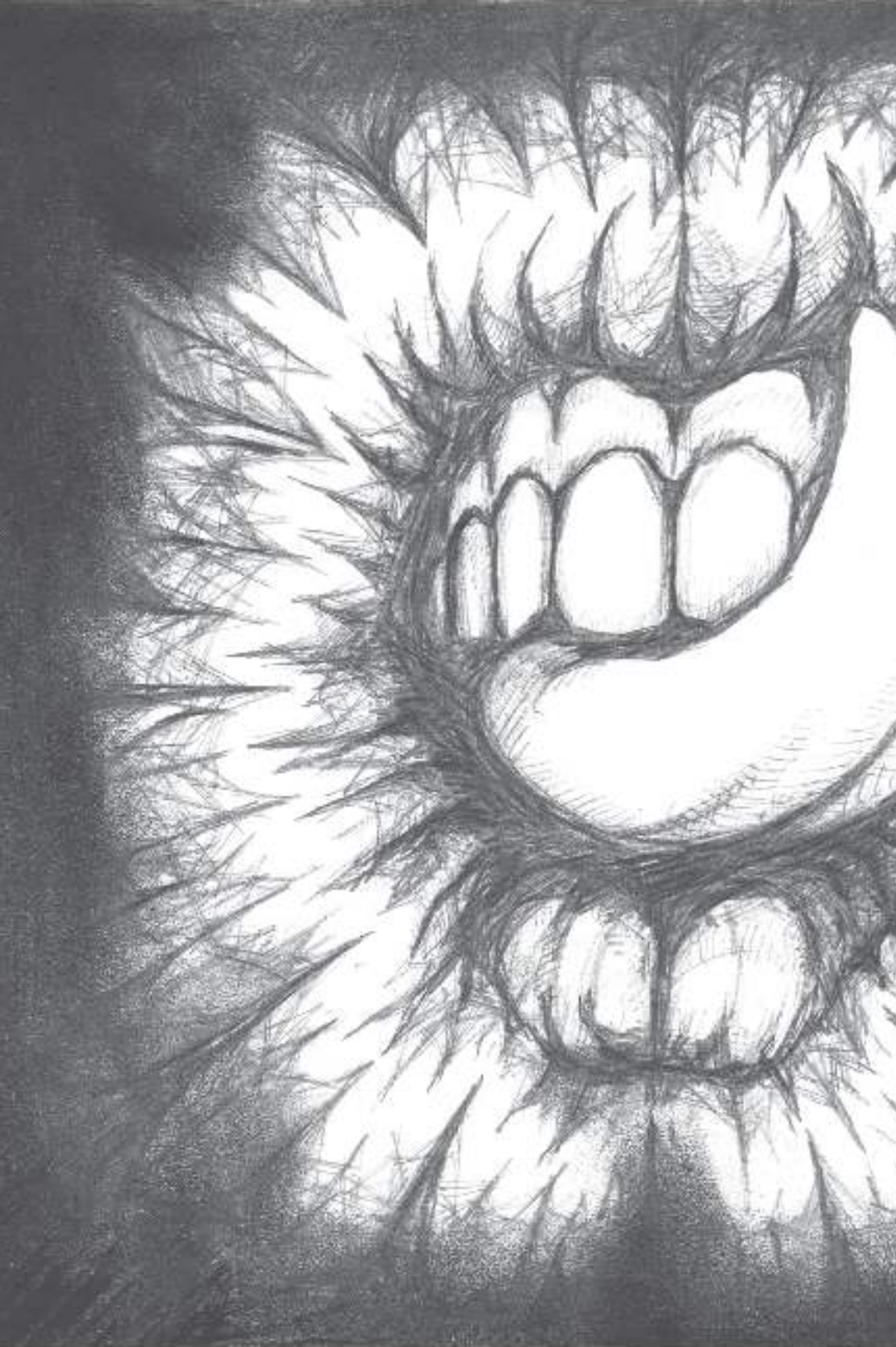



Rahil didn't get out, but he's changed. Everything's changed. Lisa came to the ward. A girl. Fantastic. I thought. She's the biggest bitch you can imagine. Of course, Rahil's crazy about her. Does everything she says. He thinks he'll get to fuck her. That won't happen. I know girls like Lisa. They're not girls. They toy with boys' minds. Can get them to do anything. But not me. I see through her.

In the beginning, she reminded me of Mikael's little sister. Same cock-sucking mouth. So I got a hard on. Mikael's little sister gave the best blow job. I wanted to fuck her for real, but Mikael just flipped out on me. He went at me with a baseball bat from the club. I screamed that she wanted it, but Mikael just kept hitting. When I ran, he threw the bat after me. I got eight stitches on the head. We're not really friends anymore. She fucking wanted it. She came into Mikael's room while Mikael was doing something with his dad. Said she had something she would show me for 100 kroner. I said she should get lost. Afterwards she started crying, so she got a Coice and half a bag of chips.

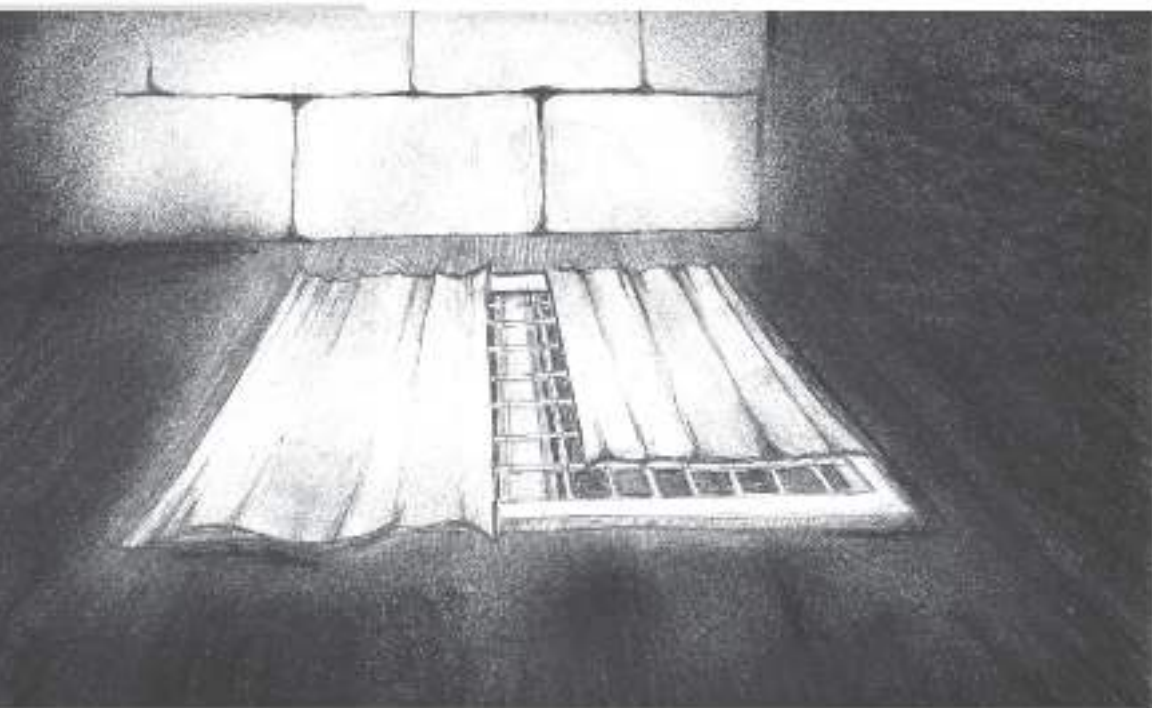
Rahil and Lisa are always laughing. It gives me a headache. And Allan, that little shit, just sits there and laughs along. Everything's just so fucking funny. They bake cakes. So fucking fun. Makes me want to puke. I hope they get rid of her soon. I tried telling that social worker cunt Rina. She smiled and said we all needed to be here and make the most of it. I'm going to poison her or something.

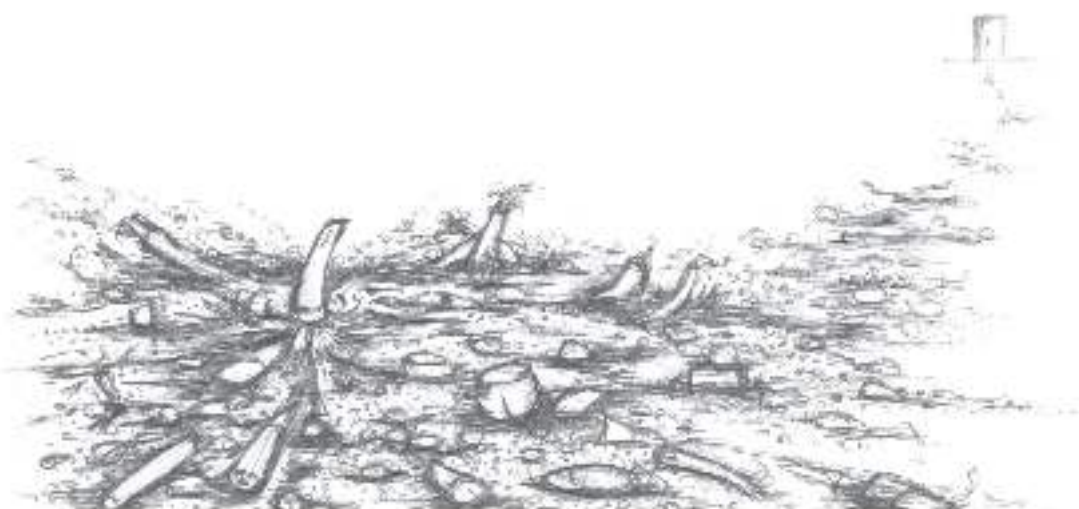
They haven't heard from my mom yet. Rina wants to call her. I say she should get lost. Mom shouldn't talk with a bitch like that. I've seen her and know she's doing well. But it wouldn't hurt if she called. Especially now that Claus has moved out. Or maybe he's dead. Hope he's dead. Some of his gross friends from the bar probably knifed him. Thinking of it makes me smile. I could knife him. Stab him again and again. Then get rid of him. That's what I should've done. Then I could've been here for murder. Wouldn't the others be scared then? I should've done it that time mom went to the hospital. At night, while he slept on the sofa. It would've been so easy. A big knife across the throat. Done.





I screamed at Lisa. I came on her face, and I kissed her red lips. I can't stand it. The walls don't let me come out anymore. I just lie on the bed and look up at the worn blue curtains. One of them is longer than the other, and there are 24 x8 ceiling panels in the ceiling. I know everything, even with my eyes closed. But I stay in my room anyway. They won't let me eat in here, so I haven't eaten anything but chips and cookies for the past 12 hours. I don't give a shit. I'll bash her. I hear her stupid laugh one more time. If only I had some booze or just some hash. Maybe Rahil can help. I need to get hold of him without the cops. I don't have any more cigarettes either. I need to find a way out, now.





My case is going to court, but there's no indictment. So it's just an extension of my custody. They say I don't need to come to court, but I want to. Then I'll run away, quick as I can. That's my best chance. I've discussed it with Rahil. He agrees it's my best chance. I run real fast. They won't get me. Then I'll be free.

I can't eat a thing all morning. I need to be perfectly ready. Two officers are coming. They put me in handcuffs. It's not necessary, I say. One of the officers looks at me stupidly but says nothing. He grabs hold of my arm and cuffs me. I hate the fucking cops.

I didn't escape. The whole thing happened so quickly. In, talk, talk, out, and gone again. They never took off the cuffs. That's illegal actually. I'll tell my lawyer about it. Rahil says I can get compensation. Maybe I'll spend the money on furniture for my and Ibrahim's apartment. Maybe he's called here. The adults would never tell me.

He's probably called a million times. Fucking adults.

We're painting. I'm doing a totally cool painting for my and Ibrahim's apartment. Sort of almost totally black, but with silver lines that form a hemp leaf. Allan and Rahil are there too. Lies leans over the table. I can see her tits while she says to me, "Janus? Do you like getting it up the anus?" There's a roaring in my ears. Allan and Rahil are laughing their heads off. I look at her, say nothing. "I mean, I'm thinking, maybe your mom called you Janus because she knew you'd be a shit packer?" She smiles, and Allan and Rahil's laughter rises. I stand up. I want them to stop. Bash them. Bash Lies. I take the painting. Throw it at her. She moves away, laughing. Two adults come in and say all kinds of things. They drag me out of the room. Drag me over the cracked painting.







Talk, talk, talk. They want me to see a psychologist. He comes and talks too. Mom talk. But they they move Lisa to another ward. Sahil thinks it's because he fucked her. NO! They got rid of her because they knew I'd bash her. They knew I'd do it.

Tonight, I can walk through the walls again. I draw in the cold night air and look up at the stars. I think about getting some booze. I end up at home with mom again. She's not happy anymore. She's lying on the bed. The living room is full of Claus' gross friends. One of them is pissing into a potted plant. The plant is already dead. I want to get out of there. Mom's friend, Else, leans over the dinner table. One of the gross ones fondles her. She says no. He hits her and pulls her pants off. She cries a little. Then, the next one. I want to get out of there. Let the kid have a ride, one of the gross ones says. They all laugh. I want to get out.

Finally, Mark, my big brother, comes in. He throws the gross ones out. Just like when I was little, I'm happy to see Mark. It's been a long time. He doesn't really see me, just slaps me on the head. Mark lives in town. I almost never see him. He doesn't want to see mom. Says it's her fault. It isn't. I'm glad to see Mark. Want to talk to him, tell him that I'm also going to live in town, along with Ibrahim. Maybe we can meet.





They let Rahil out. I don't get it. It's not fair. The new guy's named Sean. I actually know him a bit from before, from a dealer named Lars. We've smoked together, but not more than a couple of times. Sean always slipped away when the party really got going. There were these wild parties at Lars' place. Tons of booze, tons of drugs. Crazy. Once there was someone who walked along the edge of the balcony, slipped, and smashed himself up in the grass. Crazy. He still walks on crutches. We call him Citizen Kane.

The adults still don't know when I'll be allowed to get visits or calls. They also say that Ibrahim hasn't called. They're lying.

Sean's OK. He plays music and has tons of hash. Sean's definitely on my side. He doesn't say much. Soon he'll be 18. That's probably why. He'll be 18 in just one week. Maybe they'll move him. I hope he stays.

Sean's a bit like Mark. Like he's not really here, like he's on his way somewhere else. If only one of them would take me with them.

Ulla from social services came by today. I can't move back home. Mom's been hospitalized again. The house is gone. She doesn't say whether Claus is also gone or where my things are. Mom probably won't be coming home either. Can't handle it, Ulla says. There's a roaring in my ears. I want to get out. Ulla just talks. She doesn't listen. I try to tell her about the apartment in town with Ibrahim. She just raises an eyebrow and shakes her head. "I can't go along with that, Janus. You understand that, right?" Fuck NO. Ulla says I'm her responsibility until I'm 18. More talk, foster family, place to stay, assistance, exciting, good adults, new friends. No. Finally, Ulla leaves.



I sleep. That's how I'll manage things now. Just sleep all the time. I don't even count the days anymore. Now, I'm just here, sleeping. They tell me to get up. I don't. I don't care anymore. They talk about what will happen, where I'll be going. School, tests, apprenticeship, make something of myself. I just need to get out, away.

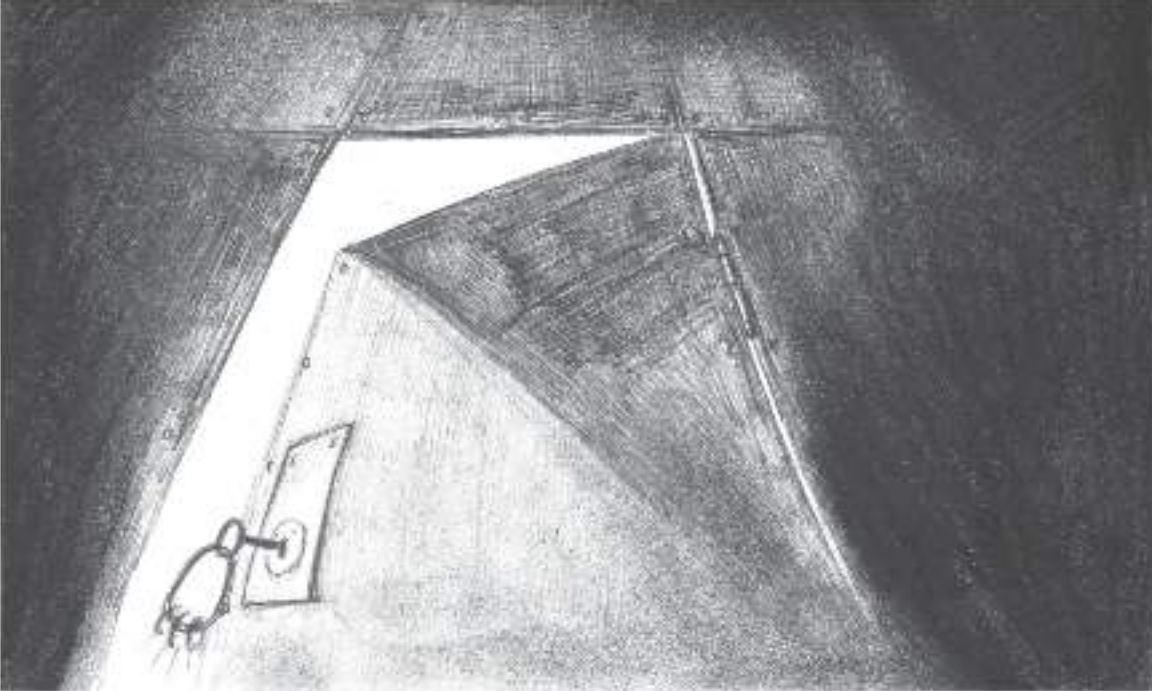
At night, I finally get out through the walls again. I meet Ibrahim on the beach. We make a fire, like a bonfire on Midsummer's eve. We throw all sorts of stuff on the fire, even books and paper. Ibrahim burns his school bag, a real kids' bag with Spiderman on it. I had a bag like that too. We laugh. Ibrahim has booze for me and hash for himself. We lie in the sand and build our apartment.





Ibrahim is dead. Shot.





We see it on TV. I know it's him. Even before they tell me. Just shot. Gang wars, the adults say. They don't understand anything. Ibrahim can't die. Not him. All the others can die. I smash the TV. They drag me into my room. They stay there, don't want to let me out. I kick the chair to pieces.

What about me, now? I don't get up for days. They leave me alone. Serve food in my room. Rina talks agsin. I don't hear her. What am I going to do? Thinking about going after Ibrahim. Maybe I can get shot too? I've got to find out who did it. I've got to get revenge. I owe that to Ibrahim. I've got to find his cousin. Maybe he knows who did it. Then they can send me off to get revenge. I'll do it. I'll find Ibrahim's cousin and get revenge.

Finally, I can receive calls and visits. That means they'll be letting me out soon.

No one really comes to visit. Mom's in the hospital. Ibrahim is gone. Mark might not know I'm here. Who else might come and visit? Claus? No thanks. Maybe I can call Mark and tell him I'm here. I don't have his number. I

could also call Mikael. Maybe he'd want to talk to me now. So much time has passed. I try calling him. His number doesn't work anymore.

Rina helps me find Mark's number. I call him. He doesn't answer. I hear his voice on the answering service seven times.

Ulla comes back. She says she's found me a place to stay. I don't want to go there. She says I can come with her and take a look at it. Now? Yes, she says. OK. We drive off in her car.

We stop at a red light. I open the door, and I'm off.

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## "SCORES OF ARABS WERE KILLED."

ON ARI SHAVIT'S *MY PROMISED LAND: THE PHENOMENON OF PALESTINIAN-BLINDNESS AND THE LEGITIMATION OF MASSACRES*

by MORIEL ROTHMAN-ZECHER

In February 2014, I heard Israeli Knesset Member Merav Michaeli tell a story: Twenty years prior, she had been a host on *Friday Live*, a popular weekly television program. In the tradition of the upcoming Purim holiday, the program's hosts had planned to dress up in silly costumes. But just after 9:00 a.m., an American-Israeli physician had entered the Cave of the Patriarchs in Israeli-occupied Hebron and opened fire on the Palestinian Muslims who worshipped at their Friday morning prayer, murdering twenty-nine people. When Michaeli had heard the horrific news, she had assumed that *Friday Live*'s festive Purim episode would be cancelled. To her chagrin, she had been the only one who thought so. After arguments with the producers, the channel's president had been called in and had issued an ultimatum to the 29-year-old Michaeli: Do the show, or you lose your job. So Michaeli and her co-host had hosted the show, dressed in silly costumes, with a moment's recognition of the massacre—intended as genuine but turned lugubrious by context and costume—and then continued the celebratory Purim broadcast as planned.

Michaeli left no room for ambiguity when she recounted the story on the twentieth anniversary of the massacre: "Whether it is a horrible car crash in an Arab town in the Galilee, or a massacre in Hebron, Arab deaths don't really matter to Jewish Israel."

### READING ARI SHAVIT

A week after the talk, I read Israeli journalist Ari Shavit's *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel*, billed as an "authoritative and deeply personal narrative history of the State of Israel." Shavit makes sure to let readers know where he sees his book's authoritative location: between a naive Left that overlooks Arab intimidation and a narrow Right that dismisses the Israeli occupation. He writes: "The truth is that without incorporating both elements into one worldview, one cannot grasp Israel or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

By the time I picked it up, the book had already been showered with accolades: the *New Yorker*'s David Remnick told Charlie Rose that it was the "most extraordinary book" on Israel since the 1960s. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman recommended that Benjamin Netanyahu and Barack Obama read it, citing Shavit as one of the "handful of experts" that he, Friedman, had relied upon over the past three decades. The *Economist* gushed that Shavit's "prophetic voice carries lessons that all sides need to hear." Franklin Foer, editor of the *New Republic*, wrote that the book constituted "the epic history that Israel deserves."

One could thus expect Shavit's book to be an extraordinary, expert, epic and authoritative history of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I disagree: Shavit's book further entrenches a local and global (the book was written originally

in English) deafness to Palestinian voices and indifference to Palestinian suffering and deaths. Let us call it Palestinian-blindness. It is the same blindness that Michaeli mentioned, and the same blindness that has enabled (Israel) to maintain its brutal, 47-year-old military occupation of the Palestinian Territories, not to mention seven earlier decades of struggle with—and displacement of—the native population.

I make no pretense at holding some omnipotent center-ground of truth. I am a Jew from Ohio, whose favorite book at the time of my Bar Mitzvah was Leon Uris' Zionist epic, *Exodus*. I am a college-educated American, whose *Exodus*-fueled fantasy of an Israeli "purity of arms" was cracked by the bloodshed of Israel's attack on Gaza in the winter of 2008-2009. I am a Jerusalem-born Israeli citizen, whose soldier aspirations were finally laid to rest at age 22 when I refused to enlist and spent a month in military prison. I am an Arabic-speaking left-wing activist, and when I write about the Israel-Palestinian conflict, my aim is to bolster the struggle against Other-blindness in general—which facilitates violence—and Palestinian-blindness and the Israeli occupation in particular, an occupation that can be summarized as systematic violence against the entire Palestinian population.

Not only does Ari Shavit claim his book is an authoritative work of history, he also paints himself, as I paint myself, as Left-wing and anti-occupation. So when Ari Shavit set out to write *My Preoccupied Land*, the burden was on him to ensure that Palestinian voices were represented and heard. But Shavit's book falls neatly within the annals of more than a century of Zionist blindness to Palestinian voices, Palestinian deaths, Palestinian suffering and justifications of the expulsion and even massacre of Palestinians. This blindness was present in the early Zionist mantra of "a land without a people for a people without a land," it was present in Prime Minister Golda Meir's 1969 declaration that there is "no such thing as a Palestinian,"<sup>2</sup> it is present when self-proclaimed left-wing politicians refer to Arabs as a "demographic threat,"<sup>3</sup> and it is present throughout Shavit's book.

## TWO PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

Throughout the first 100 pages of his book, which cover the period from 1897 until 1948, Shavit's history is rich with personal stories of Jewish Israeli pioneers, farmers, educators, military-men, kibbutzniks, and more. Yet, throughout the same pages, Shavit only names and gives personal narrative to two Palestinians (whom Shavit primarily refers to as "Arabs", as most Israelis do). Let us look at these two stories, and what they can tell us about Shavit's (non-)vision of The Palestinians.

Palestinian #1: Abed

"One Arab is different from the others. Abed," Shavit writes. In the mid-1930s, Abed watched over a Jewish-owned orange grove in the city of Rehovot, 20 kilometers south of Tel Aviv. He was loyal and trusted. He wore "a knitted white cap, billowing Oriental pantaloons, and a proud black mustache" and when the Jewish grower went away, "he [ruled] over his fellow workers with stern dignity."<sup>4</sup> Shavit goes on to assert that the Jewish orange grower "can conclude" that Abed was not a threat and that Jews and Arabs could live together in peace, "but in the

far north, a great distance from the orange grove, other voices are beginning to be heard...? Voices like that of

Palestinian #2: Izz Abd al-Kader Mustafa Yusuf ad-Din al-Kassem

Shavit introduces the reader to Izz Abd al-Kader Mustafa Yusuf ad-Din al-Kassem, making careful note that he was born outside of Palestine (in Western Syria), studied Islam outside of Palestine (in Cairo), and then returned to Syria where he "became a fundamentalist revolutionary." He began gathering weapons, information and money, initiating underground cells, "killing Jews," and preparing for an armed struggle against the Zionists, which he decided to launch in 1955. "I taught you religion and I taught you nationhood," he said to his followers, "Now it's your duty to carry out jihad. Ho, Islamists, go out on jihad."<sup>9</sup>

These are the two relevant Palestinian narratives, according to Shavit's history, between 1897 and 1948. The local, loyal, uni-named farmer with a proud mustache, and the foreign-born, militant septi-named Islamist with Jew-hatred in his heart.<sup>10</sup> Shavit doesn't quote either of their writings or speeches, aside from the two dubious lines of al-Kassem's "sermon."<sup>11</sup>

The lack of compelling, nuanced, human narratives about Palestinians and their lives in Shavit's book is not only a failure of academic rigor or diversity of voices.<sup>12</sup> It is illustrative of a broader blindness that shapes Shavit's view—along with the views of many others throughout the historical and modern Zionist movement—of the history, present and future of this place. For when the lives of the Other are pared down to a marginal series of stereotyped snippets, then the ending of those lives, whether by design or by circumstance, need not be seen as much more than an unfortunate blip. This is best illustrated, in Shavit's case, through a specific, odd, and recurring phrase: "Scores of Arabs were killed."

### "SCORES OF ARABS WERE KILLED"

**H**istory's slide towards 1948 began, in Shavit's telling, with the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939. In describing this period, Shavit acknowledges that there was a mutual "dance of blood," but he dramatizes Jewish deaths while minimizing Palestinian deaths (or Arab deaths, as he calls them). For example, Shavit tells of Chaim Pashigoda, a 23-year old law clerk, who was murdered by a crowd of Arabs brandishing stones, hammers and knives; and of David Shembadal, an electrician, who was "hacked to pieces by a group of young Arab men" upon arrival at a café to fix the lights; and of Arabs attacking a car in March 1938 and murdering six of its Jewish passengers, including a young girl who "was raped, then killed and dismembered". Rage triggered by the incident "brought about a failed attack of Jewish extremists on an Arab bus in the Galilee." Arabs kill, Jews seek revenge.<sup>13</sup> Israeli Jews then carried out a number of successful bombings, including a market-bombing in Haifa that "killed more than thirty-five Arabs," in an Arab-led "massacre in Tiberias, eight [Jewish] adults and eleven children were slaughtered."

The Israeli scholar Hillel Cohen poses the following question: What defines a massacre?<sup>14</sup> Is it the number of casualties? Is it the means by which they are killed? Is it the degree of helplessness or innocence of those killed? Or is it the writer's opinion as to which side is truly to be blamed, whether they are killing or being killed? In other words, why was the murder of nineteen Jews in Tiberias framed

by Shavit as a "massacre," while the murder of "more than thirty-five Arabs" was framed as a "killing"? The crux of Shavit's slanted retelling comes in what might seem like an even more minor semantic oddity. After the massacre in Tiberias, Shavit writes, Jewish guerrilla units "took revenge" by attacking indiscriminately on the road to Safed, in the village of Dabburiya, and in the village of Hittin: "Fourteen Arabs were killed on the Safed road, fifteen were killed in Dabburiya, and scores were left dead in Hittin."<sup>12</sup>

Scores?

"Scores", meaning "twenties"? Meaning that at least 20, maybe 30, maybe even 30 people were killed in this single attack? Enough to qualify it as a massacre? And how many children were killed here? When I read the word "scores", I do not think "40 or 50 or 60." I think "A bunch. A bunch of anonymous Arabs are left dead when understandably angry Jews take revenge for the massacre of eleven children." In other words: too bad, but not too bad. A bunch of Arabs were killed: enough to note, but not enough to stop the Purim Show.

The phrase "scores of Arabs" appears a second time, when describing "scores of Arabs" killed in bomb attack in a Haifa market, and a third time, when describing how a Jewish doctor, named as Siegfried Lehmann, and humanized as he rushed to attend to the survivors of the "devastating earthquake that killed... scores of [Lydda's Arab] residents." Which brings us to Lydda.

#### LYDDA, 1948: A NON-RECKONING

**D**uring the Nakba (the Arab term for "catastrophe") of 1948, proto-Israeli forces destroyed 530 Palestinian villages, committed dozens of massacres, and created a general climate of terror in which 600,000–800,000 Palestinians were either expelled or fled and were subsequently denied reentry by the newly founded Israeli State.<sup>13</sup> In a booklet titled *Remembering al Lydd*, the non-profit organization Zochrot tells that in April of 1948, the Hagganah, the largest of the proto-Israeli forces, conquered and occupied a series of villages between the coastal city of Jaffa and the city of al-Lydd. Refugees from these villages fled to and gathered in al-Lydd. On July 10<sup>th</sup>, thousands of Hagganah troops stormed al-Lydd, killing residents along the way, "primarily elders, women and children" and continuing until "the streets were filled with bodies." The Israeli soldiers proceeded to take residents from their houses and gathered them around al-Lydd's central mosque and its courtyard. Hundreds of other residents of al-Lydd sought shelter inside a smaller mosque, the Dahamsh mosque, convinced that they would be safe from attack while in a house of prayer. But they were not: Hagganah soldiers proceeded to kill 176 Palestinians who hid in the Dahamsh mosque. According to historian Benny Morris, reports say that when David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, was asked what to do with the remaining Palestinians in al-Lydd, he waved his hand and said "expel them." Of the 50,000 residents who had once populated al-Lydd, only 1,003 remained by the summer of 1948.<sup>14</sup>

"Lydda, 1948" was Shavit's most talked-about chapter, and was published in the *New Yorker* as a stand-alone essay. It has been framed by many<sup>15</sup> as a Zionist's reckoning with the crimes committed by the Zionist movement in 1948. "Lydda is our black box," writes Shavit. "In it lies the dark secret of Zionism. The truth is that

Zionism could not bear Lydda. From the very beginning there was a substantial contradiction between Zionism and Lydda. If Zionism was to be, Lydda could not be.<sup>29</sup>

In other words, what happened had to happen. It was a zero-sum game. Or, to borrow a word that Shavit himself uses throughout the book, it was “tragic.” The use of this word is not accidental: if history is tragic, then violence is inevitable. As Shavit writes, “in the cataclysmic summer of 1948, contradiction struck and tragedy revealed its face. Lydda was no more.”

Those who call Shavit’s work groundbreaking praise his acknowledgment that crimes were indeed carried out by the Zionist movement against the Palestinians in 1948. This sets him apart from many Zionist writers and historians who either minimize the severity of events that took place or deny that a Nakba took place at all. And indeed, Shavit does not deny what happened. He writes about the killing of women and children, the massacre at the mosque (which he does call a massacre), Ben Gurion’s orders. This is worthy of acknowledgement. But does acknowledgement truly qualify as reckoning? And if it does not, how different is it from outright denial?

Benny Morris, the historian cited in Zochrot’s booklet, is the most well-known representative of the strand of Zionist historiography that both acknowledges that an ethnic cleansing was carried out in Palestine in 1948, and frames such a cleansing as just. In emphasizing its justness, Morris goes so far as to fault David Ben Gurion not for the expulsion of 500,000–800,000 Palestinians, but for his failure to expel the remaining 150,000. In a 2004 *Haaretz* interview, Shavit asks Morris if, perhaps, Zionism—which is “dangerous” for the Jews and “makes the Arabs so wretched”—was a mistake. Morris responds that it was not, adding a sweeping, orientalist generalization the mix:

*No, Zionism was not a mistake. The desire to establish a Jewish state here was a legitimate one, a positive one. But given the character of Islam and given the character of the Arab nation, it was a mistake to think that it would be possible to establish a tranquil state here that lives in harmony with its surroundings.*

Shavit then tells Morris that this “leaves us with two possibilities: either a cruel, tragic Zionism, or the forgoing of Zionism.” Morris responds: “Yes. That’s so. You have pared it down, but that’s correct.”

In *My Promised Land*, Shavit sets up the same binary: “I see that the choice is stark: either reject Zionism because of Lydda, or accept Zionism along with Lydda.”<sup>30</sup> Like Morris before him, Shavit tells readers that he chooses the latter. And his choice is reflected in the stories he tells. For example, in the Lydda chapter, we meet a Jewish man named Bulldozer, a tired, traumatized, dopey-sounding (he loots a camera store because “he so loves cameras”) Jewish soldier who shoots a rocket and kills seventy (exactly seventy?) Palestinians in the small mosque. We hear of young Jewish boys who philosophize on capitalism, read Gandhi, listen to classical music and who become corrupted as the war goes on and their friends are murdered. They want revenge and they become like “lustful Arab assassins” and end up killing “scores of Arabs” in the Galilee and then in

Lydda (where their victims “shriek, howl and cry”). Only in the final pages of the chapter are readers introduced to a Palestinian’s perspective on the events through the eyes of a local man, Ottman Abu Hammed. It is framed with the following caveat: “Lacking a good education and any political awareness, he does not really comprehend what is going on.”<sup>29</sup>

How can Morris, Shavit and others read and internalize facts about the murder of innocents, about intentional expulsion and ethnic cleansing, understand that such acts were an inherent part of the way Zionism manifested itself, and still remain staunch supporters of the political Zionist movement of the present and future? Here is where it all connects back to stories and voices, to “scores” of victims, and finally to the justification of massacre.

### FROM LYDDA 1948 TO GAZA 2014

**S**havit’s book endeavors to widen the scope of the Israeli Zionist narrative, but his writing is ensnared by his inability to see the Zionism’s Other—the Palestinian people—as layered and complete human beings. They are barely present in his narrative of early Zionism, which is otherwise full of stories of Jewish pioneers with individual quirks and passions. When Palestinians are mentioned, they are stereotyped and caricatured as loyal Abed or fundamentalist Izz Abd al-Kader Mustafa Yusuf ad-Din al-Kassam. Later, when a Palestinian person is finally given voice in the description of the Lydda massacre, he is described as uneducated and uncomprehending. When Jews are killed by Palestinians, their killings are dramatized and poignant: a girl is dismembered in Haifa, a massacre takes place in Tiberias. When Palestinians are killed by Jews (often out of revenge), “scores of Arabs” are left dead. When Jews commit intentional acts of ethnic cleansing and massacre, Shavit recognizes the historical facts, but preserves his allegiance to Zionism: Israel did what it had to do, scores of people died, end of story.

As I finish writing in late July 2014, the Israeli military is engaged in what I would describe as a massacre in the Gaza Strip, forty miles south of my Tel Aviv home. The majority of Israeli society—people who, like Ari Shavit, describe themselves as liberals, profess an interest in peace, and do not actively want to harm Palestinians—is overwhelmingly supportive of Israel’s actions. We are doing what we have to do, scores will be left dead, end of story.

Ari Shavit’s book reflects much of what is wrong with how Zionism has unfolded: Israeli society has failed to truly reckon with its past. One consequence of this collective failure is a seamless continuum between past and present: what is happening in Gaza is intrinsically linked to what happened in Lydda, and before. We continue justifying our acts of murder and massacre, and we do so not because we are bad, but because we are blind.

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<sup>4</sup> Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land*, Spiegel & Grau, New York, NY, 2013, Page 211.

<sup>5</sup> Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1982-1948*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, Page 41.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Giles' interview with Golda Meir, "London Sunday Times," June 15, 1969.

<sup>7</sup> "Netanyahu: Israel's Arabs are the real demographic threat." By Gideon Alon and Aluf Benn, in *Haaretz*, December 18, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> One need simply to google the terms "Israeli," "Arab," and "conflict" together to encounter countless examples in which media and politicians are able to recognize the national identity of Israelis, but fail to do the same for Palestinians, especially Palestinian citizens of Israel or "Israeli Arabs." When quoting or paraphrasing Shavit, I will use "Arabs," otherwise, I will use "Palestinians."

<sup>9</sup> Shavit, page 57.

<sup>10</sup> Shavit, page 58.

<sup>11</sup> Shavit, page 59.

<sup>12</sup> The man is usually referred to as Iza a dia al Kassem. Providing his full name only makes him sound more foreign and scary, à la Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu wa Za Banga.

<sup>13</sup> Was this a direct quote? Did he really call his followers "Telavivis?" Was this a rough translation? How does one say "Ho" in Arabic? Was this just what Shavit imagined al Kassem saying? Shavit never tells his reader. The only sources he cites for the chapter in which the "sermon" is quoted are "numerous conversations with Behovot's elderly orange growers, who were still alive in the late 2000s, and the local records stored in the Behovot." For an excellent treatment of how Shavit's book fails across the board to include a diversity of voices, whether Palestinian, Mizrahi/Arab Jews (or "Oriental Jews" as Shavit calls them), or women, see Noam Shatzaf's "Book Review: On Ari Shavit's *My Promised Land*" in *972 Magazine*, December 13, 2013: <http://972mag.com/book-review-on-ari-shavits-my-promised-land/83788/>

<sup>14</sup> When discussing the 1994 massacre in Hebron, many commentators note that Dr. Goldstein was taking revenge for the murder of Jewish members of his community by Palestinian terrorists. The day after the massacre, the *New York Times* quoted Noam Arnon, a settler, as saying that "Dr. Goldstein had suffered a 'mental crisis' brought on by frequent killings of Jews at Arab hands."

<sup>15</sup> Cohen does not directly answer the question he poses. For the purpose of this essay, the dictionary definition of a massacre—to "deliberately and violently kill (a large number of people)"—suffices, although it still leaves questions unanswered (How many is a large number? Does it matter if they are armed or unarmed? Does it have to take place at once? And so on).

<sup>16</sup> A similar semantic question could be asked about the words "killed" and "murdered." While it seems that Shavit is more predisposed to describe the killings of Jews as murders, there is not a consistent pattern, and he uses the words interchangeably for rhetorical emphasis, as in his own writing of this essay.

<sup>17</sup> Shavit, page 78.

<sup>18</sup> Different sources provide different numbers. The Israeli NGO Zochrot argues that 550 villages were destroyed and 800,000 Palestinians displaced. The Palestinian human rights organization B'del mentions 50 massacres (<http://www.b'del.org/af/majdaly/item/1095-massacres-and-the-nakba74>). Israeli historian Benny Morris estimates number of Palestinians who were expelled or fled at between 600,000 and 750,000, and records 24 massacres.



<sup>8</sup> *Remembering Al Lydd*, on Zochrot's website (Hebrew and Arabic only), October, 2012: <http://zochrot.org/sites/default/files/lydda.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Leon Wieseltier in the *New York Times* lauded Shavit's writing as having "the accelerating tone of a genuine reckoning." "The State of Israel: My Promised Land" by Ari Shavit, in the *New York Times*, November 21, 2013: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/24/books/review/my-promised-land-by-ari-shavit.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>10</sup> Shavit, page 108.

<sup>11</sup> "Survival of the Fittest: An Interview with Benny Morris" by Ari Shavit in *Hooetz* Weekend Edition, January 16-18, 2004. Full text available in English on Counterpunch: <http://www.counterpunch.org/2004/01/16/an-interview-with-benny-morris/>

<sup>12</sup> Shavit, page 131.

<sup>13</sup> Shavit, pages 138-139.

## FIELDNOTES ON THE DEATH OF ALEJANDRO NIETO

by MANISSA MAHARAWAL

As an anthropologist, my research lies at the intersection of gentrification, displacement, evictions and resistance to these processes in New York City and San Francisco. As I carry out my ethnographic fieldwork I feel myself drawn to poetry as a different way of documenting and engaging in what I am observing and experiencing. In particular I find that poetry is a medium to get to the emotion of these issues in ways that ethnography does not always offer. My poems draw on quotes, descriptions and phrases from my interviews and field notes, as well as from real estate websites, police reports, and media accounts of what is happening as a way to place poetic observations next to popularly and easily available accounts of urban change. In doing so I aim to deconstruct these processes while also creating an assemblage of ethnography and poetry.

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## Fieldnotes on the Death of Alejandro Nieto

## Geographies of belonging:

Valencia Street. Is not on fire but it should be.  
 Instead wet hair, damp paper, a thousand bodies, cops lining the sidewalk,  
 caged in. Roberto Hernandez says: "the problem is they like our culture but  
 they don't like us" it rains harder. Line of drummers, we start to move, we are  
 a mass.

## Infrastructures of loss:

24th Street. Still, shuttered, shameless.  
 The dancers, crimson headaddresses, bells clasped around ankles, step slowly,  
 space, pace, passage. One holds a baby, shouts: "we are on Ohlone land,  
 we are on Ohlone land, this land is not ours." The air is rattled, terminal.

## Productions of grief:

Bernal Hill. The police report reads: "March 21st at around 7:18 and 49  
 seconds shots were fired. A Latin male adult in a red jacket. Two hundred  
 pounds. Alejandro Nieto went to the ground, he assumed a prone position,  
 the officers went to him, rendered aid, he did not survive his injuries. The  
 shots that were fired were fired by the police department. His back was to the  
 west. He was eating chips or sunflowers."

## Alejandro Nieto:

These are the things I learn about you: son, brother, cousin, student, security  
 guard. Your father is wearing wrap-around sunglasses, blue jeans, cowboy  
 boots,  
 a matching hat, his face is wet. Yes, Alejandro, we are watching out for you, for  
 the dead, we are expansive, we are a threshold.

Together, we pray, facing the east, the west, the north, the south. Someone  
 speaks: "they see us as brown people, they think we have no manners,  
 we aren't civilized, show them that we are different, leave here in peace."

Another voice: "we live together but apart, they don't know us, they are  
 scared,  
 they call the cops on us, we need to let them know about this neighborhood,  
 our neighborhood, about La Mission."

Below us the Bay is elusive, silent.  
 Above us a woman in hot pink jogging clothes,  
 a golden retriever by her side, takes pictures.

