

The background of the cover features a complex, abstract geometric pattern. It consists of numerous small white dots connected by thin white lines, forming a circular, web-like structure that resembles a molecular model or a network diagram. The pattern is centered and fills most of the frame, with a dark, textured background.

# **TIMELY REFLECTIONS ON SPATIAL JUSTICE**

**EDITED BY RANA ABUGHANNAM**

ASSISTANT EDITORS: MAYA KERFOOT, JOUD SHAWWA, HIBA ZUBAIRI



# **TIMELY REFLECTIONS ON SPATIAL JUSTICE**

TIMELY REFLECTIONS ON SPATIAL JUSTICE, 2025

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This project was developed on the unceded and occupied territories of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Nations in Vancouver; the unceded territories of the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Peoples in Halifax; and the traditional lands of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples in Waterloo. We recognize the role of architecture and research in advancing settler colonial projects on Turtle Island and affirm the solidarities forged between Indigenous peoples here and Palestinians in their interconnected struggles against dispossession and for sovereignty.



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# **EARLY REFLECTIONS**

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# LEARNING WITH PALESTINE

## ON EDUCATION AND JUSTICE

At a time when violence, discrimination, and injustice are on the rise in Palestine and across the globe, the need to center spatial justice feels more urgent than ever. At the same time, as authoritarian and hegemonic regimes increasingly control education, narrowing curricula, and silencing critical voices, and as the Israeli colonial project continues to obliterate educational institutions in Palestine, there is a critical need to reconceptualize education, how it is delivered, what it includes, and who it serves. Against this backdrop of systemic violence, deepening restrictions, and the genocide in Gaza, *Timely Reflections on Spatial Justice* insists on asking what spatial justice means now, in these pressing times. This project takes the form of a glossary of urgent reflections that mobilize knowledge as both a means of resistance and a practice of collective solidarity. While the project's scope extends beyond Palestine, it intentionally foregrounds Palestinian voices and scholarship as part of a broader, collective conversation. With fifty-one contributions from architects, scholars, and educators across the world, *Timely Reflections* challenges dominant narratives and reimagines what knowledge is produced, how it circulates, and who it ultimately serves.

Education has long been a significant part of the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli colonial project. Since the Nakba in 1948, education has been central to refugee life, valued both for improving socioeconomic opportunities and preserving the Palestinian national identity. Before the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) became central to Palestinian refugee education, early schooling efforts for children in exile were initiated by the Palestinian refugees themselves, many of whom were former teachers in Palestine. As early as 1948, Palestinians held improvised classes in tents or outdoors, finding ways to teach despite having no books, pens, or furniture.<sup>1</sup> These early

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<sup>1</sup> Anne E. Irfan, "Educating Palestinian Refugees: The Origins of UNRWA's Unique Schooling System," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34, no. 1 (March 2021): 1037–1059.

efforts embodied a collective belief that creating and sharing knowledge is itself an act of resistance and resilience against the erasure of Palestinian identity and homes.

Education continued to play a significant role in strengthening the Palestinian presence and identity, something that the Israeli state saw as a threat. When the first Palestinian universities began to emerge in the 1970s, the Israeli state quickly moved to shut them down. In 1973, for example, Birzeit University was closed by the Israeli forces for the first time. The following year, the university's founder and first president, Dr. Hanna Nasir, was arrested and then deported to Lebanon, where he remained in exile for nineteen years.<sup>2</sup> In 1980, Military Order 854 granted Israeli authorities control over Palestinian universities' curriculum, student admissions, and faculty appointments, while censoring all reading materials entering the West Bank and Gaza, further restricting academic freedom.<sup>3</sup> Despite these restrictions, Palestinian higher education expanded, and by the late 1980s, there were six universities, hosting about 22,000 students. Within days of the first Intifada in 1987, the Israeli state closed several Palestinian higher education institutions. By February 1988, all universities, colleges, and government training schools were shut down.<sup>4</sup> The attack on education even reached school-age children when schools in the West Bank, and later kindergartens, were also shut down. Higher education institutions remained closed for four years, till 1992, during which students and faculty were barred from attending classes, accessing libraries, or using laboratories. Defying the Israeli state's restrictions and asserting their right to education, Palestinians responded with international campaigns, protests, sit-ins, school break-ins, and alternative education projects.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Riham Barghouti and Helen Murray, "The Struggle for Academic Freedom in the Palestinian Occupied Territories," in *Academic Freedom Conference: "Problems and Challenges in Arab and African Countries"* eds. Abdalla R. Bibtana (CODESRIA, 2006): 33.

3 Barghouti and Murray, "The Struggle for Academic Freedom in the Palestinian Occupied Territories," 33.

4 Barghouti and Murray, "The Struggle for Academic Freedom in the Palestinian Occupied Territories," 34.

5 Yamila Hussein, "The Stone and the Pen: Palestinian Education During the 1987 Intifada," *The Radical Teacher*, no. 74 (2005): 17.

In the absence of formal classrooms, universities moved their lessons underground, gathering in homes, offices, community centers, mosques, and churches. Families transformed their living rooms, gardens, and courtyards into spaces of learning, teaching school-aged children themselves. These improvised settings nurtured alternative ways of teaching and fostered communal modes of learning, becoming acts of cultural preservation and quiet defiance. In doing so, they embodied the spirit of the Intifada, which sought to restore Palestinians' agency over their own lives. As Yamila Hussein notes, "[f]or the first time since it occupied the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, Israel lost control over official Palestinian learning and teaching precisely because of this decree, while the Palestinians, also for the first time ever, gained some agency in deciding what their children should learn, who would teach them, and how."<sup>6</sup> The Israeli state responded to these underground communities with more aggression, further proving their significance in the Palestinian struggle. As Munir Fasheh notes, "[w]hereas Israel did not mind our holding conferences condemning closure of educational institutions and demanding their re-opening, it was harsh on neighborhood committees... Whereas licensed individuals and organizations formed the medium of conferences, the medium in neighborhood committees consisted of people who thought and acted in freedom, with attentiveness to surroundings and to what they could do with what they have."<sup>7</sup> It is this communal grounding and freedom that frames *Timely Reflections*. The freedom to think, teach, and discuss ideas without fear of censorship or persecution.

Over the years, projects of collective learning continued to grow in Palestine and by Palestinians in response to varied political conditions. In 2012, Decolonizing Architecture Art Research (DAAR) established Campus in Camps, an experimental educational program in al-Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem, Palestine. Building on the Arabic word

6 Hussein, "The Stone and the Pen: Palestinian Education During the 1987 Intifada," 17.

7 Munir Fasheh. "Over 68 Years with Mathematics: My Story of Healing from Modern Superstitions and Reclaiming my Sense of Being and Well-being," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Mathematics Education and Society Conference*, ed. Swapna Mukhopadhyay and Brian Greer (MES8, 2015), 48-49.

for ‘University,’ *Jame’a* جامعة, meaning a public space of assembly, Campus in Camps established a collective space for “communal learning and production of knowledge grounded in lived experience and connected to communities.”<sup>8</sup> Between 2012 and 2016, participants in Campus in Camps produced a Collective Dictionary on the main concepts that underscore the contemporary condition of the Palestinian refugee camp.<sup>9</sup> The collective dictionary was founded on dialogue with community members, organizations, and collaborators from within Palestinian refugee camps and beyond. More recently, and amidst the ongoing genocide in Gaza, during which the Israeli state has destroyed all Palestinian campuses in Gaza in a clear act of scholasticide,<sup>10</sup> spaces of communal learning from university campuses have taken other forms. Beginning in early 2024, Palestinian universities in the West Bank, such as Birzeit University and An-Najah National University, set up initiatives to support the education of students in Gaza through remote learning.<sup>11</sup> Faculty from across the world joined these initiatives in an act of solidarity, teaching students through Zoom, prerecorded lectures, and even WhatsApp messages. In the United Kingdom, architects and University of Westminster educators Nasser Golzari and Yara Sharif led Architects for Gaza and established the Gaza Global University, which aimed at advancing education for the people of Gaza.<sup>12</sup> By April 2024, student encampments had been set up across Western university campuses in solidarity with the Palestinian people and their struggle for freedom. In these encampments,

8 Alessandro Petti, “Campus in Camps: Fundamental Principles”. *Campus in Camps*. June 11, 2013. <https://www.campusincamps.ps/about/>.

9 “Collective Dictionary,” Campus in Camps, 2012-2016, accessed August 10, 2025. <https://www.campusincamps.ps/>

10 “UN experts deeply concerned over ‘scholasticide’ in Gaza.” United Nations. April 18, 2024. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>.

11 See “Rebuilding Hope”. Birzeit University, accessed August 10, 2025, <https://www.birzeit.edu/en/rebuilding-hope>; “An-Najah National University Launches Initiative to Enable Gaza Students to Continue University Education,” An-Najah National University, 14 February 2024, <https://www.najah.edu/en/community/community-news/2024/02/14/an-najah-national-university-launches-initiative-to-enable-gaza-students-to-continue-university-education/>

12 “Education”, Architects for Gaza, accessed August 10, 2025. <https://architectsforgaza.com/education/>

collective learning and community-building practices unfolded in many forms, including teach-ins, community libraries, workshops, and archiving efforts, to name a few.<sup>13</sup> Collective practices of cooking, writing, painting, and dancing sustained the community. In the spirit of these efforts, which mobilize built space and education in the pursuit of justice, this project invites architects and educators to rethink the meaning and possibilities of spatial justice.

In October 2024, I was awarded one of the five Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) Faculty Fellowships to Advance Equity in Architecture. Inspired by the forms of collective learning and community building that emerge in camps, such as Palestinian refugee camps and student encampments,<sup>14</sup> my proposed project focused on developing a collective glossary of terms related to spatial and environmental justice (Figure 1). In February 2025, the ACSA made the deeply disappointing decision to cancel the upcoming Journal of Architectural Education (JAE) 79:2 issue on Palestine, effectively silencing critical scholarship on Palestine and by Palestinians.<sup>15</sup> In solidarity with the JAE editorial board, I withdrew from the fellowship on ethical grounds. Still, amid escalating violence, inequality, and oppression in Palestine and beyond, a reflection on spatial justice feels increasingly urgent. In response, I reformulated the project and, in May 2025, launched *Timely Reflections on Spatial Justice*, a glossary that critically contextualizes ideas and terms in relation to this urgent moment. *Timely Reflections* asks how we, as architects and educators, engage

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13 Jane Kenway and Katie Maher, "Encampment Pedagogies: Lessons Learned from Students for Palestine," *Curriculum Perspectives* 44 (2024): 389–393,

14 For an analysis of the Palestinian refugee camp as it relates to the university encampments, see Majd Al-Shihabi, "The Camp and the Encampment: Reflections on Palestine Futures from the University of Toronto Student Encampment," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 124, no. 2 (April 2025): 424–33,

15 For more on the cancellation of the issue, see Daniel Jonas Roche, "Academic Upheaval: ACSA Cancels Fall 2025 Journal of Architectural Education Issue about Palestine and Fires Its Interim Executive Editor," *The Architect's Newspaper*, February 28, 2025, <https://www.archpaper.com/2025/02/acsa-cancels-fall-2025-journal-of-architectural-education-issue-on-palestine-and-fires-its-interim-executive-editor/>; Zach Mortice, "Scholastic Resignation: A Fight with the Journal of Architectural Education over Academic Freedom Has Put the ACSA in Crisis," *The Architect's Newspaper*, April 4, 2025, <https://www.archpaper.com/2025/04/journal-of-architectural-education-academic-freedom-acsa/>

with and push against the current worlds around us, and what the possible futures this can bring. *Timely*, in this sense, is a record of time, and a witnessing and a mobilization for other times—past, present, and future—that counter the colonial and hegemonic fixed narration of time.<sup>16</sup> It creates timely and timeless reflections. *Reflections*, here, are responses that are both a meditation and a mirroring of ourselves, our ideas, and our solidarities. A mirror across space and time.

The project began with an invitation to architects and scholars to select a single term they wished to elaborate on in relation to the concept of spatial justice. While I initially suggested a set of entries, contributors expanded it by proposing new ones, affirming the glossary as a living document. Given the urgency of the project, the contributors were asked to respond within a month, and their submissions took diverse forms, including scholarly essays, personal narratives, poetry, and other creative expressions. The result was fifty-one contributions, representing a wide range of ideas, writing styles, and areas of expertise, which together strengthened the project's collective voice and impact. I am deeply grateful to everyone who responded to my call for this collaborative knowledge production project. Their reflections made the project both meaningful and significant, and I am honored to have learned alongside them. I am also thankful to my graduate assistants and assistant editors, Maya Kerfoot, Joud Shawwa, and Hiba Zubairi, for their continual support and belief in this project, even when it took a new form. At its core, this has been a collective effort. And my hopes that in its collaborative framing, its reach becomes endless, inspiring new possibilities and shaping counter worlds.

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<sup>16</sup> For more about the settler framing of time, see Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Duke University Press, 2017). For the colonial framing of time in Palestine, see Nasser Abourahme, *The Time Beneath the Concrete: Palestine between Camp and Colony* (Duke University Press, February 2025), 15-18.

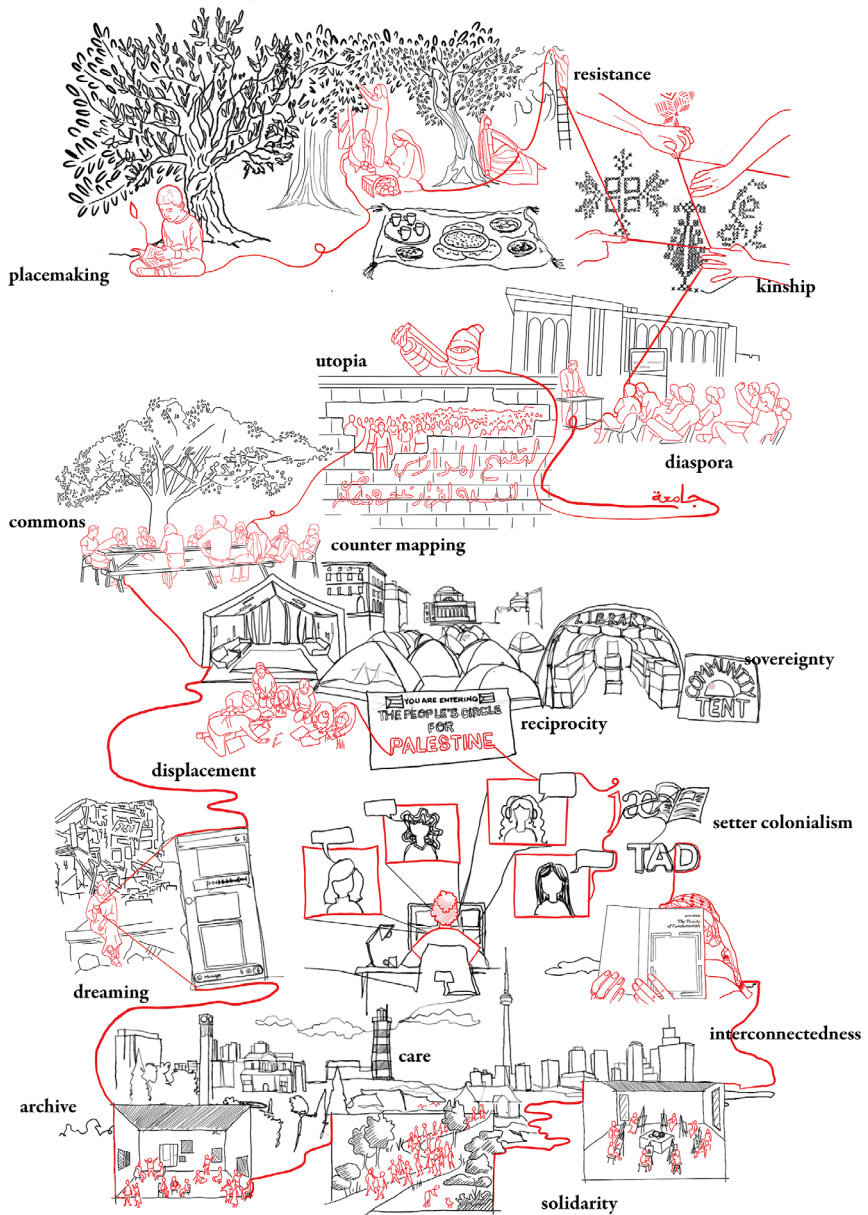


Figure 1: From Palestine to the world- collective knowledge creation and learning. Image created by Maya Kerfoot, Joud Shawwa, and Hiba Zubairi, as a representation of this project's early intentions and hopes. (Courtesy of Maya Kerfoot, Joud Shawwa, and Hiba Zubairi, 2025)

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# **ABSTRACTION**

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# ABSTRACTION AS COLONIZING TOOL

Abstraction is a central tenet of architecture since the profession established itself as the art of design, separated from the art of building. In architecture schools, we teach our students that the process of design abstraction was developed in Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Most of us design educators, however, do not mention the parallel development of architecture as a discipline and the European colonization of lands beyond their kingdoms. We mostly treat the development of spatial abstraction as a component of European modernization, but as demonstrated by Arturo Escobar 30 years ago, modernization and colonization are two faces of the same process.<sup>1</sup>

“Abstraction” is the quality of dealing with ideas rather than facts or dealing with something that exists only as ideas. The key question here is: Which facts have been elevated to the realm of ideas and which facts have been discarded? Modernity was created when we abandoned any relational knowledge and adopted a superficial (that-which-occurs-on-the-surface) understanding of space in which the controlling white man is removed from space and every non-man and non-white being is reduced to an object to be plotted and, thereby, controlled. Abstraction has been a tool of coloniality and inequality since the sixteenth century, when the “modern world-system”<sup>2</sup> defined by Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein took shape. Architecture is deeply embedded in this process.

Using the lenses of Escobar, Quijano, and Wallerstein, we see that the very process of slicing an object into plan, section, and elevation is a process of establishing hierarchies. Design is about discarding information in order to be able to manipulate what is considered the essence. But what if the

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1 Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

2 Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, “Americanness as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System,” *International Social Science Journal* 44, no. 134 (1992): 549–557.

treasure lies in the information discarded? One would never know that the baby was thrown out with the bath water if they never understood that there was a baby to begin with. My point here, learned from contemporary scholars who engage with Indigenous knowledge in an effort of epistemic decolonization, such as Robin Wall Kimmerer and Denise Ferreira da Silva,<sup>3</sup> is that the rise of abstraction in the sixteenth century killed relational processes, which we, design educators, urgently need to bring back to the table. In the case of both the built and the natural environments, the rise of abstraction as the only possible tool of analysis supported the tragic idea that white, male homo sapiens rule, and everyone who is not white, not male, and, worse, not sapiens, should be at their disposal.

From the beginning, design education uses abstraction to separate students from everything they knew before and immerse them within a new set of values: architectural values. Once delinked from any previous spatial relations, studio pedagogy teaches them to master abstraction, almost always discarding any site context or content in order to manipulate only geometry. Site plans do not register community life. Contours do not tell the history of the land. Plans and sections are arbitrary devices that force behaviors on people. Those are the Janus-faced powers of architecture: though it can be used to envision a better world, 95% of the time it is used to reinforce the status quo. If architects can bring relational knowledge back into design, they might escape their traditions of elitism and exclusion. Abstraction is the most pervasive form of privilege. The history of spatial abstraction tells us that we lost something important when we systematized our design tools and that we should find ways to bring empathy, emotion, and embodied knowledges back to the design table. To close this short piece, I would propose that we think of spatial abstraction like any pharmakos: in the right dosage it can cure and in the wrong dosage it kills. For centuries, spatial abstraction has been used

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<sup>3</sup> See Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013) and Denise Ferreira Da Silva, "Notes for a Critique of the 'Metaphysics of Race,'" *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no. 1 (2011): 138–148.

to control and colonize. To decolonize design abstraction is to tame its exclusionary powers by infusing it with relational knowledges and participatory processes, in search of a better balance.

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# ARCHIVE

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In “Capitalism, Slavery, and Bourgeois Historiography,” Cedric Robinson outlined a direct connection between the types of sources available in historical archives, the interpretations made of those sources, and the people making those interpretations.<sup>1</sup> He argued that Eric Williams’ assertion in the 1940s that the transatlantic slave trade was an exploitative economic process, and not just an unfortunate moral lapse, emerged less from the revelation of new historical sources and more from Williams’ willingness, as a Black historian, to challenge the long-held dominant narratives explaining the slave trade. Williams’ relationship to the historical archive was different from others writing during his period, Robinson argued. Williams’ argument that slave labor made possible the economic transition to industrial capitalism was not a fact absent from sources in the many historical archives documenting slavery; but it was an interpretation at odds with the intentions of the academic historical discipline, not the least of which was to uphold a narrative that would absolve white European and white American involvement in slavery by framing the transatlantic slave trade as the moralistic failing of a few rather than the capitalistic pursuit of many. That Williams consulted precisely the same historical documents as his white peers but drew from them a radically different conclusion reveals how the contemporary context in which those documents were read, and who read them, shaped their historical content. These varying interpretations of archival sources reveal that as history was being told, it was also being made.

The archive—its contents, its organization, its accessibility—plays an outsized role in the rendering of historical narratives, which reveals history as not just a collection of events and facts but as itself a production dependent on the raw materials gleaned from its archival sources. Michel-Ralph Trouillot has argued that history is a creation, a thing made, that requires various constructions and forms of history-making labor: “The production of historical narratives involves the unequal contribution of competing

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<sup>1</sup> Cedric J. Robinson, “Capitalism, Slavery and Bourgeois Historiography,” *History Workshop* no. 23 (Spring, 1987): 122–140.

groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production.”<sup>2</sup> The means of history’s production are multiple and manifold, but they converge on the historical archive, the place where evidence about the past is collected, organized, and preserved. Just like the unequal access to the economic means of production creates rifts that structure all of society, inequitable access to archives allows for knowledge production to serve as a mechanism of social control. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith has argued, research has historically been deployed as a tool of domination, especially during colonization.<sup>3</sup> The tracing, recording, and documentation of Black and Indigenous peoples under the rubric of “research” especially contributed to a discursive violence that has served as both a premise and proxy for bodily violence and social repression.<sup>4</sup>

While the research that any given individual takes on may seem innocuous, it is incumbent upon the researcher to be keenly aware of the disciplinary function of the archive. Traditionally, historical research, including research in built environment history, has relied heavily on intensive archive-based research conducted over a period of months or years. This approach has long served as the primary method for developing new insights that will expand the existing body of knowledge. It is an approach that relies on the assumption that the researcher is distinct from the entities and events studied; that the researcher (and their methods and tools of research) exist “outside” the history in question; that the archive itself is a relatively cohesive body of materials that document a set of events; and that the collection of facts represented in the archive require expert interpretation in order to be fully understood. For these reasons, archives are also typically exclusionary spaces, often open only to credentialed academics.<sup>5</sup> Additionally

2 Michel-Ralph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995), xix.

3 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Zed Books, 2012).

4 Mark M. Ayyash, *A Hermeneutics of Violence* (University of Toronto Press, 2019); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1978).

5 Dianne Harris, “Architectural History’s Futures,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 74, no. 2 (June 2015): 149.

implied is the notion that these disciplinary rules of the archive will not, and cannot, undermine the accepted traditions of historical practice—that is, one purpose of the archive is to reinforce archival research as a valid research method. Thus, “the archive” describes at once a place of research (often deep in the bowels of a university or research institution), a collection of materials, and a disciplinary practice that reinforces the role of archival research in historical production.

The exclusivity of archives, the validity they confer, and the defining limits they place on disciplinary practices each play a key role in how research can be used to enforce inequality. If archives are limiting and exclusionary, how then might we go about researching, documenting, and telling the stories of our collective pasts in a way that is liberatory? The key here is to deconstruct the archive to understand its various components, to reconsider its nature as not just a ‘thing’ or a place but as a process, and to reorient the archival process towards different ends.

Archives should not be taken as autonomous conditions unto their own but should be understood in relation to the content that they hold, the contexts in which they are created, and the conditions in which they are accessed. Trouillot further offered a deconstruction of historical production that clarifies the meaning and potential of archives when he wrote that “silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance).”<sup>6</sup> These silences are more than just absences; they are constitutive moments in the production of history. Fact creation provides the raw material for the eventual historical narrative—the people, places, and events to be studied. Fact creation emerges from the act of living. It consists of the documentation of the things done in the present moment. As such, fact creation cannot be reconstituted at a later time. Thus,

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6 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 26.

a profound historical silence occurs when people are excluded from participation in everyday life, when they are denied the right of social existence, or when their existence isn't readily acknowledged.

Fact assembly—the creation of archives—consists of collecting, sorting, and organizing the sources that record or document the acts of living that constitute fact creation. Sources include artifacts such as buildings, texts, images, and material culture; and they include recorded cultural expressions such as songs, dances, and artworks. A winnowing of events necessarily occurs with fact assembly because, just like a map cannot ever be an entirely one-to-one tracing of a territory without ceasing to be a map, an archive likewise cannot be a comprehensive documentation of events. An archive is, by necessity, partial and incomplete. However, the intentions behind the archival winnowing are crucial to understanding the nature of the specific archive in question. Does the archival winnowing reflect a desire to prevent some people from entering the historical record? Is it an effort to highlight a particularly underrepresented group? Does it reflect the lack of available records of fact creation? Trouillot notes that fact creation and fact assembly are often conflated—that we often don't distinguish between the things that happened in the past and the archival materials that recorded those events. Because we tend to see fact creation and fact assembly as one and the same, if something is missing from the archive, too often we assume that it didn't exist or that an event didn't happen. Distinguishing between fact creation and fact assembly and interrogating the nature of their silences thus allows for insights into the nature of the historical production occurring at these distinct moments. For example, intentional silences at fact creation suggest a lack of acknowledgement in that present moment, whereas intentional silences at fact assembly suggest a desire to shape future understandings of the past. Fact creation and fact assembly are both always continuous and ongoing; however, fact creation records the present, whereas fact assembly (re)collects the past. Thus, fact assembly is a

critical potential point of intervention in historical production where one might shape the later writing and remembrance of history.

Distinguishing between fact creation and fact assembly allows us to understand how history is produced on two accounts—first, through the historical actors doing the things that constitute the “facts” of the past that are further recorded in the sources created in their present moment; second, through the historical collectors who assemble the artifacts that recorded those past actions, events, and ideas. Recognizing the distinction between these two accounts of historical production allows us to reconsider a third account—the writing of the historical narrative itself. Because the first account asserts that people and events existed in the historical past whether or not they show up in the historical archive, it allows for and validates a turn to sources beyond the archive. It also encourages a theorizing of archival absences—not as evidence of the absence of an historical actor or event, but as impetus for interrogating the archive itself and the meaning of its absences. Searching for alternate sources and theorizing archival absences in turn suggests the possibility of assembling a new archive entirely, one that might account for, if not closely trace, those historical absences in question.

We thus produce history on three accounts—as actors creating historical sources, as collectors assembling historical archives, and as documentarians constructing historical narratives—and by doing so, we assert our account-ability; we assert our ability to tell the stories of our collective pasts as we take account of historical absences, take account of the problematics and potentials of historical production, and, by extension, take account of ourselves. This accounting makes possible the kind of radical revisioning of an accepted historical narrative that Eric Williams undertook in his challenge to histories of the slave trade, which in turn led to expanded discourses on the role of race in historical production. However, Judith Butler warns us that the reconsideration of disciplinary practices due to changed historical narratives only reveals

that “it is not that there was once a unity that subsequently has come apart, only that there was once an idealization...that is no longer credible, and ought not to be.”<sup>7</sup> While Williams’ alternate accounting of slavery may have been understood by many as an unraveling of a once unified historical narrative, it really only revealed that the prior narrative was but a fictive gloss over a regime of brutal violence.

Creating one’s own archive offers the potential for extending historical accountability to contend more closely with the silences that occur during fact assembly. Self-assembled archives might, for example, counter the artifactual basis of conventional archives. How might an archive of spatial justice engage oral traditions, building culture, or embodied knowledge? How might it contest the notion of an archive as fixed and static, official and sanctioned, or restrictive and exclusive? The ways that people collectively remember, document, and recall past events are vast and varied, especially outside of dominant western cultures.<sup>8</sup> Archiving is an everyday act among many ordinary people, both today and among our ancestors, even if such acts have not been validated or sanctioned by the institutions that govern knowledge production.<sup>9</sup> How might a self- or collectively-created archive reflect both the diversity and ordinariness of communal memorializing?

Archives are the collections from which historical narratives are drawn; they are a subject of inquiry, critique, and contemplation; and they are a product of research itself. Taken together, archiving holds potential as an activity through which we might understand and rectify what Lisa Lowe calls “the process through which the forgetting of violent encounter is naturalized, both by the archive, and in subsequent narrative histories.”<sup>10</sup> We might thus consider how archiving plays a foundational role in “an economy of affirmation and forgetting” in ways that both underscore and refute the status

7 Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (Fordham University Press, 2005), 4.

8 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

9 Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Beacon Press, 2014).

10 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015), 2-3.

quo.<sup>11</sup> Archiving can then function as a heuristic device that is both a collection of sources and also a process of exposing the silences introduced by such collections.<sup>12</sup> As a conscientious moment of historical production, archiving can attend to, as Lowe argues, “what could have been” as it creates “a space of productive attention to the scene of loss.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*.

<sup>13</sup> Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 40–41.

# **BLIGHT**

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# TAKING BACK “BLIGHT”

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in architecture, city planning, real estate development, municipal government, urban studies and mass media alike, “blight” has been understood as a threat to the integrity, security, and well-being of the American city (figure 1).<sup>1</sup> But the consensus around “blight” rests not on the seemingly objective character of the urban conditions to which the term refers. Rather, the consensus around “blight” rests on a more fundamental consensus around the necessity and permanence of racial capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between “blight” and racial capitalism is manifest in the ways in which the definition, discovery, and prevention of “blight” have historically been coterminous with the displacement and dispossession of non-white working-class communities. Thus, whether “blight” was found in the industrializing pre-World War II city or the de-industrializing post-World War II city, whether “blight” refers to overcrowded neighborhoods or abandoned neighborhoods, and whether the definition of “blight” has been explicitly racist or seemingly race-neutral, “blight removal” has functioned as a sanctioned mechanism of wealth accumulation by urban dispossession. As one of an ensemble of terms that emerged to know and manage the modern American city, “blight” therefore has a history that opens onto the history of race and its inevitable correlate, racism, in American urban modernity.

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1 Following the practice of St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton in *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1945), I enclose “blight” in quotation marks, here and in what follows, to foreground the discursive dimension of a phenomenon that is typically regarded as experientially obvious, even in critical analyses.

2 This essay draws on my previous work on “blight,” in particular Andrew Herscher, “Black and Blight,” in *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020) and Andrew Herscher, “The Urbanism of Racial Capitalism: Towards a History of ‘Blight’,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 40, no.1 (2020): 57-65.



Figure 1. Detroit Blight Removal Task Force,  
cover of Detroit Blight Removal Task Force  
Plan, 2014.

Urban historians have sometimes noted the way in which definitions of “blight” have vividly changed over time.<sup>3</sup> What these historians have not foregrounded, however, is how those changes have continuously functioned to advance the dispossession and displacement of communities of color in the American city. On the one hand, then, definitions of “blight” have consistently applied to property owned or occupied by people of color; on the other hand, the remediation of “blight” has consistently served to transfer property from people of color, through the state, to predominantly white investors, developers, or owners.

As such, the conceptualization of “blight” and the practice of “blight removal” have productively obscured the fundamental need in capitalism for a population of reserve labor and for urban space to accommodate that population. As “blight,” the spaces that reserve labor occupy are discursively and practically expelled from the system that produced them: these spaces are framed as obstacles to property development, as opposed to products of a disavowed form of de-development premised on maintaining reserve labor in a precarious condition. The pathologization of “blight” in American cities has thereby displaced recognition of a spatial manifestation of the contradiction between capitalism and democracy—the way in which capitalism requires inequality to productively function.

Communities that are targeted by campaigns of “blight removal” have been well aware of the stakes of these campaigns and, at times, have reconfigured discourse around “blight” to advance their own ambitions. These reconfigurations are often made in cities like Detroit, where municipal politics have revolved around “blight prevention” and “blight removal” for decades.

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3 See, for example, Robert Fogelson, “Inventing Blight: Downtown and the Origins of Urban Redevelopment,” in *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (Yale University Press, 2001).

# **STOP THE EVICTION OF LELA WHITFIELD**

**Pack the Courtroom  
Friday July 18  
10:30 am**

**36th District Court Judge Garrett  
4th floor 421 Madison St. Detroit, MI**



Lela Whitfield has lived in her Detroit home since she was a child. The home belonged to Lela's mother, who took out a reverse mortgage in 2005. Lela's mother passed away in 2010, and the lender foreclosed on the loan. The property has since been deeded to the government-controlled mortgage giant Fannie Mae, which is trying to evict Lela.

When the mortgagor for a reverse mortgage passes away, the heirs have the opportunity, by law, to buy the home for its market value. This helps prevent foreclosure and keep the home with the family. Lela is willing and able to buy the home for its market value, with help from the Detroit nonprofit United Community Housing Coalition. However, Fannie Mae refuses to accept her offer, even though they have already acted illegally. Fannie Mae has broken its own rules and laws, but they would rather evict Lela than keep her in her home.

Lela's neighborhood, like so many in Detroit, has been devastated by the foreclosure crisis. The majority of homes on her block are abandoned and in disrepair. If Lela is evicted, her home will undoubtedly become abandoned and stripped, causing further blight on the community. Fannie Mae is controlled by the federal government, which is supposed to represent the people. Join us in fighting this Eviction.

#### **TAKE FURTHER ACTION**

Call Fannie Mae. Demand they let Lela Whitfield stay in her home.

Call (312)368-6200, and (866)442-8572.

Reference: Loan # 3202852. FHA case # 2618927229-952. Address: 839 Manistique, Detroit, MI 48215

**Detroit Eviction Defense meets every Thursday at 6pm - Old St. John's Church 2120 Russell  
[detroitevictiondefense.org](http://detroitevictiondefense.org)**

Figure 2. Detroit Eviction Defense, poster protesting eviction of Lela Whitfield, Detroit, July 2015. Image courtesy Detroit Resists.

Community activists in Detroit have repeatedly and emphatically posed “blight” as a condition produced by policies around foreclosures, evictions, and investment—that is, not a problem *for* racial capitalist urbanism but a problem *of* racial capitalist urbanism.

In one potent example, from a neighborhood on Detroit’s Eastside, a 2015 protest against the eviction of a neighborhood resident from her foreclosed home included the claim that, “if Lela is evicted, her home will undoubtedly become abandoned and stripped, causing further blight to the community” (figure 2). This claim precisely and strategically reversed the politics around “blight”: while “blight” emerged in Detroit, as in other American cities, as a condition produced by the *invasion* of Black residents into the city, “blight” here became a condition produced by the *expulsion* of Black residents from the city. *Blighted* homes soliciting removal were thereby reconfigured as *Black* homes soliciting protection.

In Detroit, in the 1960s, advocates of Black power proclaimed the city “Black man’s land” and worked to advance radical self-government by the city’s Black-majority population.<sup>4</sup> These proclamations were undermined, first by the white urban regime and then by the incorporation of subsequent Black urban regimes—municipalities led by Black officeholders and Black elites—in urban development structures that continued to be based on corporate-and investor-centered policies of urban growth and the concurrent precaritization of working-class communities of color.<sup>5</sup>

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4 See, for example, Grace Lee and James Boggs, “The City is the Black Man’s Land,” *Monthly Review*, April 1966: 35-46.

5 In the words of Adolf Reed, Jr., “the dynamics that make possible the empowerment of black regimes are the same as those that produce the deepening marginalization and dispossession of a substantial segment of the urban black population”: see “The Black Urban Regime: Structural Origins and Constraints,” in *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 88.

The reconfiguration of “blighted homes” as Black homes marks a return to the practices and ambitions of radical self-government. Those homes are politicized by the communities who occupy them and transform them from architectural detritus into objects of a political imagination—the imagination of racialized spaces deleted in and by public policy, urban planning and real estate development alike. In these reconfigurations are promises of spatial justice (figure 3).



Figure 3: Lela Whitfield, Freedom Freedom, Detroit Eviction Defense, and community members, detail of Eviction Defense Fence, Detroit, August 2015. Photo courtesy Detroit Resists.

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# **BOOMERANG EFFECT**

**WAI ARCHITECTURE THINK TANK**

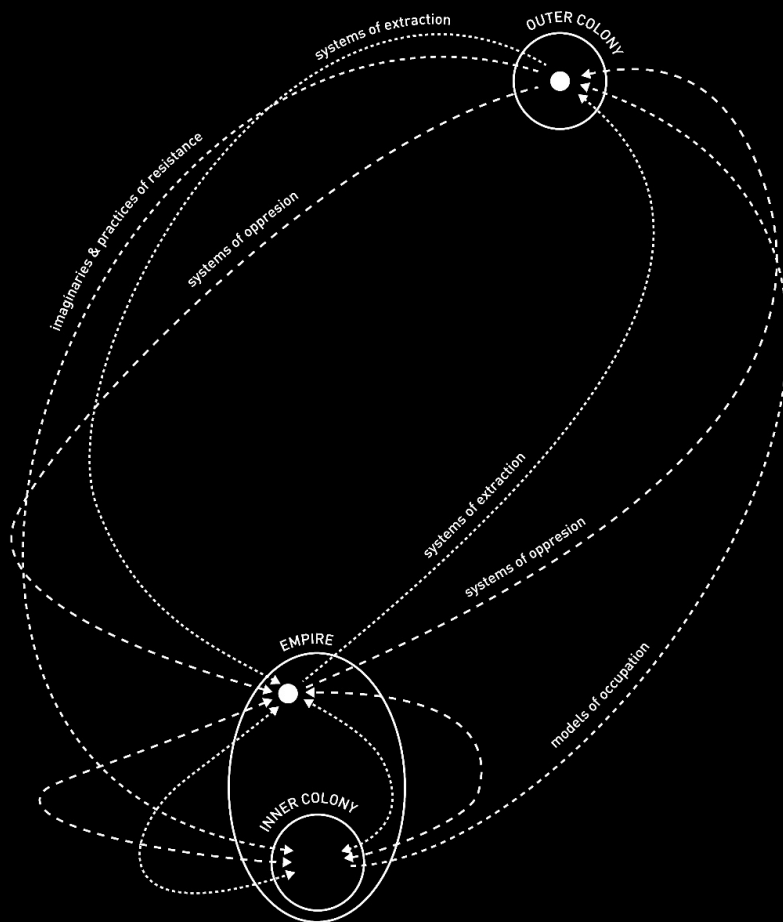


Figure 1. Boomerang Effect Diagram displays the relationship between Empire and its inner (Settler-Colonialism) and outer (Colonialism) colonies by means of the trajectory of systems of oppression and extraction that are first tried in the colonies and always make it all the way back to empire.  
WAI Architecture Think Tank, 2025.

# A BOOMERANG PROSE

*Hitler for is not the crime in itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the “coolies” of India, and the “niggers” of America.*

- Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*<sup>1</sup>

Colonialism is a disease that spreads  
and brings about endless destruction  
and displacement.

There are many types of colonialism,  
each one displaying  
a particular form of barbaric,  
(un)civilizing violence.

Colonialism outside, establishes  
development, and growth inside,  
cars, and smartphones,  
chocolate and uranium,  
bananas, and oil.

Colonialism inside, is  
settler-colonialism:  
a colonialism of settlers.

Some types of colonialism are more genocidal,  
some others are more about ethnic cleansing.

Colonialism  
oscillates (at a vertiginous pace)  
between  
extermination campaigns  
and massive expulsions,  
massacres and bombings,  
kidnappings and erasures.

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<sup>1</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000). Original French edition *Discours sur le colonialisme*, (Éditions Réclame, 1955).

Through the history of Western empires,  
colonialism has developed mechanisms  
for the construction  
and implementation of  
racial logic.

For colonialism, in its relationship to capitalism,  
race is technology  
(simultaneously a production machine  
and an invisibility cloak).

Whoever the colonialists  
enslave (native, Black, Coolies),  
must multiply.

Whoever the colonialists  
displace (Indigenous people everywhere),  
must disappear.

Via capitalism,  
colonialism produces laborers by means of race,  
while race in the settler-colony produces  
in addition  
human obstacles.

The perfect colonial formula  
for the surplus value of a growing economy  
under capitalism is:  
(free labor + free land + free resources)

—

(cost of militarized control + colonial infrastructures for trade).

Here, (free) work and (free) land  
come together to create the perfect  
capitalist-productivist formula.

The colonizers,  
either too comfortable,  
or unaware,  
benefit in many forms  
from the brutalizing fruits of  
colonialism.

In the distance:  
the regulated plantations  
    the legalized Jim Crow  
        the policy for a White Australia  
            the spatially planned Apartheid  
                the ongoing Nakba.

Inside empire,  
the bourgeoisie,  
the Capitalists and the ruling class,  
(oligarchs and despots)  
continue to make money.

The liberal pretends  
as if  
nothing happens.

That is,  
until  
the  
boomerang  
        comes  
    back  
“home.”

That one fine day  
as Aime Cesaire warns:  
*the bourgeoisie is awakened  
by a terrific boomerang effect:  
the gestapos are busy,  
the prisons fill up,  
the torturers standing around the racks invent,  
refine,  
discuss.*<sup>2</sup>

The boomerang is  
the Plantation, everywhere  
Achille Mbembe’s “the Becoming Black of the World,”<sup>3</sup>  
Malcolm X’s “Chickens coming home to roost”

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<sup>2</sup> Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 1-9.

The boomerang roams menacingly,  
through “Foreign Policy.”

First,  
it bombs, intrudes, corrupts,  
extracts, inundates, excavates,  
fracks, drills, spills,  
asphyxiates, silences, gaslights,  
intimidates, persecutes, incarcerates,  
rules with necropolitics,  
and gore capitalism  
in the occupied territories.

Back at empire and in the settler-colony,  
the boomerang hits with  
increased surveillance,  
states of exception,  
draconian austerity,  
banned books,  
closed schools,  
shut down hospitals,  
contaminated waterways,  
toxic air,  
disease,  
police-states,  
martial law,  
gender violence,  
lawlessness,  
fascism.

The boomerang effect is  
colonization dehumanizing  
even the “most civilized” person.

The boomerang effect is  
warcrafts named after native nations of  
Iroquois, Apache, Choctaw,  
killing indigenous people “abroad”  
while terrorizing whoever dares to  
resists “at home.”

The effects of the boomerang show  
empire  
destroying  
itself

like it

destroyed

the colonies.

Like occupation,  
resistance also works as a  
Boomerang.

This time,  
Post-Colonial

Imaginaries,

Solidarity,

Worldmaking.

Post-Colonial not as  
the “end” of colonial control  
but as, the blueprint of the colony  
it’s power and resistance  
globalized in a  
planetary struggle.

The Boomerang effect  
Installs the colony  
Everywhere

Post-Colonial boomerangs  
find ways  
to

imagine

the end

of capitalism

to

render

life

beyond

colonialism

and  
postpone  
the end  
of the world.

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# **BORDER**

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# ON BORDERS

## (BORDERS, SPATIAL JUSTICE, AND THE POLITICS OF DECOLONIAL IMAGINATION)

### INTRODUCTION: THE BEGINNINGS:

From the English border to the Arabic *Al-Hadd* (الحَدّ), the language of division does more than describe geography or space—it reveals how we organize power, identity, and knowledge. The English term *border*, from Old French *bordure*, meaning “edge” or “side,” took root during the rise of European nation-states. It carries connotations of sovereignty, surveillance, and exclusion.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, *Al-Hadd*, from the Arabic root ḥ-d-d (ح د د), meaning “to sharpen” or “to define,” comes with a different intellectual history. In Islamic legal and philosophical traditions, it refers not only to legal boundaries but also to ontological and epistemological limits.<sup>2</sup>

In the Western imagination, the border often appears as an apparatus of control—dividing populations, regulating mobility, and asserting the state’s power. In classical Islamic thought, *Al-Hadd* has a broader, more relational meaning. For Ibn Sīnā, it defines the essence (maḥiyya ماهية Essence) of a thing; in Jābir’s alchemy, it signals transitions between states of matter and meaning; and for Ibn Rushd, it marks the boundaries between disciplines of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Together, these two terms reflect different worldviews: one territorial and exclusionary, the other philosophical and metaphysical.

Borders are not just territorial lines; they are necropolitical and hegemonic instruments. They are sites where sovereignty decides “who may live and who must die,” making

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<sup>1</sup> Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. Christine Jones et al. (Verso, 2002), 75.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Burhān, in al-Shifā’*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya li-l-Kitāb, 1957), 45-48, 161-162.

Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, *Kitāb al-Mizān*, ed. by Paul Kraus (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1933), see introduction and thematic sections on limits and definitions.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-Maqāl fīmā bayn al-ḥikma wa-l-sharī’a min al-ittiṣāl*, ed. Georges Hourani (Brill, 1959), 44-45, 62. Ibn Rushd, *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Nafs*, ed. A. Badawī (al-Maṭba’a al-Amīriyya, 1956), 9-10, 69-70.

exclusion and disposability structural rather than incidental.<sup>4</sup> In a reminder to us all that spatial organization shapes what is seen as legitimate, knowable, and livable,<sup>5</sup> Henri Lefebvre and Wendy Brown reveal how borders police subjectivities and reproduce hierarchies.<sup>6</sup> Pursuing spatial justice, then, requires exposing these violences, challenging inherited logics of legitimacy, and reimagining borders as openings toward alternative, more just geographies.

## I. EPISTEMIC FOUNDATIONS: SPACE, POWER, JUSTICE

Modern borders came with the Westphalian state and were rooted in notions of fixed territory and sovereign control. But *Al-Hadd*, especially in classical Arabic thought, operated differently—on ontological and logical levels. In *al-Burhān*, Ibn Sīnā defines *Al-Hadd* as the formal statement that reveals a thing's essence through genus and difference.<sup>7</sup> Jābir ibn Ḥayyān's *Kitāb al-Mīzān* sees each *Al-Hadd* as governed by balance (*mīzān* الميزان)—a limit not of restriction, but of harmony.<sup>8</sup> For Ibn Rushd, the *Al-Hadd* structures thought itself: it clarifies domains of religion and philosophy while maintaining their distinct integrity.<sup>9</sup>

These concepts offer a relational and ethical understanding of limits, far removed from modern borders that divide with violence and finality. Henri Lefebvre argues that space is socially produced through a triad: spatial practice (daily routines), representations of space (maps, plans), and representational space (lived experience).<sup>10</sup> Edward Soja extends this by insisting that justice itself is spatial—it shows

4 Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.

5 Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 13–25, 37–40, 53.

6 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); 9–11, 51, 85–86. And Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 1–26, 62.

7 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Burhān*, in *al-Shifā'*, 158.

8 Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, *Kitāb al-Mīzān*, 42.

9 Ibn Rushd, *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Nafs*, 77 and Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-Maqāl fīmā bayn al-ḥikma wa-l-sharī'a min al-itṭisāl*, 10.

10 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell, 1991), 33, 38–39.

up in how access, mobility, and recognition are distributed.<sup>11</sup> Borders, in the modern capitalist world-system, are active instruments for segmenting labor, reinforcing hierarchy, and legitimizing inequality under universalist ideals. They structure the global division of labor into core, semi-periphery, and periphery zones, roles that are actively produced and maintained through interstate systems, economic policy, and social ideology. Far from natural, these borders perpetuate and normalize global hierarchies, shaping what is visible, legitimate, and possible for different populations within the world-economy.<sup>12</sup>

## **II. BORDER AS METHOD, BORDERSCAPE AS FIELD, BORDERSCAPE AS THIRD SPACE**

Recent scholarship reframes the border not just as a place or object, but as a method—a way of understanding how power and knowledge are constructed. The idea of border as method treats borders as analytical tools that expose how inclusion and exclusion are made.<sup>13</sup> In this view, borders are not static—they're dynamic processes that shape and reflect social, cultural, and political struggles. This resonates with how *Hadd* functions in Islamic thought: as a threshold that enables meaning through distinction, not separation, which is a continuous state of changing.

The concept of the Borderscape shifts attention from seeing the border as a fixed line to understanding it as a relational, diffused, episodic, perspectival, and contested formation—a mobile and relational space, an assemblage in which bordering takes place, shaped by people, mobilities, and negotiations rather than by cartographic precision.<sup>14</sup> In parallel, Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia helps reveal

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11 Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, 13–25, 53.

12 Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 22–24, 27–29, 67–69.

13 Astrid M. Fellner and Rebekka Kanesu, “*Border as Method*,” UniGR-CBS Online Glossary Border Studies (2024), 2–4; and Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), vii–viii, 3–4, 7, 16–18, 50–52, 159, 251, 270–281.

14 Christian Wille, “*Borderscapes*,” UniGR-CBS Online Glossary Border Studies (2022), 2–6.

the Borderscape as a space that is “in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert” these relations.<sup>15</sup> As in heterotopias, Borderscapes can juxtapose in a single real place several spaces that are in themselves incompatible, rendering them zones of tension, contradiction, and potential where dominant spatial orders are unsettled and open to re-negotiation.<sup>16</sup>

Edward Soja’s concept of Thirdspace draws these threads together, describing space as lived-in, messy, in-between, and at once both real and imagined, structured and improvised.<sup>17</sup> In the borderlands, identities mix, binaries dissolve, and new relationalities emerge—borders become sites of transformation rather than mere restriction.<sup>18</sup> By approaching borders as methods, fields, and Thirdspaces, we open possibilities for reimagining belonging and justice beyond division.

### III. COLONIAL BORDERS AND NECROPOLITICS

Modern borders didn’t emerge naturally—they were drawn as part of colonial projects to control land, people, and resources. Through mapping, census-taking, and property surveys, European powers imposed rigid lines across relational and communal landscapes. Achille Mbembe calls this logic “necropolitics,” which he defines as the power to decide who lives and who can be killed.<sup>19</sup> Colonial borders created extractive zones and death-worlds, especially in Africa, the Americas, and the “Middle East”. These borders are not only spatial—they are ontological. They disrupt Indigenous and precolonial understandings of land as shared, relational, and cosmologically grounded. Where *Hadd* once represented balance and transition, colonial borders brought surveillance, militarization, and exclusion. Mbembe shows how this

15 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias,” trans. from *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* no. 5 (1984): 4–6.

16 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias,” 8–9.

17 Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 6–8, 10, 67, 68–69.

18 Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 18–19.

19 Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–12.

continues today in border zones where certain lives are seen as disposable.<sup>20</sup>

In response, counter-mapping movements resist these cartographic violences. They restore erased spatialities through oral histories, fugitive paths, and, as Nancy Lee Peluso suggests, community-based knowledge.<sup>21</sup> These acts challenge the authority of colonial maps and reclaim land as a living and storied archive.

Black geographies amplify this challenge. Katherine McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds* shows how the spatial logics of slavery and segregation—ships, plantations, urban ghettos—were designed to confine and dehumanize, yet also became sites of resistance, creativity, and reimagined belonging.<sup>22</sup>

In Palestine, Eyal Weizman's notion of "vertical apartheid" reveals how Israeli control operates not only across territory but through layers—walls, watchtowers, checkpoints, tunnels, and airspace—dominating life from above and below.<sup>23</sup> Here, the border is not merely a line but a layered system of domination and surveillance embedded in everyday life. Colonial borders sought to control and erase, yet they have also become spaces where memory, resistance, and new spatial imaginaries take root.

#### IV. URBAN BORDERS AND THE CARCERAL CITY

Borders are not confined to international boundaries—they appear inside cities, shaping how people move, live, and connect. Gated communities, police checkpoints, surveillance cameras, zoning laws, crossing lines in streets, and pavements, all are acts of bordering. The Qalandia checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem in Palestine is a striking example; it is designed to produce delay, frustration, and disconnection.

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20 Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 17–23, 25–28, 39.

21 Nancy Lee Peluso, "Whose Woods Are These? Counter-Mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia," *Antipode* 27, no. 4 (1995): 383–406.

22 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 1–2, 5–8, 41–42, 89–97.

23 Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007), 7–11, 27–29, 204–213, 228–231.

This isn't unique. In cities like Los Angeles, Paris, Cairo, and Johannesburg, racial capitalism structures who belongs where and who is kept out.<sup>24</sup>

Edward Soja's work in Los Angeles shows how struggles over bus access, housing rights, and public space are fights for spatial justice.<sup>25</sup> These movements echo Henri Lefebvre's claim that space isn't just to be occupied—it is something people have the right to shape and transform.<sup>26</sup>

Manlio Brusatin gives us a compelling insight: "the line" of any border is never just a line. In modern and colonial contexts, it's a tool of control—a means of teaching power how to dominate space. From the drawing of borders to architectural training, the line becomes an exercise in authority.<sup>27</sup> In the Arab world, the straight line symbolized colonial modernity. Whether in the Sykes-Picot Agreement or gridded city plans, the straight line was seen as rational and progressive; anything curved was deemed chaotic or backward.<sup>28</sup>

Urban borders, then, are material, symbolic, and affective. They condition not only how space is used but how it is imagined—and who is allowed to imagine it.

## V. BORDERS, IDENTITY, AND ANTI-COLONIAL MEMORY

Borders are not just drawn; they are enacted through rituals, symbols, and performances. Étienne Balibar reminds us that national anthems, citizenship oaths, passport stamps, and the like help produce the nation as a felt reality.<sup>29</sup> These ceremonies perform inclusion and exclusion, embedding borders into our daily lives and identities. Yet they are haunted by colonial violence—forced migrations, partitioned homelands, and erased sovereignties.

24 Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 144–153, 165–172, 227–241 (on the Qalandia checkpoint and urban tactics of control and delay), and McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, 41–42, 81–84, 104–106.

25 Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, 4–6, 19–24, 69–78 (on LA bus, housing, and justice movements).

26 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 30–31, 383–386.

27 Manlio Brusatin, *Storia delle linee [The History of the Line]*, trans. Ahmad Zaki, (Al-Karma Publishers, 2014), 19.

28 Brusatin, *Storia delle linee [The History of the Line]*, 21.

29 Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, 29–94.

In this context, migrant crossings become counter-performances. Each act of evasion and each journey through legal loopholes disrupt the illusion of sovereign control, even occupying the crossing lines in a random street is a performative act. Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands*, calls this “mestiza consciousness”<sup>30</sup>—a way of thinking and being that embraces contradiction, hybridity, and resilience. The mestiza doesn’t belong neatly to either side; it lives in the in-between and makes its own.

Walter Mignolo’s border thinking builds on this, calling for a move away from Western universals and toward pluriversality against duality and modernity’s binaries and for multiple ways of knowing and being rooted in the experiences of the colonized.<sup>31</sup> Achille Mbembe expands this vision: a future of planetary responsibility, mobility, and encounter, where the border becomes a space of relation rather than exclusion.<sup>32</sup>

Decolonial spatial justice isn’t just about making borders more humane—it’s about dismantling the idea of the border as a hegemonic spatial structure. And people are already doing this. Anti-colonial networks turn urban geography into solidarity routes, checkpoints into installations of “Resi[lience] stance,”<sup>33</sup> and abandoned infrastructure or ruins into spaces of care and hope. Yara Sharif illustrates these networks in Palestine, where women in Ramallah walk through the sewage pipes under the apartheid wall and men climb over the wall to reach their families and jobs.<sup>34</sup> In cities like São Paulo, Lagos,

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30 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 99-104..

31 Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 203–205, 265–268  
32 Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 39-40..

33 “Resi[lience]stance,” as theorized by Abdalla Bayyari, describes the embodied and spatial forms of resistance that arise under regimes of control, particularly in the Arab context. The concept merges “resilience” and “resistance” to highlight how bodies—through their presence and expressive movement in public spaces—both endure and actively confront repression. Bayyari argues that such bodily acts, including movement in urban context and other forms of public expression, challenge the mechanisms of power that seek to regulate individuals and spaces, making the body itself a site of both adaptation and opposition. For “Resi[lience]stance,” see Abdalla Bayyari, “Resi[lience]stance: Embodiment and Urban Resistance in the Contemporary Arab World” (forthcoming).

34 Yara Sharif, *Architecture of Resistance: Cultivating Moments of Possibility within the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Routledge: 2017), 61.

and Barcelona, rooftop gardens, informal housing, and street markets create zones where borders loosen their grip. These practices aren't just survival—they're world-making.

## CONCLUSION: TOWARD A POLITICS OF SPATIAL JUSTICE

Borders, whether traced as lines on a map or enacted through daily rituals, are never neutral or static. They are colonial technologies, epistemic devices, and lived realities that shape what is possible, knowable, and just. From the metaphysical thresholds of *Al-Hadd* to the necropolitical violence of modern frontiers, borders organize both exclusion and belonging, exploitation and resistance. Yet, as this essay has shown, borders are also generative: they can be reimaged as sites of encounter, creativity, and solidarity. Anti-colonial practices—from counter-mapping to mutual aid—prefigure new geographies where inherited divisions are unsettled and spatial justice becomes thinkable. To move beyond the border as a paradigm of rule is to embrace multiplicity, memory, and the right to transform space. In doing so, we open the possibility for more just, plural, and livable worlds, where borders no longer dictate the terms of life and belonging.

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**CANON**

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# CANON / QĀNŪN / KANŌN

## A FRAMEWORK FOR ARCHITECTURE

*[so-called]: western canon – English*  
*alternatively: qānūn قانون - Arabic*  
*both rooted from: kanōn κανών - Greek*

### CODE, LAW, RULE, PRINCIPLES

This ancient, transmuted word – canon/qānūn/kanōn in various iterations has meant: code, law, rule, principles,<sup>1</sup> but has also meant a delicate, wooden, stringed musical instrument from ancient Mesopotamia. In Ancient Greece, the kanōn was used to describe the ‘rule’ or ‘standard’ regarding proportion and design and is cited by Polyclitus as the name of a sculpture he created depicting the ‘rule’ and ‘standard.’ The word was transmuted by Christian writers to describe the approved selection of books of the Bible. In Arabic, the semantically similar-rooted word *qānūn* means both the law and a musical instrument. The *qānūn* musical instrument has its codes, rules and principles to ensure: melody, beauty, and evocation.

It is not clear, really, who and precisely when, in late-blooming western culture, ‘canon’ became code for: ideal, noteworthy, original, and the best examples. At this juncture those ‘ideal, noteworthy, original and best examples’ that were/are cited in every derivative architecture history book are just an odd collection of isolated and disjunctured ideas presented as fountain heads of western colonial culture, denuded of oeuvre, of local, of palimpsest, of history—an antithetical derivation of ‘code, law, rule and principles.’

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<sup>1</sup> In 1025 CE, a millennium ago, the Canon of Medicine (القانون في الطب) by Ibn Sina was released in several volumes, and was the sole source of scholarship on the subject in Europe and beyond for seven centuries. For an excellent source regarding the western appropriation of knowledge from the Islamic world, see:

Sami Hamarneh, “The Life Sciences” in *The Genius of Arab Civilization Source of Renaissance*, (New York University Press, 1975.): 168-169.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Science*, (Westerham Press Ltd, 1976.): 174-179.

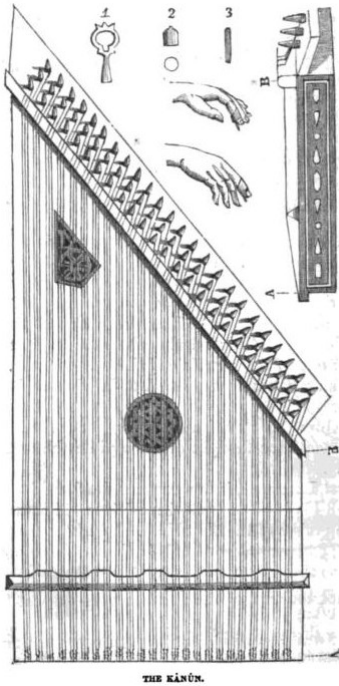


Figure 1: Qanun and Qanun Performer in Jerusalem illustrated in William Thomson's *The Land and the Book: or, biblical illustrations drawn from the manners and customs, the scenes and scenery of the holy land* (T. Nelson and Sons, 1860), 576-677. This stringed Assyrian musical instrument from ancient Mesopotamia, the qānūn, shares its name with the Arabic version of the term referring to 'rule' or 'law.' The plucking of musical notes, from strings stretched across a wooden body, when performed with care and understanding, allows for infinite creative melodies wholly evocative of beauty.

## MELODY, BEAUTY AND EVOCATION

If there are valuable ideas to be taught to architecture students, let the canon/qānūn/kanōn inspire a *framework* of melody, beauty and evocation with an ever-changing, dynamic and rooted interrogation of examples that are plural, abundant and ever-challenged.

A dynamic framework understanding of the canon/qānūn/kanōn is especially vital in architecture education as both pedagogues and students navigate the ‘codes’ and ‘rules’ of design: what is aspirational, relevant and important—both in content and process? The so-called existing ‘canon’ of architecture is objectively a calcified relic. The content of architecture education urgently needs dynamic, inclusive, global, non-hierarchical, and anti-racist examples of excellence. The method of understanding this content also needs to be one of questioning, curiosity, and interrogation, so that the architects of our future worlds serve to create a better quality of life for all, and endeavour towards melody, beauty and, evocation.

Let us seriously and rigorously examine the canon/qānūn/kanōn of vernacular, ancient, and contemporary spaces. Let us not just wax lyrical about facades but dwell inside rooms, landscapes, materials, and the uncomfortable realities that no architecture is singular, neutral, nor ideal.

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# CARE

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# UNSETTLING CARE

In *Noopiming*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes about opening oneself up to a reciprocal world alive with animals, people, land, and water. In one passage, as the characters discuss autonomy and collective care, Simpson writes:

Nothing drives Mindimooyenh more crazy than ‘self-care.’

‘We are self-caring our way to fascism,’ they yell.

I try to explain.

‘That’s not a thing,’ they reply. ‘It is just care.’<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to narratives of self-care increasingly discussed from individualistic and neoliberal positions, care always brings with it a politics, relations, and web of interconnections.<sup>2</sup> As Donna Haraway notes, “nothing comes without its world.”<sup>3</sup> That is to say, all relations involve care and care itself is relational. Environmental philosopher María Puig de la Bellacasa has expanded on this point, explaining how care is always present and an accompaniment to all life, even as uneven power relations assure that not all relationships can be defined as caring.<sup>4</sup>

Over the past several years, there has been no shortage of writing, thinking, and drawing about care.<sup>5</sup> As though care is a catch-all term that can both make sense of and clean up the world’s messes: racial capitalism and climate change resulting from centuries of colonialism, imperialism, and war-making. Yet, care is not a simple term. It is not inherently benign or

1 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *Noopiming: The cure for white ladies*, (Anansi, 2020), 86.

2 Jina B. Kim, and Sami Schalk. “Reclaiming the Radical Politics of Self-Care.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2021): 325-42; Audre Lorde, “A Burst of Light,” in *A Burst of Light: Essays*. (Firebrand Books, 1988), 40-133.

3 Donna J. Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. FemaleMan\_meets\_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience*. Second ed. (Routledge, 2018), 37; María Puig de la Bellacasa ““Nothing Comes without Its World’: Thinking with Care.” *The Sociological Review* 60, no. 2 (2012): 197-216.

4 Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012: 198.

5 See Sara Jacobs and Taryn Wiens. “Landscapes of Care: Politics, Practices, and Possibilities.” *Landscape Research* 49, no. 3 (2024): 428-444 for a comprehensive review of the recent ways care has been thought about within landscape studies, design, and related fields.

normatively good. Work done in the name of care—paternalistic ideas of “caring for” people, environments, lands—have long been used to justify the domination, dehumanization, and exploitation upon which the above systems of oppression depend. Feminist geographers have likewise considered how unjust systems of labor and work have created the need for care; work that queer folks, people of color, women, and others on the edges have always done, often as a response to institutional or state neglect.<sup>6</sup> For these reasons, M. Murphy has cautioned against equating care with positive feelings akin to political goodness, calling instead for an unsettling of care that requires both creating conditions for care as well as dismantling systems of harm.<sup>7</sup>

So, what would it mean to unsettle care? In teaching about care in relation to spatial and environmental justice, I tend to start with Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s often-cited quote: “where life is precious, life *is* precious.”<sup>8</sup> I like this quote for a few reasons: it is spatial (*where* life is), it is critical (not all life is currently considered precious), and it opens a conversation about how care arises, for whom, and in what conditions. Gilmore makes clear the ways care is not only spatial but that it is also relational, all while suggesting the radical possibilities of how caring relations might create new worlds of collective liberation. For life to be precious—to be life-affirming—attention must be given to how care governs who (and what) is allowed to live and under what conditions.

Attending to the biopolitical relations of care challenges landscape and design practices that (literally) smooth or hold still the diversity of socio-ecological relations. Here, I am thinking with Anna Tsing’s discussions of friction and non-scalability—the need for interconnections across difference—bell hooks on love, care, and conflict not being reduced to

6 Victoria Lawson, “Geographies of Care and Responsibility.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97, no. 1 (2007): 1-11; Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher, “Toward a feminist theory of caring,” in *Circles of care: Work and Identity in Women’s Lives*, eds. Emily Abel and Margaret Nelson. (SUNY Press, 1990): 36–54.

7 M Murphy, “Unsettling Care: Troubling Transnational Itineraries of Care in Feminist Health Practices.” *Social Studies of Science* 45, no. 5 (2015): 717-37.

8 Ruth Wilson Gilmore interviewed in Kushner, Rachel. “Is prison necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore might change your mind.” *The New York Times*, (April 17, 2019).

smoothing out differences, and Malcom Ferdinand's "double fracture" that holds environmental and colonial struggles together.<sup>9</sup> These ideas of rupture begin to unsettle how care might unmake, or crack open, landscapes predicated on smoothness that maintains or upholds dominant and status quo material, ecological, or building practices. Through these cracks, how can the stories that saturate and situate land and water all around us guide more respectful and just relationships?

As care is increasingly discussed as part of the status quo—as through the need for care hasn't arisen from state and institutional neglect, abandonment, and harm in the first place—I am drawn to what Sara Ahmed might describe as willful care: care that is defiant, that is refusal, that is deviant. In assembling a queer archive of willfulness, Ahmed notes that willfulness is a "failure to comply with those whose authority is given."<sup>10</sup> To be willful, for Ahmed, is to be a threat, to be a problem to hegemony. Willful care is that which refuses to adapt, that refuses to maintain; care that emerges in opposition to practices that hold life and land in stasis.

Reading Ahmed, I am reminded of Mierle Laderman Ukeles' 1969 CARE Manifesto in which she writes, "the sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage Monday morning?"<sup>11</sup> For those who are already deemed willful, care often collides in the intersectional ways as our own bodies become sites of care-work through spatial, ecological, or material relations that stretch into the embodied labor of teaching, research, and design. If care governs life and liveliness, what would it mean to practice care that is willful, as opposed to care that is willing?

Acting and thinking through care can fracture hegemonic ways of knowing, meaning that ways of living that emerge through care can remake power relations upon which existing structures of white supremacy, patriarchy, and

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9 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. "On Nonscalability: The Living World Is Not Amenable to Precision-Nested Scales." *Common Knowledge* 25, no. 1-3 (2019): 143-62; bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, (William Morrow, 2020); Malcom Ferdinand. *A Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World*, (Cambridge, 2021).

10 Sara Ahmed. *Willful Subjects*, (Duke University Press, 2014), 1.

11 Mierle Laderman Ukeles. *Manifesto for maintenance art* [text] (1969).

extractive capitalism depend. Our shared future depends on the removal of these intersecting structures of oppression, making radical approaches to care necessary and urgent for bringing just land futures into existence. Yet, invoking care without pushing against these structures merely remakes and maintains them.<sup>12</sup> Let us instead practice care that creates lively and collective possibilities for murky lands, waters, and bodies; care that is deeply relational and radically willful.

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<sup>12</sup> Jacobs and Wiens, "Landscapes of Care," 440.

# CLIMATE ESSENTIALISM

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Abstractions of climate permeate the built environment in what we call climate-adaptive architecture, typically associated with the tropical zone—generally associated with anything other than the temperate zones—, or in variations of style, often exclusive associated with Western contexts, where a temperate climate has been naturalized. Such truth is evident in the classification of non-Western architecture(s) as ‘climate-responsive,’ ‘tropical,’ and ‘vernacular,’ among other terms that have been employed to underplay the role and agency of non-Western agents.

Variations of such an obvious yet pervasive notion have been critically historicized by Hannah Le Roux, Ola Uduku, Vandana Baweja, Jiat-Hwee Chang, Anooradha Siddiqi, Esra Akcan,<sup>1</sup> among other scholars, who have employed postcolonial theory to historically situate ‘climate’ in architecture, across national and imperial lines, as widely reliant on variations of climate essentialism—the historically racist assumption that climate defines (and classifies) peoples and, therefore, cultural and social development.

While a simple version of climate determinism is attributed to ancient Greece and even the Enlightenment, the theory was particularly consequential in the hands of late nineteenth and, mainly, twentieth-century scholars, specifically American geographer Ellsworth Huntington (1876–1947), who employed this harmful theory in the service of Western imperialism.<sup>2</sup> Starting in the eighteenth century, continuous developments in European colonial and tropical knowledge

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1 Hannah le Roux, “The Networks of Tropical Architecture,” *The Journal of Architecture* 8, no. 3 (January 2003): 337–54; Ola Uduku, “Modernist Architecture and ‘the Tropical’ in West Africa: The Tropical Architecture Movement in West Africa, 1948–1970,” *Habitat International* 30, no. 3 (September 2006): 396–411; Vandana Baweja, “Otto Koenigsberger and the Tropicalization of British Architectural Culture,” in *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity*, Duanfang Lu (Routledge, 2010), 236–54; Jiat-Hwee Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Colonial Networks, Nature and Technoscience* (Routledge, 2016); Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, “Architecture Culture, Humanitarian Expertise: From the Tropics to Shelter, 1953–93,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 76, no. 3 (2017): 367–84; Esra Akcan, “The Verandah between Climate Determinism and Climate Consciousness: Colonial Comfort or Self-Determination?,” *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art* 2024, no. 54 (May 1, 2024): 50–63.

2 Mike Hulme, “Reducing the Future to Climate: A Story of Climate Determinism and Reductionism,” *Osiris* 26, no. 1 (2011): 250, <https://doi.org/10.1086/661274>.

associated the “torrid zone” with geographical and biological homogeneity. That is, in the historian Nancy Stepan’s words: “a place of radical otherness to the temperate world, with which it contrasted and which it helped constitute.”<sup>3</sup> By the second half of the nineteenth century, European colonial powers, primarily England, France, Germany, and the Netherlands, invested significant effort in the research and institutionalization of tropical knowledge, focusing on tropical fauna, flora, and socio-political climates, to ensure the successful occupation of those areas by white settlers. Nineteenth-century efforts, which had primarily pertained to the military, would evolve into a twentieth-century technoscientific discourse that, although entrenched in modern institutions and discourses ranging from medical hygiene to architecture, still relied on nineteenth-century racial connotations based on environmental and climatic determinism. European settlers and administrators, therefore, were framed as agents of climatic mastery—armed with science, architecture, and hygiene to “correct” the deficiencies of tropical environments. Architecture itself became a medium through which these logics were spatialized: buildings were designed to protect white bodies while reinforcing hierarchies between colonizer and colonized. In this framework, climate was (is) not neutral—it was weaponized to produce racialized geographies of power, where occupation was recast as environmental necessity and imperialism as a civilizing mission.

That Architecture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially climate-responsive architecture in the tropics, has been designed and produced primarily for the benefit of white bodies, is not an understatement.<sup>4</sup> Baweja traces the roots of tropical architecture as a field of study in the British imperial context to tropical medicine and hygiene, which, by the 1950s, had shifted entirely from “medical

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3 Nancy Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (Cornell University Press, 2001), 17.

4 Vandana Baweja, “A Pre-History of Green Architecture: Otto Koenigsberger and Tropical Architecture, from Princely Mysore to Post-Colonial London” (Doctor of Philosophy (Architecture), The University of Michigan, 2008), 108–9, <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/60709>.

personnel and sanitary engineers to modernist architects.”<sup>5</sup> Science and infrastructure were the means to counter concerns about the tropics’ septic environment, higher temperatures, local diseases, and effects on Europeans’ health, as well as to leverage tropical economic opportunities for the extraction of natural and human resources, mainly of cheap labor. The trope of the tropics as sites of excessive heat, disease, and disorder, which rendered local societies as environmentally constrained and therefore incapable of self-governance or progress, justifying colonial occupation, has spanned climate-responsive architectures, as well as broader definitions of territory and nation. Most notably, in the construction of black freedom in Liberia, justified by the belief that cold climates were not suitable for African Americans, for example.<sup>6</sup>

Recent environmental disasters in the tropics have highlighted updated perceptions, often associated with the Global South, as the locus of ecological and humanitarian crises, where climate change exhibits its most severe effects.<sup>7</sup> Considering architecture’s intrinsic relationship to the future—even if immediate or long-term, and the overwhelming variants involved in the prediction of future during and post climate change—climate being the only know variable, scholars have pointed to a new version of climate determinism, characterized by Michael Hulme as “climate reductionism,” which although of different intellectual and political lineages, has suffered from a similar “epistemological slippage,” emphasizing climate as the sole determinant of future imagination over human agency.<sup>8</sup>

While climate deterministic assumptions have long served to marginalize tropical regions—casting them as sites of disease, passivity, or environmental inadequacy—their persistence in contemporary discourse raises a fundamental question: if tropical places are deemed unfit to lead or innovate

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5 Baweja, “A Pre-History of Green Architecture: Otto Koenigsberger and Tropical Architecture, from Princely Mysore to Post-Colonial London,” 110.

6 See Ikuko Asaka, *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation* (Duke University Press, 2017).

7 Christian Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* (Nation Books, 2011), 9.

8 Hulme, “Reducing the Future to Climate.”

in response to environmental crisis, why has the West—framed as temperate, rational, and technologically superior—not been held accountable for its disproportionate role in producing that very crisis? Unpacking the histories of climate determinism offers a critical pathway toward Western accountability and a necessary material and historical reckoning. As climate change destabilizes the geographic binaries that once underpinned imperial and architectural hierarchies, enduring forms of climate essentialism and reductionism reveal less about the environments they purport to describe and more about the ideological structures they are designed to uphold.

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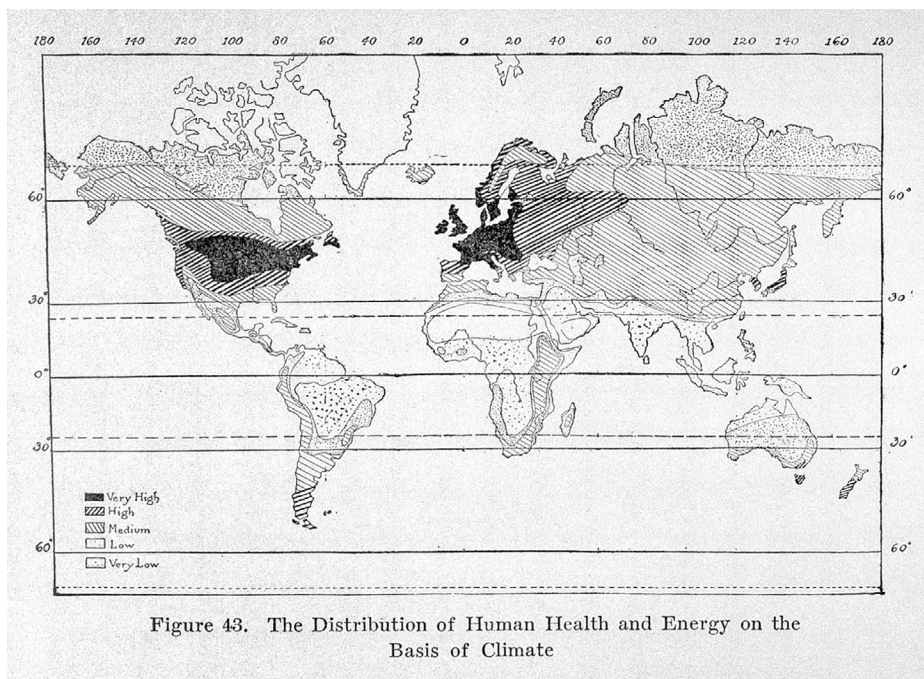


Figure 43. The Distribution of Human Health and Energy on the Basis of Climate

Figure 1. 'The Distribution of Human Health and Energy on the Basis of Climate', from Ellsworth Huntington, *Civilization and Climate* (New Haven, 1924).

# **COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS**

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# ON COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

IN WA‘Y WE REMEMBER, IN JAM‘ WE RETURN

Collective consciousness, Al-wa‘y al-jam‘ī (الوعي الجماعي), draws from two deeply resonant Arabic roots: wa‘y (وعي) and jam‘ (جمع). Wa‘y stems from the root w-‘-y, meaning to internalize knowledge, to retain, to be aware. In Arabic, the words “collective” (jam‘ī) and “university” (jāmi‘a) share the same root, j-m-‘ — the act of gathering, assembling, bringing together what has been scattered. In my previous work on the university campus, ḥaram jāmi‘ī (حرم جامعي), I explored how this term invokes both sacredness (ḥ-r-m) and collectivity (j-m-‘), suggesting that the university was once imagined not only as a place of institutional knowledge but as a sacred scholarly collective, a sanctuary of learning, a site of gathering for those committed to critical thought.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the modern university has been hollowed out. It produces the professional rather than the learner, a subject, as Stefano Harney and Fred Moten argue, who must be removed from the history they invoke. The university manufactures ideological knowledge useful to the world of consumption, careerism, and compliance.<sup>2</sup> But this is not the kind of knowledge that nourishes or sustains critical collective consciousness.

In *Seeking Spatial Justice*, Edward Soja uses the term “critical spatial consciousness” sparingly, most notably in a chapter titled “*Toward a New Spatial Consciousness*.” Briefly but powerfully, he describes it as “a motivating and mobilizing political force.”<sup>3</sup> For Soja, without a critical spatial consciousness, unjust geographies remain invisible and

1 Jenan Ghazal, “Reclaiming the Lawn: Decolonial Placemaking Practices At The People’s Circle,” (paper Session no. 18: Contested Ground(s) presented at the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada (SSAC), Ottawa, May 29, 2025)

2 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, (Minor Compositions, 2013), 30-32.

3 Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 42.

unchallenged, quietly shaping the “normal” order of everyday life. To become spatially conscious, then, is to refuse to take space for granted — to see its politics, segregations, violences, and potentialities.

A critical spatial consciousness is therefore always **collective**. In anti-colonial struggles, collectivity often emerges through a refusal of isolation, through the need to stand together, speak together, remember together. *Al-wa‘y al-jam‘ī* — collective consciousness — is not simply shared understanding, but the coming-into-being of a people who know together, who feel and act through a mutual recognition of colonial systems and the future possibility of justice. It is not only about oppression; it is the formation of a shared horizon of resistance, articulated through language, place, and relation.

This consciousness appears through **collocation** — the politics of placement and proximity: where bodies gather in protest, where stories are placed side-by-side in oral traditions, where colloquial speech interrupts formal languages and institutional authority. The colloquial (*‘āmmiyya*, meaning vernacular or intimate) defies colonial erasure and exposes the systems of power that operate across geographies. Words like “justice,” “return,” and “land” start to connect again, not just semantically, but spatially and affectively. In Arabic, these movements live in *jam‘*. I have seen this firsthand on campus.

The coming-together of knowledges, solidarities, and political possibilities produces a new kind of consciousness, one that is collective, spatially aware, and anti-colonial. When students encamp on university grounds and name these spaces liberated zones, when communities teach in tents a collective history of genocide, trauma, and resistance, they are not only protesting — they are engaging in the spatial practice of collective consciousness. Over tidy lawns and under institutional scrutiny, the *jam‘* of tents — grounded in soil that long bore witness to the colonial uprooting of native landscapes — becomes a performative reorientation of the university itself. Here, the learner reclaims the space not as a professional-in-training, but as a subject of liberation, a maker

of radical knowledge. This reconfiguration of *jam* ' refuses to conform to the image the university claims to stand for. It is a collective refusal. A refusal to uphold selective human rights under the guise of neutrality. A refusal of the university's silence, its complicity, and its imagined innocence. The encampment collocates rage, pedagogy, grief, and refusal. It is a thirdspace in Soja's terms<sup>4</sup> — not purely material, not purely symbolic, but a lived, insurgent geography. It is where anti-colonial learning is not just spoken, but enacted and embodied.

Our collective consciousness is, at its root, a gathering and re-gathering of knowledges, memories, and bodies — all that colonial violence seeks to scatter and erase. In this gathering, we find clarity. In this proximity, we find potentialities. And when we become scattered by choice or force, the *jam* ' (collective) continues to live beyond the space where it was created and nurtured. In the rhythm of the chants we memorized, the images we archived, the threads of chats on social media platforms, and our digital presence that defied shadow banning. This collective is not reducible to digital or physical space. The university might reclaim the lawn, but it cannot make us unlearn *al-wa 'y* (the consciousness) shaped by the *jam* '. In the space of encounter, it creates space elsewhere — on another lawn, a different campus, another street. And so, we carry it as a living, breathing thing, rooted in the space of encounter, spanning across geographies and mother tongues from Palestine to Turtle Island, from Lebanon, Sudan, Congo, Kashmir... In each "elsewhere," we do not start from scratch, but return (*awda*) to a deeper collective (*jam* '). The collective exists in its own potential to re-ignite, reappear, and assemble bodies, struggles, and dreams.

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<sup>4</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 1996).



Figure 1: The gathering of tents at the People's Circle for Palestine (King's Circle, St. George Campus, the University of Toronto). Photo by author, 2 May 2024.



Figure 2: On the Orange Turf, waiting for the next teach-in at the People's Circle for Palestine. Photo by author, 15 May 2024.

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# **COLLECTIVE STEWARDSHIP**

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# TOWARDS A POLITICS OF SOLIDARITY

Examples of architectures that enforce systems of control, hierarchy, and enclosure abound. These spatial regimes—designed as imagined strongpoint of stability—often mask the violence of racial capitalism and colonial domination. Yet they are, in fact, materially, politically, and socially brittle. Their instability, sustained through resource-intensive infrastructure, exposes the injustices they uphold and underscores the need to reconsider our attachments to their permanence.

The term ‘stewardship’ carries etymological roots that trace back to *stigweard* in Old English: “one who has charge of the affairs of the household or estate of another.”<sup>1</sup> From *stig*, meaning hall or pen, and *weard*, guard—stewardship began as the practice of guarding what belongs to someone else. It was applied to royal households and came to designate high-ranking state officials—agents of management and control, often on behalf of empire.<sup>2</sup> This figure, historically positioned within structures of hierarchy and obligation, raises the question: is stewardship inherently a power function? Is the steward ever neutral? To speak of *stewardship* is to pose a series of questions: what are we keeping? For whom? In what name are we trying to repair, maintain, or rehabilitate what has been broken—by force, by extraction, by design?

To examine stewardship collectively, then, is to reckon with the politics of *who* manages and *what* is guarded. It is to ask whether keeping and caretaking can be wrested from traditions of domination and reimagined in service of justice. How might we, as architects, historians, and researchers, become stewards *with* rather than *of*—in solidarity, not in charge?

I stand with Ariella Aïsha Azoulay’s refusal “to inhabit the position of the historian who arrives after the events are

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1 Harper Douglas, “Steward,” Etymonline, accessed July 4, 2025, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/steward>.

2 Douglas, “Steward.”

over [...] dissociated in time and space from where we are.”<sup>3</sup> Collective stewardship resists belatedness. It reframes research and pedagogy not as abstract or detached practices, but as situated, ethical, and politically entangled engagements. This approach emphasizes returning to sites with attentiveness—through listening, sensing, and documenting textures, sounds, and layers. Terrains is not approached to be mastered, but to be heard. The question becomes: what forms of accountability can be cultivated in relation to place? Stewardship, in this sense, requires sustained attunement—slow, repetitive, and often uncomfortable. It does not yield easily to the logic of settler-colonial knowledge systems that prize order, legibility, and progress. In place of mastery, we must seek relations. In place of conclusions, we must seek commitments.

In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Edward Saïd argues that the intellectual must speak truth to power, particularly on behalf of those silenced or dispossessed. He calls for precisely this act of speaking out against the mechanisms that guard and sustain power:

[...] I would go so far as saying that the intellectual must be involved in a lifelong dispute with all the guardians of sacred vision or text, whose depredations are legion and whose heavy hand brooks no disagreement and certainly no diversity. Uncompromising freedom of opinion and expression is the secular intellectual’s main bastion: to abandon its defense or to tolerate tamperings with any of its foundations is in effect to betray the intellectual’s calling.<sup>4</sup>

Though he does not use the term ‘stewardship,’ his writing proposes a form of moral and political commitment that aligns with it—especially when exercised collectively. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Saïd exposes how scholarship and cultural practices are shaped by and participate in imperial power.<sup>5</sup> Empire, as Edward Saïd and Gauri Viswanathan have

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3 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso, 2019), 286.

4 Edward W. Saïd, “Speaking Truth to Power,” In *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*, (Vintage Books, 1994), 88–89.

5 Edward W. Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism*, (Vintage Books, 1993) 3–14.

shown, has permeated pedagogy at its core. As they note, education was not a neutral tool but a structure of imperial stewardship: a curriculum designed to produce subjects modeled on the values of the colonizer—through the guidance of British rulers cast as “Platonic Guardians.”<sup>6</sup> This vision positioned imperial authority as a moral and civilizational stewardship, disguising domination as care.

Saïd emphasizes that this ideological project was enforced not only through physical force, but more insidiously through the persuasive routines of hegemony—what he calls its quotidian, inventive, and executive power.<sup>7</sup> This form of stewardship extended to the built environment: through what Alfred Crosby calls “ecological imperialism,” the land itself was reshaped; through architecture and urban planning, colonial cities constructed as physical expressions of imperial order.<sup>8</sup> In the metropole, too, new elites and cultural forms emerged—agents and beneficiaries of an imperial system that sustained itself through practices of governance masked as guardianship.

Saïd’s work on Palestine, including *After the Last Sky*, insists on memory and land as sites of resistance and collective identity. In this way, Saïd offers us a deeply political, justice-oriented sense of stewardship—not of resources or territories, but of history, solidarity, and enduring struggle. He invokes the Arabic concept of *sumud*, meaning “to stay put, to cling to our houses and land by all means available,”<sup>9</sup> as a mode of resistance grounded in presence. Writing of West Bank lawyer and author Raja Shihadeh, Saïd describes his work as “a form of elementary resistance, a way of turning presence into small-scale obduracy [...] a daily articulation of the formidably precise status quo into which [one is] bound.”<sup>10</sup> At the edge

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6 A term that Saïd borrows from apologist Charles Trevelyan. Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism*, 109. Quoted in Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest, Literary Study and British Rule in India*, (Columbia University Press, 1989), 132.

7 Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism*, 109.

8 Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*, (Cambridge University Press, 1986). Quoted in Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism*, 109.

9 Edward W. Saïd, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, (Columbia University Press, 1986), 100.

10 Saïd, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, 100.

of such containment, Shihadeh suggests, “you discover your freedom, which is neither capitulation nor blind, consuming hate, but a sense that your mind is the one thing that you can prevent your oppressor from having the power to touch.”<sup>11</sup>

In architectural practice and pedagogy, collective stewardship demands that we discover our freedom, from small-scale obduracy and presence to radically different spatial imaginaries. Architecture has always been a tool of power—a disciplining force. But this does not mean we must abandon it. Rather, we can reorient the architectural project toward a politics of solidarity. That means understanding buildings, maps, archives, and territories not just as objects of study, but as co-authored spatial imaginaries. It means that research must become a terrain of political commitment.

Teaching and researching in Mi’kma’ki, I see this echoed in the demands of students and organizers at four Halifax Universities (Dalhousie University, NSCAD, SMU and King’s), including those at the Al Zeitoun University encampment in the Studley Quad,<sup>12</sup> inspired by global movements like Columbia University’s protest against the genocide in Palestine. These students are not only resisting war and displacement; they are building a different kind of university—they are practicing stewardship as collective refusal and collective care: mobilizing communities, building infrastructures of mutual aid, and reimagining education in solidarity with liberation struggles. Many educators are already doing this work—elders and land-based teachers who steward not abstract knowledge, but shared practices of care and kinship. They model what it means to learn *with* place rather than *about* it. Such stewardship already exists—in protest camps, in oral histories, in makeshift kitchens, in song—it cannot be done alone; it requires community, commitment, and humility. Collective stewardship, then, is not a management technique.

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<sup>11</sup> Raja Shihadeh quoted in Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, 100.

<sup>12</sup> Lauren Phillips, “Student encampment at Dal begins Sunday following release of demands over the weekend,” *The Coast*, June 16, 2014, <https://www.thecoast.ca/news-opinion/breaking-student-encampment-at-dal-begins-sunday-following-release-of-demands-over-the-weekend-32852800>.

It is a practice of radical relation. It is care without control. It is memory without finality. It is not the work of saving, but of staying.

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# **COLONIAL MODERNITY**

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# SPATIAL JUSTICE BEYOND TODAY'S COLONIAL MODERNITY

In the last few decades, relational approaches to space have become widespread.<sup>1</sup> Relational theorisations have been crucial for challenging surface-bound Euclidean and sedentary conceptions of space. They have also helped grapple with the centrality of power in producing space and making places.

Relationality spanning humans and nonhumans has helped foreground the continual and contingent production of space through diverse social-material practices; the making of places through globally extensive connections and mobilities; the engendering of multiplicities of identities and cultures as inherent to dynamic production of space and place; and the possibilities of spatial justice – both distributive and procedural – associated with those multiplicities in the present and future. In this short essay, I ask how relational approaches have considered *radical alterities* among diverse ways of knowing-being. Appreciating these ways as *worlds*, I propose a reconsideration of spatial justice as reparative justice beyond the confines of today's globally hegemonic modern world.

It is this world that has enabled the Israeli government and military to inflict the genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.<sup>2</sup>

It is this world that has been constituted by legacies, continuities, and emergences of distinctively colonial relations.

It is this world that lies behind global social-ecological crises and may be aptly described as *colonial modernity*.<sup>3</sup>

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1 For example: Stephen Graham and Patsy Healey. "Relational Concepts of Space and Place: Issues for Planning Theory and Practice." *European Planning Studies* 7, no 5 (1999): 623–46. doi:10.1080/09654319908720542; Doreen Massey, *For Space*, (SAGE Publications, 2005); Jonathan Darling. "Thinking Beyond Place: The Responsibilities of a Relational Spatial Politics." *Geography Compass* 3, no. 5 (2009): 1938–1954; Peter Merriman, *Mobility, Space and Culture* (Routledge, 2012).

2 Saurabh Arora, Les Levidow et al., "Confronting the World's 21st Century Colonial Genocide," *Society for Social Studies of Science (4S)*, March 25, 2025, [https://4sonline.org/news\\_manager.php?page=39875](https://4sonline.org/news_manager.php?page=39875).

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## WORLDS AND THEIR (UN)MAKING

Beyond its equation with progress and development through processes such as industrialisation and bureaucratisation, the modern world is philosophically seen as embedding a range of ontological bifurcations. Widely debated among these are bifurcations of culture and nature, subject and object, mind and matter, fact and affect, and time and space.<sup>4</sup> These are taken to constitute modernity's techno-scientific developments and wider ecological-cultural *worldmaking*.<sup>5</sup>

Such bifurcations help modern natural sciences claim universal objectivity and modern engineering promote its 'efficient' artefacts and infrastructures.

Claiming such objectivity and efficiency, modern technologies and sciences are impressed upon multiple other worlds that may be categorised as indigenous or traditional. In this process, distinctive ontologies of other worlds are obscured (while being furtively attacked and appropriated). Euclidean understandings of space are applied everywhere. Modern bifurcations are imprinted in misrepresentations of diverse other worlds as plural cultures and countries that are separated from a singular nature. Where cultures and countries are associated with (formerly) colonised peoples, moderns may configure their multifaceted and heterogeneous otherness as colonial difference – as *terra nullius* or primitive, as fetishist or backward, as local or vernacular, and as relics of the past, not makers of futures.<sup>6</sup>

Contrasting relational accounts of space may challenge colonial difference, but do not generally recognise diverse worlds. Largely obscured even in relational accounts then, diverse worlds remain ontologically captured by colonial

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4 Michael T. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (Routledge, 1993); Massey, *For Space*, 54–59.

5 Arturo Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 179–210; Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

6 MichelRolph Trouillot, "North Atlantic Universals: Analytical Fictions, 1492–1945," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 839–858.

modernity's ostensibly universal space.<sup>7</sup> In this space, just one world exists rather than many.<sup>8</sup>

Scholars inspired by decolonial movements, particularly in Abya Yala, have challenged this occlusion of ontological difference.<sup>9</sup> Foregrounding multiple worlds, particularly those associated with Indigenous peoples, these scholars have shown how their heterogeneous ontologies diverge from and refuse modern bifurcations. Encounters between modern and diverse worlds as ways of knowing-being, are observed as colonial. Ontological conflicts are highlighted where radically different worlds are encountered.

For example, consider the conflicts that ensue when caribou of modern conservation biology meets the *atiku* of Innu worlds.<sup>10</sup> More than just different names or perspectives of the 'same' animal that roams a universal space, Blaser observes how *atiku* and caribou are actually "different reals".<sup>11</sup> It is the modern real that is dominant – enacted through models of population dynamics, sensors that capture animal movement, and ethology of the Caribou's instincts.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, the *atiku* are enacted through a way of knowing that does not aim to capture *a priori* reality. Instead, knowing involves participating in life-giving relations that make a specifically Innu world. It is this world's hunting of *atiku* in particular that is seen as conflicting with the modern world's conservation of 'nature' separated from people. While *atiku* hunting is understood as

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7 Jarrad Reddekop, "Against ontological capture: Drawing lessons from Amazonian Kichwa relationality," *Review of International Studies* 48, no. 5 (2022): 857-874.

8 John Law, "What's Wrong with a One-World World?" *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 16, no. 1 (2015): 126-39.

9 For example, see Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise"; Mario Blaser, "The Threat of the Yrmo: The Political Ontology of a Sustainable Hunting Program," *American Anthropologist* 111, no. 1 (2009): 10-20; Walter D. Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience," *Confero: Essays on Education, Philosophy and Politics* 1, no. 1 (2013): 129-150; Marisol de la Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2015); Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser, eds., *A World of Many Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2018), 1-20.

10 Mario Blaser, "Is Another Cosmopolitics Possible?" *Cultural Anthropology* 31, no. 4 (2016): 545-570;

11 Mario Blaser, "Doing and Undoing Caribou/Atiku: Diffractive and Divergent Multiplicities and Their Cosmopolitical Orientations," *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society* 1, no. 1 (2018): 47-64.

12 Blaser, "Is Another Cosmopolitics Possible?", 556.

a threat to modern nature by caribou conservationists, for the Innu it is crucial for their land's wellbeing and sacred relations with human and nonhuman persons.<sup>13</sup>

Blaser and colleagues appreciate radical differences between worlds through distinct ontologies. Worlds are used synonymously with ontologies. This equation tends to overlook that ontology as metaphysics of knowing-being is not sufficient for worldmaking, even if it may be necessary. Much more than ontology is required for worldmaking, including specific relations among humans and nonhumans like water and land, as well as relations with diverse other worlds. To describe such relations that are foundational to worldmaking – relations that entangle to constitute a wide range of techno-scientific and cultural-ecological developments while resisting transformation themselves – I use the concept of *political topology*.<sup>14,15</sup>

As colonial-modern worldmaking concentrates and accumulates immense power and privilege, many 'novel' developments like artificial intelligence and climate crisis are associated with vast injustices. Often these injustices disproportionately impact colonially marginalised peoples and worlds.<sup>16</sup>

Where mass violence and extreme injustices are recognised ex post as major crimes (eg: genocides), then promises of "never again" are embraced by modern centres of power and privilege. Yet such promises are readily broken, as more horrifying violence and unimaginably brutal injustices are again inflicted, as seen in Gaza and Sudan recently. It may

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13 Blaser, "Doing and Undoing Caribou/Atiku", 54.

14 Saurabh Arora, Les Levidow, Cian O'Donovan, and Andy Stirling, "Confronting the World's 21st Century Colonial Genocide".

15 For mathematicians, topology points to those spatial transformations that are not realised through stretching, shrinking or bending along existing dimensions of Euclidean geometrical space. A teacup and a doughnut share the same topology, as does a box and a sphere, because continuous deformation of one of those shapes allows the realisation of the other. In contrast topological change is deeper, for example involving a tear or a cut or the addition or subtraction of dimensions.

16 Farhana Sultana, "The Unbearable Heaviness of Climate Coloniality," *Political Geography* 99 (November 2022); Zhasmina Tacheva and Srividya Ramasubramanian, "Challenging AI Empire: Toward a Decolonial and Queer Framework of Data Resurgence," *Advance* (March 2, 2023): 1-16.

therefore be important to ask if repeated failures of “never again” may be tied to the modern world’s colonial topologies that resist change while enacting a huge range of emergent developments including tech-enabled genocidal violence and ‘green extractivism’.<sup>17</sup>

## **POLITICAL TOPOLOGY OF COLONIAL MODERNITY**

Beyond its ontological bifurcations, foundational to the modern world are distinctive colonial relations that are deeply embedded and globally extensive. Those relations are topological. They have made the modern world through vast *appropriations* of privileges from colonised peoples, alongside toxic *extractions* of resources from diverse (colonised) worlds. These appropriations and extractions are now taking new forms under guises of climate resilience, sustainable development, and associated ‘green transitions.’<sup>18</sup> Beyond appropriation and extraction, colonial modernity’s constituting political topologies entangle a wide range of similarly foundational relations.<sup>19</sup> These include:

- *Comprehensive superiorisms*, through which entire groups of people are assumed as superior to others on the bases of racial, ethnic, national, and religious categories. Similar categorical superiority is assumed for modern science and technology over other ways of knowing-being. Such superiorisms can thus be used to justify colonial appropriations and extractions from diverse worlds and racialised peoples.
- *Military supremacism*, which makes business out of wars while mining diverse worlds for resources to develop (advanced) weapons. Military supremacism may be especially violently directed against those who mobilise cultural-ecological resources to resist colonial appropriation (of land and water) and marginalisation (of lives and livelihoods).

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17 Saurabh Arora, Les Levidow, Cian O’Donovan, and Andy Stirling, “Confronting the World’s 21st Century Colonial Genocide”; Natacha Bruna, “A climate-smart world and the rise of green extractivism,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 49, no. 4 (2022): 839-864.

18 Arora and Stirling, “Colonial Modernity and Sustainability Transitions”.

19 Arora and Stirling, “Colonial Modernity and Sustainability Transitions”.

- *Gendered domination*, under which specific modern definitions of gender roles and hierarchies (eg: between binarized masculinity and femininity) are imposed on diverse worlds.<sup>20</sup> Modern forms of patriarchal domination are thus normalised, which means that women often end up with a bulk of caring responsibilities in the wake of harms inflicted through colonial appropriations and extractions.<sup>21</sup>
- *Imagined control*, particularly through surveillance and securitisation of fictitious or fenced borders between modern nation-states, between nonhumans in conservation zones and humans in communities, between technological cultures and wider climates, and indeed between worlds.<sup>22</sup> It is across such borders that spoils of extraction and appropriation flow to further concentrate power and privilege in colonial modernity.

## REPARATIVE JUSTICE IN PLURIVERSAL SPACES

To effectively struggle against the repeated inflicting of extreme violences and cruel injustices in the modern world, it is crucial to directly confront and profoundly transform or dismantle its constituting colonial topologies such as those outlined above.

To enact such transformation or dismantling, and to get one step closer to non-repetition of colonial-modern injustices, a worldwide movement for reparations may be needed in our times.

A movement that builds on existing demands for reparative justice to hold colonial concentrations of power and privilege to account, for example, through financial compensation, debt cancellation, rehabilitation of victims and survivors of colonialism and enslavement, and securing their land rights.

<sup>20</sup> María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 186–209.

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Khayaat Fakier and Jacklyn Cock, "Eco-Feminist Organizing in South Africa: Reflections on the Feminist Table," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 29, no. 1 (2018): 40–57.

<sup>22</sup> Saurabh Arora et al., "Control, Care, and Conviviality in the Politics of Technology for Sustainability," *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy* 17, suppl. 2 (2020): 247–62

A movement that is future-oriented and constructive,<sup>23</sup> aimed at novel worldmaking through redistributed and returned lands, rehabilitation of survivors, and financial compensation.

A movement that focuses on nurturing many diverse worlds within and beyond (formerly) colonised cultures and countries, because human healing from colonial traumas may require connected nonhuman ecologies and climates to heal too.<sup>24</sup>

A movement that is therefore not confined to modern space – whether relational or Euclidean – and focuses instead on reparative justice in pluriversal spaces where many diverse worlds have been damaged through colonial topologies of the globally hegemonic modern world.

A movement that brings to fore what has been marginalised by colonial topologies, so that many diverse worlds can flourish through reparative justice.

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23 Olúfẹ̀mí O. Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations: Worldmaking in the Case of Climate Crisis* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 69-104.

24 Saurabh Arora, Andre Kpodonu et al., “Pluriversal Reparations: A Manifesto”. In *Reparations*, Runnymede Trust UK (2025, forthcoming): 48-53.

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# COUNTER-MAPPING

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# ON THE POSSIBILITIES FOR A COUNTER MAP

“There is no ceiling for the wind, no home for the wind.”<sup>1</sup>

## RUBBLE | REFERENCE POINT

Rubble extends in every direction, stretching endlessly toward the horizon. A violent wreckage brutally fashioned by bombs and missiles, relentless and still ongoing nearly two years later. Homes, hospitals, mosques, markets, and all other places that once stood as familiar reference points to the everyday life of Palestinians in Gaza have been flattened, their form and meaning warped by persistent genocidal violence. And in the wake of such devastation lies a mournful landscape of ash, debris, and dust. The UN estimates that there are at least 50 tons of rubble in Gaza, with approximately 92% of all residential buildings (nearly half a million homes) damaged or completely demolished since October 2023.<sup>2</sup> Beneath the debris is believed to be the bodies of at least 11,000 people, though these numbers continue to rise with each passing day that Israel’s ruthless assault persists.<sup>3</sup> Clearing the rubble will take decades and cost billions of dollars.<sup>4</sup> And yet, the 2.3 million Palestinians living in Gaza will, of course, rebuild reference points for their daily lives, just as generations before them have.<sup>5</sup>

In colonial cartography, reference points are treated as fixed locations with precise geographic coordinates that anchor maps to the “real” world. In determining how space is measured, represented, and ultimately understood, they also reflect broader systems of knowledge and authority.

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1 Mahmoud Darwish, “Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading,” trans. Mona Anis, *Cultural Critique* 67, no.3 (Fall 2007) 176.

2 United Nations, “Gaza: Destruction of vital lifting gear halts search for thousands buried under rubble,” *UN News*, April 9, 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/1162491>.

3 United Nations, 2025.

4 “Gaza transformed into rubble-strewn wasteland after Israeli bombardment,” *Al Jazeera*, February 5, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2025/2/5/gaza-transformed-into-rubble-strewn-wasteland-after-israeli-bombardment>.

5 Nour Joudah, “Gaza: Indigenous Urbanism Amid Elimination,” *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 12, no. 1 (2025): 71-75.

Measurement methods like triangulation and trilateration rely on these points to define other unknown positions and, in doing so, reinforce a framework that prioritizes precision, control, and domination.<sup>6</sup> These cartographic practices are recursive: maps shape how we see the world, and in turn give rise to new maps shaped by that very world.<sup>7</sup>

In Palestine, under British Mandate rule from 1920 to 1948, mapping served as a powerful tool for asserting colonial authority and, above all, laying the foundation for displacement and dispossession. Geographic dominance, as Palestinian polymath Edward Said wrote, has never been only “about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.”<sup>8</sup> British maps were quiet, though deadly, weapons that transformed lived, embodied landscapes into lines on paper.<sup>9</sup> In the making of colonial cartographies, Palestinian reference points were erased and renamed with Hebrew names, new borders were drawn that politically and financially benefited colonial powers, and land relations were codified in ways that enabled European land ownership that depended on the dispossession of Palestinian homelands.<sup>10</sup>

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6 Even efforts to correct for the inherent distortions caused by translating Earth’s three-dimensional spheroid into a two-dimensional map reflect underlying social and political priorities. The Mercator projection, arguably the most ubiquitous global projection today, places its primary reference point at the intersection of the equator (defined as 0° latitude) and the Prime Meridian (defined as 0° longitude). The Prime Meridian originates in Greenwich, England, a deliberate choice that emphasizes its importance both in its geographic location and in its being termed ‘prime’ or primary. Further, the mathematical equation used in the Mercator projection significantly exaggerates the size of European countries while simultaneously shrinking other territories. The Mercator has undeniably contributed to centering Europe through both its visual hierarchy and its ability to aid European socio-political agendas. In the 19th and 20th century, the Mercator map was a useful, successful, and brutal tool of the British Empire, materializing Britain’s colonial agenda to conquer, control, surveille, and exploit.

7 Matthew Sparke, “Territories of Tradition: Cartographic Beginnings and the Narration of the Nation” *In the space of theory: Postfoundational geographies of the nation-state*, ed. Martin Dodge, Rob Kitchin, Chris Perkins (University of Minnesota Press, 2005) 12.

8 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Knopf, 1993), 7.

9 For an extensive and comprehensive compendium of Palestine maps, see Salman Abu-Sitta, *Atlas of Palestine, 1917-1966* (: Palestine Land Society, 2010).

10 Zena Agha’s scholarship and art practice trace the ways that mapping has been both part of the intensification of militarized warfare against Palestine and also how counter-mapping works toward liberation. Zena Agha, “Counter-Mapping the Archive,” *Jadaliyya*, May 17, 2025, and “Maps, Technology, and Decolonial Spatial Practices in Palestine,” *Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network*, 2020, are particularly salient publications on mapping practices. See a broader survey of her work at [www.zenaagha.com](http://www.zenaagha.com).

Central to this cartographic enterprise was the creation of the 1923 Palestine Grid, a standardized coordinate system imposed by British surveyors. It restructured Indigenous spatial knowledge into colonial systems and introduced new colonial reference points; today, it remains the foundation upon which almost all modern Zionist maps of the territory are based.<sup>11</sup> In *Atlas of Palestine, 1917-1966*, Palestinian scholar Salman Abu Sitta charts the entanglements between cartography and erasure: “There are few countries in the world in which surveying and mapping played so much important role in its history. Palestine, the Holy Land, was long coveted by foreigners, primarily the Crusades and European colonists. They wanted to know its physical and historical characteristics as a prelude to conquering the land.”<sup>12</sup>

By 1948, the British Survey of Palestine had resulted in comprehensive cadastral and topographic maps that recorded land use, ownership, and village boundaries in meticulous detail. Though bureaucratic in appearance, these surveys were tools of control. They were used to justify land transfers, reconfigure Palestine’s geography through the expropriation of Palestinian land, and erase entire communities. These maps would ultimately also enable the creation of the state of Israel and large-scale displacement of the Palestinian people. In the decades since, mapping has remained a central tool of domination, with new surveys and plans often serving to legitimize territorial expansion into Palestinian lands. 1948. 1967. 1987. 2000. 2008. 2012. 2014. 2021. 2023. And all the brutal moments in between.<sup>13</sup> Today, as Israel continues its campaign of military aggression and systemic deprivation against Palestinians and their land, the map persists as an active instrument of erasure, fragmentation, segregation, control, and

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11 Ahmad Barclay, “Mapping and ‘Truth’: Communicating the Erasure of Palestine,” *The Funambulist*, no. 18: (2018). <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/cartography-power/mapping-truth-communicating-erasure-palestine-ahmad-barclay>.

12 Salman Abu Sitta, *The Atlas of Palestine, 1917-1966*, 25.

13 Since the UN’s recognition of Israel, there have been decades of brutal violence against Palestinians. Maps have continued to play a role in ensuring successful violence against Palestinians.

violence.

And yet, many maps actively resist the destruction of Palestinians and their homeland. These maps were created not to erase, divide, or justify occupation but to imagine and assert liberation.<sup>14</sup> In resistance to colonial cartography, these counter-maps operate as “material practice of weaving together neglected and unintelligible histories, visuals, ideas, faces, alleyways, and embodied spatial practices,” as Palestinian geographer Hashem Abushama describes.<sup>15</sup> Mapping as a practice of refusal that reimagines the territory outside of the logic of settler colonialism thus requires new reference points that center and affirm Palestinian life.

But how does one perform this practice amid an ongoing genocide? How can a place where all previous reference points have been hollowed out be mapped? Can violence leave behind more than fragments? Is it possible for the debris of genocide to be cartographic, to serve as a reference point?

## DUST | BORDER

Today, Palestine is a series of fragmented archipelagos, a direct and material consequence of colonial mapping practices. The colonial maps that record these fractured geographies do more than chart geopolitical dynamics; they rationalize displacement, occupation, and erasure through the drawing of borders. Israel’s settlement project is built on permanence:

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14 Examples of projects that use cartography, both in its conventional representational forms and in new, more innovative ways include the following (incomplete) list: “iReturn” map (formerly “iNakba” map) by the Zochrot Organization ([https://www.zochrot.org/villages/nakba\\_map/en?Nakba\\_Map](https://www.zochrot.org/villages/nakba_map/en?Nakba_Map)); “Cartography of Genocide” project by Forensic Architecture (<https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/a-cartography-of-genocide>); the “Return to Al-Ma’in” Investigation by Forensic Architecture (<https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/return-to-al-main>); *The Place that is Ours* film co-directed by Zena Agha and Dorothy Allen-Pickard (2021); “Counter-mapping Territories” by Haya Zaatry (published in Hashem Abushama, “Mapping and countermapping dispossession in Palestine” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 50.1 (2025)); the cartographic work published in Linda Quiquívix, “Art of War, Art of Resistance: Palestinian Counter-Cartography on Google Earth” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 104.3 (May 2014) 444-459; “Palestine Open Maps” open-source mapping project by Impact Data Lab and Columbia University Studio-X Amman (<https://palopenmaps.org/en>).

15 Hashem Abushama, “Mapping and countermapping dispossession in Palestine,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 50, no. 1 (2025): 2.

concrete walls, asphalt roads, surveillance infrastructure, and expanding housing units, each intended to fix territory and render occupation irreversible. But wind systems and the materials they carry interrupt this illusion of fixity. In Gaza, Israel's bombs reduce homes, schools, and hospitals to rubble from above, while on the ground, Israel enlists bulldozers to grind down the rubble into particles fine enough to lift into the air.<sup>16</sup> These dust particles, born from genocide, uricide, and ecocide,<sup>17</sup> become part of the atmosphere, carried by wind across borders and seas. Dust unsettles dominant geographies and challenges the authority of nation-states built on enclosure. Carried on the wind, dust from Gaza reaches far beyond the confines of occupation, unsettling the notion that this condition is neutral or permanent.

In a tribute written for Said after his death, Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish evokes the wind's refusal to be fixed, writing "there is no ceiling for the wind, / no home for the wind."<sup>18</sup> Dust, like the wind that carries it, disobeys. Through its motion, it offers a different cartography, one in which borders are not immutable, and occupation is not destiny. The dust carried from Gaza and dropped across the world shrinks the gaps between geographies symbolically and physically. It not only connects Palestinians in exile to those who remained, but it also functions as a reminder of a global responsibility for shared humanity. If dust becomes a cartographic reference point that shifts, circulates, and refuses settlement, then the dust of Gaza belongs to us all. It is a "transnational effort," and we are all complicit in its destruction, especially as the US and Europe are actively benefiting from an "economy

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16 Léopold Lambert defines "bulldozer politics" as architectural and infrastructural demolition as a tool of political domination and spatial control, especially in the context of Palestine. See more in Léopold Lambert, *La Politique du Bulldozer: La Ruine palestinienne comme projet israélien* (Bulldozer Politics: The Palestinian Ruin as an Israel Project) (B2 Editions, 2016).

17 Shourideh C. Molavi, *Environmental Warfare in Gaza: Colonial Violence and New Landscapes of Resistance* (Pluto Press, 2024).

18 Darwish, "Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading," 176.

of genocide.”<sup>19</sup> Dust that transgresses borders carries traces of violence but, more importantly, of resistance. Through its fugitivity, the struggle for one becomes the struggle for all, wherein the liberation of Palestine is inseparable from the broader, global movement for justice and collective liberation. No one is free until Palestine is free.

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19 Tom Stevenson in his essay “Rubble from Bone” declares that the ongoing genocide in Gaza is a “transnational effort” by tracing how the brutality by Israel is only possible because of the manufacturing and financial backing of weaponry in the United States and Europe. He writes, “The war itself is a transnational effort. Bombs manufactured in Texas are fitted with precision-guidance systems from Missouri, shipped to Europe, then flown, perhaps via British bases in Cyprus, to Israel before being dropped on Gaza. US and European foreign policy is aligned to enable Israel to do precisely what it is doing now. The US quickly provided an additional \$14.5 billion of emergency aid to Israel for the war effort. Military supplies include 2000 Hellfire missiles and 57,000 155mm shells. When the IDF came close to running down its stores of 120mm tank shells the State Department approved a shipment of 14,000 more. On 20 October the White House requested the removal of all restrictions on access to munitions it has positioned in Israel.” Tom Stevenson, “Rubble from Bone,” *London Review of Books* 46, no. 3 (2024), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v46/n03/tom-stevenson/rubble-from-bone>. In her report, “From economy of occupation to economy of genocide,” UN Special Rapporteur Francesco Albanese uses the term ‘economy of genocide’ to draw attention to the political and financial benefits that nation-states like the US and its companies reap in aiding Israeli expansion into Palestine and enabling surveillance and killing of Palestinians. Francesca Albanese, *From Economy of Occupation to Economy of Genocide*. UN Human Rights Council Doc. A/HRC/59/23, (advanced unedited version, July 3, 2025), <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/a-hrc-59-23-from-economy-of-occupation-to-economy-of-genocide-report-special-rapporteur-francesca-albanese-palestine-2025/>.

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# DEPORTATION

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# TO CARRY (TO HOLD, TO MARK) AWAY

## 57 MILLION UNIVERSES

The act of deportation of human beings is an irredeemable violence that derives from and begets further violences. To occur, deportation requires (and thus constitutes) surveillance, abduction, trafficking, detention, incarceration, forced removal, and the stripping of human rights, with logistics and infrastructure to support each step. Deportation follows state-sanctioned and domestic terrorism and precedes the deafening silence of loved ones disappeared. Under international criminal law, deportation – the forced displacement of civilians – is “an underlying offence of the crime of genocide and of the crime against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against the civilian population with knowledge thereof.”<sup>1</sup>

What we currently call the United States does not have a monopoly on deportation, but whereas deportation happens in other places and times, it is a foundation of settler colonial empires. Deportation is the eugenicist lever in the controlled movement of racialized labor within such empires. In the United States, deportation began with the forced removals of Indigenous peoples, the trafficking and chattel slavery of African peoples, and the many intersecting systems of incarceration and abuse inflicted upon these and subsequent racialized peoples. According to the US Department of State, the express purpose of the Immigration Act of 1924, which formalized the US Border Patrol (previously, mounted guards catching 19th-century undocumented Chinese migrants) and made people “illegal” overnight, was “to preserve the ideal of US homogeneity.”<sup>2</sup>

As of June 2025, the United States Immigration and

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1 Alice Sironi, Celine Bauloz and Milen Emmanuel, eds., *Glossary on Migration. International Migration Law, No. 34*. International Organization for Migration (IOM), (2019): 45-46.

2 “The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act),” Office of the Historian, United States Department of State, accessed June 25, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>.

Customs Enforcement (ICE) has detained at least 59,000 people, nearly half with no criminal record.<sup>3</sup> On the settler colony's 249th birthday, the 47th president signed a bill that expanded ICE's annual budget by three times,<sup>4</sup> making it the largest policing entity in US history and the 16th largest military entity in the world.<sup>5</sup> But this regime's policies continue to be remarkable not because they are exceptional, but because they are not. The so-called United States has already deported an estimated 57 million people since 1920, more than any other nation,<sup>6</sup> and each of those people carries within them a universe.

## TO CARRY AWAY (AND TO CARRY INTO)

On February 7, 1885, 480 Chinese people living and working in Eureka, California, Wiyot lands were forcibly removed from their homes and businesses and corralled onto two outbound steamships. The mob of 600 white American men looted Chinese businesses, hung effigies of Chinese people, and ordered Chinese residents to leave or be lynched, and so the *Humboldt* and the *City of Chester* carried them away (deported, from the Latin *de-* "from, away" + *portare* "to carry"). Eureka Chinatown was demolished thereafter, and this strategy for ethnic cleansing became known as "the Eureka Method" across the US West.<sup>7</sup>

Eight decades prior, 192 Chinese people were carried *into* (imported, from the Latin *in-* "into, in" + *portare* "to carry") the ports of Trinidad and Tobago, Kalinago and Taino lands. Following the end of the Haitian Revolution in 1804, British officials proposed Chinese people as an "alternative" racialized labor to African diaspora communities liberating themselves,

3 Camilo Montoya-Galvez, "ICE Holding a Record 59,000 Immigrant Detainees, Nearly Half with No Criminal Record, Internal Data Show," *CBS News*, June 24, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ice-record-59000-immigrant-detainees-half-no-criminal-record/>.

4 Elyssa Pachico, "Congress Approves Unprecedented Funding for Mass Deportation," American Immigration Council, July 1, 2025, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/press-release/congress-approves-unprecedented-funding-mass-detention-deportation-2025/>.

5 Brendan Cole and John Feng, "US Immigration Budget Now Bigger than Most of the World's Militaries – Newsweek," *Newsweek*, July 2, 2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/immigration-ice-bill-trump-2093456>.

6 Adam Goodman, *The Deportation Machine: America's Long History of Expelling Immigrants* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 218.

7 Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans*. (Random House, 2007), 121-166.

spurring a century of coerced labor through indentureship for South Asians and East Asians across the colonized world.

They chartered ships carrying us in and ships carrying us out, with those carrying Chinese diaspora often the same ships that had trafficked African diaspora.<sup>8</sup> Racialized labor has been “imported” in the form of enslaved African people, enslaved Indigenous people, indentured Asian people, guest worker “braceros” from Mexico, and visa holders from every corner of the world – and those very peoples have been deported (through the Indian Removal Act, the American Colonization Society, Chinese Exclusion, Executive Order 9066, Mexican “Repatriation” and “Operation Wetback,” the Patriot Act) in the same absurd proverbial breath. Then, on June 9th, 2025, the Zionist entity abducted twelve people on board the *Madleen* in international waters, trafficked them into occupied Palestinian territories, and then “deported” them for entering “illegally.” In the US, Muslim and Arab students and their allies have been targeted, abducted, trafficked, detained, and in many cases carried away for supporting Palestinian peoples’ right to self-determination. Where our racialized labor (including intellectual labor) fails to protect and profit the empire, our free speech becomes the verdict for our forced removal.

Today, in Tovaangar (what we currently call Los Angeles County), those ships have evolved into a network of private vehicles, trucks, trains, and airplanes. But families and neighbors – in Los Angeles, California, Tongva lands, mostly Mexican and Central American communities, and across the country, Muslim and Arab, Black and African, and Asian communities – are still arriving to their loved ones’ last known locations to find their food still on the grill, their cars abandoned, their belongings strewn on the ground, one lawnmower still running, one child still in shock.

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8 Yun Laremon and R. R. Laremont, “Chinese Coolies and African Slaves in Cuba, 1847-74,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 4, no. 2 (2021): 99–122. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2001.0022>.

## TO HOLD AWAY

In Rock Springs, Wyoming, Eastern Shoshone and Cheyenne lands, the US Federal Army was stationed for fourteen years following the September 2, 1885 massacre of 28 Chinese people (and the looting and burning down of Rock Springs Chinatown), in order to prevent Chinese miners employed by the Union Pacific from escaping white racial violence. When 600 Chinese people from Rock Springs and Evanston boarded a train westward for San Francisco, state and corporation conspired to return them back to the smoldering ruins of their homes and the mangled, decomposing bodies of their community, this time forced to remain in place (detained, from the Latin *de-* “from, away” + *tenere* “to hold”), to work under military occupation.<sup>9</sup> This seeming illogic – **“The Chinese Must Go!” and yet they must stay (to work)** – runs seamlessly through the deportation machine across time and space.

Centuries of genocidal warfare waged by the US settler colony culminated in the 1830 Indian Removal Act, which forcibly removed (carried away, deported) First Nations from their Southeast homelands, at great human cost, to reservations west of the Mississippi meant to detain and disempower them. In 1956, the Indian Relocation Act, on the tail end of Indian termination policy, effected a second carrying away, in which Native people were encouraged and at times coerced into leaving their old and new homelands to assimilate in urban centers and relinquish their ties to their nations. **Native peoples must go to reservations, and yet they must leave them.**

Chattel slavery and indentured labor systems have not disappeared but instead have evolved into the prison industrial complex and its subset, the migrant detention industrial complex, wherein those abducted to be deported by kidnappers and bounty hunters are indefinitely detained, forced or coerced into labor. Increasingly, the infrastructure of detention is privately run, with 90.8% of people detained by ICE held in

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<sup>9</sup> Tom Rea, “The Rock Springs Massacre,” Wyoming History, November 8, 2014, <https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/rock-springs-massacre>.

private prisons as of July 2023,<sup>10</sup> meaning deportation (the act of removing civilians) is in actuality the act of detention and coerced labor. **Immigrants must leave, and yet they must stay (to work).**

In order to expedite deportation of those without documentation (a civil offense), the Trump regime is preemptively and unlawfully handling cases as criminal. And yet, to expedite deportation of those *with* documentation, the regime's Department of Justice strategically handles denaturalization cases not as criminal but civil, in order to circumvent individuals' right to attorney.<sup>11</sup> **You are criminals, and yet you are not criminals.**

There is no logic to deportation, importation, and detention (carrying away, carrying into, holding away) but the logic of racial capitalism and settler colonial empire.

Since October 7, 2023, and in addition to the relentless genocide committed against Palestinians in Gaza, the Zionist entity has abruptly cancelled work permits for over 140,000 Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza, arrested and detained over 10,000 workers from Gaza, and deported over 6,000 out of Gaza.<sup>12</sup> In a campaign straight out of the United States' playbook, the Zionist entity has since sought to replace the thousands of Palestinian workers it has forcibly removed with migrant Asian and African workers it has imported.<sup>13</sup>

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10 Gabriel Eskandari, "Migrant Bodies as Commodities," *The Flaw*, April 18, 2025, <https://theflaw.org/articles/migrant-bodies-as-commodities/>.

11 Jaclyn Diaz, and Juliana Kim, "DOJ Announces Plans to Prioritize Cases to Revoke Citizenship," *NPR*, June 30, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/06/30/nx-s1-5445398/denaturalization-trump-immigration-enforcement>.

12 Ihab Maharmeh, "Israel's Exploitation of Palestinian Labor: A Strategy of Erasure," *Al-Shabaka*, January 5, 2025, <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/israels-exploitation-of-palestinian-labor-a-strategy-of-erasure/>.

13 J. E. Rosenberg, "Israel Further Strangles Palestine by Replacing Its Workers with Imported Labor," *People's World*, May 22, 2025, <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/israel-further-strangles-palestine-by-replacing-its-workers-with-imported-labor/>.

## TO MARK AWAY

The concentration camp, so-called “Alligator Alcatraz,” was built by private contractors in eight days, without storm protection, running water, or sewage, on Miccosukee lands. There are Miccosukee villages within 900 feet of these cages for those marked for deportation.<sup>14</sup> Concentration camps holding Japanese Americans, too, were often built on and near reservations. But which private contractors? Who builds your concentration camps?

In Los Angeles, both Dodger Stadium (for which the Mexican American communities of Bishop, Palo Verde, and La Loma were forcibly removed from their homes) and Terminal Island (from which Japanese Americans were forcibly removed and incarcerated) are being used today as staging for ICE operations. Our freeways (designed precisely for this type of military convoy) have been shut down for ICE, National Guard, LAPD, LASD, and other military and law enforcement simply “following orders.”

The word design comes from the Latin *de* “from, away” + *signare* “to mark.” Spanish colonial *diseños* marked away expanses of stolen land as settler colonial spoils. Built environment practitioners in the United States – those of us who would call ourselves designers – do the same within our instruments of service: marking away stolen land as spoils. But we don’t exist solely to create instruments of service. And, anyway, instruments of service to whom? Rather than marking *away* – through repetition, through errors and omissions, through the system working as “designed,” we might (we must) mark, instead, in each and every moment *a way*.

Angeleno organizers and neighbors and landscape architects have been creating signs designating (marking away) private spaces in restaurants, retail, and construction sites, where ICE agents are required to produce judicial warrants to enter. *A way*. Those protecting one another from militarized

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14 Doc Louallen, “Florida Tribe Fights New ‘Alligator Alcatraz’ Migrant Facility near Everglades Homes,” *ABC News*, July 1, 2025, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/florida-tribe-fights-new-alligator-alcatraz-migrant-facility/story?id=123393299>.

police and the preemptive deployment of federal armed forces, including unlawful uses of force and chemical warfare, are finding that street furniture designed (marked away) for leisure and play can instead become barricades and shields. *A way*. Some community members are designating parking lots of hotels housing ICE agents as impromptu performance spaces late into the night, keeping bounty hunters from their sleep. *A way*. Others are designing mutual aid networks to funnel resources to street vendors, construction workers, and others made vulnerable by these violent raids – redistributing money to buy out undocumented food vendors and then redistributing food to unhoused community. *As many ways as there are of us*.

Mark *a way* toward the full-scale boycott, divestment, sanctions, and dismantling of all carceral design and construction from every Cop City to every concentration camp to every border wall from Los Angeles to Palestine and back.

Mark *a way*. Hold, within us, *a way*. Carry – together – a liberatory, fugitive, ungovernable, steadfast, collective way, full and overflowing with love, for every universe within every being, toward the futures we deserve.

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# DIASPORA

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2<sup>ND</sup> GENERATION HAKKA CHINESE SETTLER ON TURTLE ISLAND

# DIASPORA IS...

## REFLECTIONS ON SURVIVAL, RESISTANCE, AND BEING A GOOD GUEST

Diaspora: “the dispersion or spread of a people from their original homeland.”<sup>1</sup>

A perfectly neutral definition. My family was indeed “dispersed”. We “spread” as part of a larger movement of “people”. If one were to trace my ancestry, there was probably an “original homeland”. The condition of being diasporic means I know very little about my family’s origin story. Snatches of the family history were overheard, but growing up, I didn’t give it much thought.

This changed ever since I started getting involved with community organizing in Toronto’s Chinatown.<sup>2</sup> Doing place-based work on stolen Indigenous land has caused me to deeply reflect on what it means to be of the Chinese diaspora, from an immigrant family of refugees, and of the flavor of diaspora who were on the receiving end of Western Imperialism and Colonialism.

So, what is “Diaspora”?

Beyond the fact of leaving, whether voluntary or forced, Diaspora is severance. Diaspora is dislocation. Diaspora is loss. Diaspora is searching. Diaspora is placeless. Diaspora is emplaced. Diaspora is risk. Diaspora is reward. Diaspora is longing. Diaspora is regret. Diaspora is refugee. Diaspora is trauma. Diaspora is survival.

For me, diaspora is a feeling. A state of being. Diaspora is me. And I am diaspora. It’s in my blood, and the blood of my Hakka ancestors. The Hakka are so diasporic that it’s debated whether they constitute an actual Chinese ethnic group, or are simply a nomadic cultural group. The Chinese characters 客家 (pronounced Hakka) literally translate as “Guest Family”.

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1 “Diaspora,” Oxford English Dictionary, accessed June 25, 2025, [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/diaspora\\_n?tl=true](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/diaspora_n?tl=true).

2 My community work started in 2021 with Friends of Chinatown Toronto (FOCT) and I’m a founding board member of the Toronto Chinatown Land Trust (TCLT).

We're called this because the Hakka, who originated in North Central China, at some point hundreds of years ago became wanderers, likely escaping invaders, war, and economic upheaval. In short, they moved to survive. This inevitably put them into conflict with others who were already living in the southern parts of China, where most settled. From there, many Hakka went abroad to Taiwan, South and Southeast Asia, Australia, North America, the Caribbean, and beyond.

Being diasporic is built into the Hakka identity, but I can't trace my lineage beyond my grandfather. Three dispersed generations - each enacting the iterative severances from the past that make us amnesiac about our roots, whether through accidental or deliberate forgetting.

My grandparents were born in 興寧 [Xingning], Guangdong Province, China. My dad, in Saigon, Vietnam. I was born in a small town in Manitoba that no longer exists.<sup>3</sup> I grew up in Edmonton, Alberta with other immigrants and First Nations and Métis kids. We were literally and figuratively a picture of multiculturalism, awkwardly smiling at the camera on school picture day. In addition to math and science, we were taught about the fur trade and early settlers from France and England.<sup>4</sup> We were taught about how Canada became a nation. Any mention of Indigenous people was relegated to the past. Colonial atrocities and genocide were not mentioned, nor was I taught that Residential Schools existed and were still operating as I went through the Catholic School system.<sup>5</sup>

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3 I was born in a small town called Deloraine, in Manitoba, which doesn't exist anymore because it was amalgamated into a larger municipality. I found this out by accident in 2024 because I tried to create a Government of Canada online services account but couldn't. According to the clerk at Service Canada, the paper birth certificate from Deloraine Memorial Hospital that I provided as proof of my birth wasn't acceptable and without an updated modern birth certificate there was no evidence that I was born. I discovered that my birthplace no longer existed during my attempts to get an updated birth certificate. Annoying at the time, the experience was a reminder of how imaginary and absurd colonial borders and bureaucracy are.

4 The term settlers and pioneers was often used, but I don't recall them being called colonizers, which they were.

5 I recall some mention of the diseases that Europeans brought that decimated Indigenous people, but not much else. The last Federally funded Residential School closed in 1996 when I was in grade 11.

I have a vivid memory of visiting the Storyland Valley Zoo as a child and riding on a replica horse within an “Indian Village”. To me, the exhibit demonstrates how Indigenous people were reduced to stereotypical caricatures in a storyline that casts white European colonizers as the main characters with non-white diaspora in supporting roles.



Figure 1: Me as a kid visiting the “Indian Village” at Edmonton’s Storyland Valley Zoo in the mid-1980s. This exhibit no longer exists. (Image from Banh Archive)

Given this, it’s no wonder that for many diasporas, becoming Canadian means ignorance of the past and current lived experiences of Indigenous people. Still, with the availability of information about Canada’s dark history, ignorance is a choice, and the preferred choice of a colonial government. Assimilation is, for many diasporas, the safest and best chance at survival.

I am diaspora and diaspora is me. The word conjures up many images, emotions, and feelings. It reminds me of my family. I’m reminded of my friends. I’m reminded of people

who look like me, whom I find embarrassing, even shameful. The ones who choose invisibility to survive and thus become silent. Or worse, those who strive for proximity to whiteness, and willingly play their part as a Model Minority.<sup>6</sup> Assimilation complete. Survival becomes the dream of home ownership and the unending competition for resources.

Diaspora is expat-high-life. Diaspora is migrant worker. Diaspora is conservative scapegoat. Diaspora is liberal guilt. Diaspora is privilege. Diaspora is expendable. Diaspora is stereotype. Diaspora is combo #5. Diaspora is multiculturalism. Diaspora is DEI.

I was raised speaking Cantonese, but much of those language skills are gone, replaced by Canadian English. Third culture kids like me were called 竹升 [Jook Sing] which is a reference to the hollow segments of a bamboo pole that are closed off on each end. The idea is that those of us born outside of the Chinese homelands are not Chinese. We're Westerners, but in reality, neither. We're segmented, in-between, isolated without being able to access either side fully. Diaspora is 竹升 [Jook Sing].

Within Chinese culture there's a concept that most of us know - even if we don't know its origins. This is the idea of behaving like a Good Guest by displaying 客氣 [Hak Hei], or guestly behavior. Even a 竹升 [Jook Sing] like me knows that good hosts have a responsibility to ensure guests want for nothing and are taken care of when they visit your home. Similarly, guests are responsible for being a Good Guest, which for me has meant bringing gifts, taking your shoes off in someone else's home, being courteous, and generally avoiding being a burden on your host.

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<sup>6</sup> "This stereotype depicts Asians as hard working, successful at school and in the workplace, and as economically prosperous. This stereotype has many negative consequences. It divides Asian Canadian communities — which include East Asians, Southeast Asians, South Asians, and Central Asians — and other racialized groups." "Model Minority", The Canadian Encyclopedia, accessed June 27, 2025, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/model-minority>

The concept of 客氣 [Hak Hei] and being a Good Guest has been on my mind a lot lately.<sup>7</sup> To be a Good Guest, you need to know who your host is. As newcomers to Canada, do we see the Colonizer as our host and therefore the object of our 客氣 [Hak Hei] and guestly behavior? If so, then it's quite easy to fall into the Model Minority trap to perform our histories and ethnicities so we can weave ourselves into the multicultural mosaic. Or do we recognize that our true hosts are the original Indigenous inhabitants and stewards of the lands and waters of Turtle Island?

Diaspora is not neutral. Diaspora is Colonial. Diaspora is anti-colonial. Diaspora is settler-on-stolen-Indigenous-land. Diaspora is unlearning. Diaspora is relearning. Diaspora is conflict. Diaspora is repair. Diaspora is solidarity. Diaspora is resistance.

So, how can Diaspora be Good Guests?

It starts by recognizing that Good Guests don't show up uninvited. And we were not invited but now that we're here, we have choices to make. When I think about my ancestors and my own diasporic story, I can trace a what I call a 'Genealogy of Survival' that brought me to this place and this moment. But to be a Good Guest who recognizes Indigenous Sovereignty, I need my story to become a Genealogy of Resistance.<sup>8</sup> To do this means clearly defining what kind of diaspora I am.

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<sup>7</sup> I am currently working with the Toronto Chinatown Land Trust (TCLT) on our 客氣 [Hak Hei/Good Guest] anti-colonial program. In this context, being a good guest means recognizing that as Chinese diaspora, we're settlers on stolen Indigenous land. And while the program is called, 客氣 [Hak Hei/Good Guest], our work actually calls for going beyond simply being a good guest, to being good allies and supporters of Indigenous sovereignty, cultural resurgence, and land back.

<sup>8</sup> I was introduced to Genealogies of Resistance by Anishinaabe educator and self-taught visual artist Quill Christie-Peters during a workshop called "Tracing Our Genealogies of Resistance: Building Embodied Practices of Joint Struggle" during the Misko Aki Knowledge Exchange (MAKE) 2025.

Through my community work I've met and built relationships with some incredible Indigenous and BIPOC folks who've welcomed me into their worlds by sharing their stories.<sup>9</sup> They not only enriched my life, but also enriched my understanding of the kind of diaspora I want to be.

And so diaspora is hope. Diaspora is future. Diaspora is possibility. Diaspora is evolution. Diaspora is revolution. Diaspora is all the pronouns, and all the acronyms.

Through my Palestinian friends, I learned that diaspora is also *sumud*, a steadfastness that is so profoundly human, anchored in a pure love and longing for ancestral homelands and people that I can only begin to grasp, but am deeply moved by.

Being a Good Guest is a starting point for how I'm rewriting my diasporic story from one of survival to one of resistance. When Diaspora choose to acknowledge that we are uninvited settlers, and work to build and repair relationships with the land's original inhabitants, then we can move beyond playing supporting roles in the colonizer's story to actively building livable worlds together.

I recently learned the Anishinaabe word for "community", which is understood as "the time taken in a certain place".<sup>10</sup> Diaspora may be the "dispersal and spread of a people", but we can define how we use the time we have, in the places where we settle, by honoring the sovereignty of our true hosts so that one day we may earn an invitation to rightfully be called Guests on these lands.

When diasporas begin to conceive of survival as reciprocal and relational, then diaspora becomes community in joint struggle. In this way, we allow ourselves to be shaped by who we stand by. Who we'd fall with. Who we claim, and who claims us in return.

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9 My deep gratitude and love for the friends and chosen family I met via Friends of Chinatown (FOCT), Toronto Chinatown Land Trust (TCLT), and Yellowhead School's Radical Relationalities Program 2024.

10 Shared by Anishinaabe Artist, Filmmaker and Educator, Susan Blight during a presentation at Relational Language Circle Session #3, a Radical Reverberations project led by Maisaloon Al-Ashkar and Ja'miil Millar, May 27, 2025.

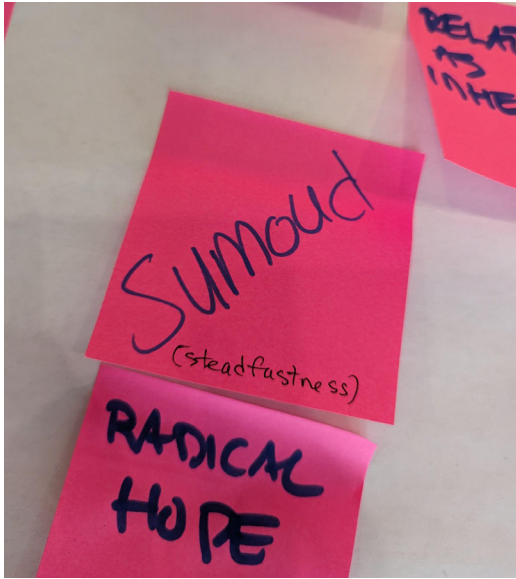


Figure 2: Post-its from a workshop on Radical Relationalities (Joseph Banh, May 2024)<sup>10</sup>

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# **DISPLACEMENT**

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# **BETWEEN DEPARTURE AND RETURN**

## **DISPLACEMENT UNPLACE. UNHOUSE. REVERSE PLACEMENT.**

Dis(place). Unplace. Unhouse. Reverse (place)ment. Each term traces the uneasy meeting of time and space, where lost memories, unfamiliar presence, and forced movement unfold.

This reflection draws out the mechanics of a spatial tactic, a system of dismantling that manipulates placement as a form of power, while stripping away dignity in the process. It imposes a choreography of removal, extraction, and erasure. Displacement is enacted tangibly through violence or law, and diffusely through the superimposition of bodies onto unfamiliar topographies, where land becomes host, shelter collapses into absence, and mobility is recast as control.

Displacement is not the loss of home, it is the restructuring of space into a condition of suspension—where presence is provisional, and return is distant, uncertain, and undefined. Displacement generates architectures that neither hold nor direct; new spaces are built to delay, disorient, and unsettle. It un-anchors past narratives, making futures unpredictable.

Displacement disorients by removing what was familiar from the landscape, body, and memory. Windows become watchtowers. A fence becomes an apartheid wall, no longer offering safety, but surveillance. Interactions become checkpoint confrontations. Maps blur as borders are redrawn to divide and erase. Movement becomes conditional. Language breaks.

And still, something remains. In what is withheld, people find ways to persist. They mark the ground not to claim it, but to remember. Objects, gestures, and habits carry memory. In the absence of shelter, stories continue to build and house the ones in exile.



Figure.1: *"Displacement," digital collage by Hala Barakat, 2025.* The path as fracture. Cracked wall surfaces merge with bone scans and anatomical traces, forming a terrain of spatial disintegration. The image reflects the bodily and architectural violence embedded in displacement.

Displacement stretches between what was and what cannot be returned to. The ground is uneven; cracked, fragile, and scattered with the residue of other lives. In Figure 1 *"Displacement"*, the path reveals itself: a fractured surface where bones, ruptures, and voids align. This is not a route to somewhere, but a record of breakage, a body unraveling in a hole. The path shifts over time, sometimes narrowing, sometimes disappearing, and never stable. A wall becomes a scar. A window becomes a watchtower. A routine becomes a checkpoint. What once offered shelter now surveils. Maps tear at the folds, their borders rewritten to erase. Movement becomes permissioned. Language fractures.

Still, something remains. In what is withheld, people find ways to persist. They mark the ground not to claim it, but to remember. A cloth, a bowl, a habit, a story, small acts that resist forgetting. In the absence of shelter, memory becomes structure.

Displacement is often framed as a singular event, an act of removal, a forced departure, an interruption in the continuity of place. Yet displacement endures. It is not a moment in time, but an ongoing condition that reshapes landscapes, architectures, communities, and cultural memory. It reconfigures the relationship between people and the spaces from which they have been severed, persisting long after the moment of expulsion.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than signifying an emptying of space, displacement transforms spatial logics. It produces zones of absence, erasure, and disconnection, while simultaneously giving rise to acts of adaptation, resistance, and survival—all unsettled by the demand for new memory-making. As Michel Agier observes in *Managing the Undesirables*, displacement is not only a condition of removal, but one that reprograms space through zoning, fencing, and administrative control. He writes that displacement “turns into a mode of existence,” reverberating across generations and reshaping the physical landscapes and the emotional, legal, and cultural geographies.<sup>2</sup> Displacement operates at multiple scales: from the demolition of homes to the redrawing of borders, from the silencing of oral histories to the restructuring of land and movement.

In regions marked by settler colonialism and occupation, displacement becomes both material and symbolic. The Palestinian and Indigenous North-American contexts offer parallel histories in which land has been systematically seized, renamed, partitioned, and erased.<sup>3</sup> Displaced communities have had to navigate the daily spatial constraints imposed

1 Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Harvard University Press, 2000), 212

2 Michel Agier, *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government* (Polity, 2011), 89–93, 131–137, 200–206.

3 Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006), 387–409.

by permits, checkpoints, buffer zones, and legal obstacles of sovereignty.

In such conditions, the architecture of displacement includes visible physical structures, walls, fences, camps as well as bureaucratic infrastructures that regulate visibility, access, and mobility.<sup>4</sup>

Walking these geographies of removal becomes an act of counter-mapping: a way of making loss visible and asserting presence in spaces deemed absent.<sup>5</sup>

Architecture often plays a complex and contradictory role in the process of design making. It can participate in displacement by enabling control, concealment, and erasure, but it can also serve as a medium of resistance and remembrance. Design strategies that foreground contested histories, ephemeral traces, and suppressed narratives offer an alternative to practices that prioritize erasure or abstraction. Investigations into political walls as sites of spatial rupture reveal how barriers might be reimagined not solely as divisive, but as zones where histories are concentrated and relationships

Displacement, therefore, is not solely a void of place, but a condition of layered presences: of what was, what is withheld, and what insists on returning. It reorients space not as a static host but as a medium through which power, resistance, and identity are continually negotiated. Spatial justice must consider seriously the long temporalities and spiritual geographies that displacement generates. Architecture requires the questioning of return, of repair, and of relationality in place-making.<sup>6</sup>

Displacement does not end when people are moved; it is an ongoing structure and restructuring. It leaves marks on land, on bodies, and on the built environment. To engage spatial justice meaningfully requires recognizing displacement

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4 Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (Verso, 2007), 6

5 Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), 71 Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory* (W. W. Norton, 2020).

6 Ashraf M. Salama, *Spatial Design Education: New Directions for Pedagogy in Architecture and Beyond* (Ashgate, 2015), [pages 95-138].

as a condition to be mitigated, but more importantly one that reveals deeper truths about power, belonging, and the ownership of space.

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# **DISPOSSESSION**

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## DISPOSSESSION AS STRUCTURE

*Dispossession* is central and structural in Palestinian life under Israeli military occupation.<sup>1</sup> Far from a singular event or legal abstraction, dispossession in Palestine is a multilayered, ongoing process that targets the land, the body, and all that renders the Palestinian a human. It is not a byproduct of conflict but the logic of the settler-colonial project itself, which seeks to eliminate the native to secure settler sovereignty.

## DISPOSSESSION OF LAND

Dispossession in Palestine began with the denial of the Palestinian's right to land,<sup>2</sup> and has since expanded into a comprehensive structure of erasure. What started as physical displacement has evolved into the systematic stripping of possession over land, body, dignity, and basic rights.<sup>3</sup> Today, this structure culminates in the genocide unfolding in Gaza and the mass forced displacement of entire communities. Dispossession is not an isolated moment but an enduring regime that renders Palestinian life precarious, criminalized, and conditionally recognized; if at all.

## DISPOSSESSION OF THE BODY

The Palestinian body is rendered vulnerable, surveilled, disposable, and even invisible.<sup>4</sup> The occupation institutes a regime in which bodily autonomy is suspended: movement is strictly controlled; imprisonment without charge is routine; and extrajudicial killings occur with impunity. Palestinians are killed or injured; civilians are subjected to a state of chronic exposure to violence, where the mere fact of being can be interpreted as a threat. Even in death, bodies are mutilated, buried by bulldozers, or denied dignity.<sup>5</sup>

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1 See Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.

2 See Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

3 See Ghada Karmi, *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (Verso Books, 2015).

4 See Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

5 See Saree Makdisi, *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*, illustrated edition with foreword by Alice Walker (W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

## DISPOSSESSION OF DIGNITY

Under military occupation, Palestinian dignity is conditional.<sup>6</sup> Asserting rights is seen as provocation, dissent, and terrorism. To be tolerated, one must remain passive and invisible. Humiliation, detention, and demonization are not exceptions, but tools of control meant to crush the spirit and normalize subjugation.

## DISPOSSESSION OF RIGHTS

Basic rights under military occupation including movement, healthcare, education, self-determination, and even the right to life itself, are treated as privileges granted by the occupying power.<sup>7</sup> In Gaza, survival depends on chance; in the West Bank, apartheid selectively allocates rights. International law offers little protection, applied selectively or not at all, denying Palestinians both legal safeguards and political agency.

## DISPOSSESSION OF RECOGNITION

Perhaps most deceptive is the dispossession of recognition, the erasure of Palestinian narratives, histories, and humanity from dominant political and media discourse.<sup>8</sup> Zionism succeeded not only through force but also through global disregard for its impact on Palestinians, their displacement, fragmentation, and catastrophe. Palestinians are spoken about but rarely listened to; framed as problems to be managed, not people to be understood.

Dispossession in Palestine is not only about what has been taken, but also about the impossibility of ownership under occupation. Ownership of home, body, rights, or future is made contingent, precarious, and revocable. And yet, Palestinians continue to resist this structure of erasure. As Mahmoud Darwish reminds us, “We have an incurable malady: hope.”<sup>9</sup>

6 See Raja Shehadeh, *Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine*, foreword by Anthony Lewis (Steerforth Press, 2001).

7 See Noura Erakat, *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine* (Stanford University Press, 2019).

8 Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (ZED Books, 2012).

9 Mahmoud Darwish quoted in Ashwani Saith. “Mahmoud Darwish Hope as Home in the Eye of the Storm.” *ISIM Review*, 15 (Spring 2005), 28-29.

Even within a system designed to dehumanize and erase, the refusal to surrender reasserts a powerful claim: that to be dispossessed is not to be defeated.

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# **DREAMING**

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# OR, SMUGGLING FREEDOM PAST CHECKPOINTS

A clear night in mid-June 2025 settles over southern Lebanon. We rest on unfinished concrete, family gathered after a long day replacing stones pried loose by occupation. Tobacco leaves breathe their sharp scent into the air. Then the sky ripples. One streak, then another, then a wild scatter of brilliance darts across the vault. Each arc flares, pauses, then fades. My niece and nephew, small as the olive saplings that sprouted during the most recent genocide in Gaza, gaze upward in astonishment. They shout, shooting stars, shooting stars, convinced that the heavens have delivered a private spectacle. They clasp hands, shut their eyes, and send lavish wishes upon those darts of fire. Adults hover behind them. We exchange restrained looks that carry whole histories. Some remain among the rows of tobacco, listening to cicadas, holding the scene intact for the children. Others drift indoors where a television blares. A crimson banner crawls across the screen while tiny windows replay the same streaking radiance from Amman, Damascus, Baghdad. The caption consumes half the image: "Iran launches new missile barrage at Israel." The little ones burst in to announce their wishes. They see faces transfixed by the very stars they had just greeted outside, and their excitement swells. For a moment, innocence and war share the same broadcast.

What does it require to cultivate an environment in which children claim the right to dream even when militarization saturates their world? That custodial labor passes through generations. Bodies must survive guns, drones, embargoes, yet survival of flesh alone falls short. Dignity demands that dreams endure alongside bloodlines. My nephew and niece will grow tall among these hills. One day, they will decipher the night more astutely than now. They will realize that the glimmers above them were rockets traveling away from their fields rather than toward them. Their discovery will never extinguish the habit of wishing; it will redirect it. They will

place aspirations upon trajectories that escort colonial violence out of view, and their delight at that departure will shape a mature, anticolonial future. Dreaming, therefore, shifts from naïve wonder to deliberate practice, a cultivated capacity to read the sky for signs that an empire can be unmade and worlds replanted.

Such maturation echoes through the long history of freedom movements. Historian Robin D. G. Kelley cautions that critique without vision soon exhausts itself, whereas a shared dream can propel whole communities toward action: “Without new visions we don’t know what to build, only what to knock down...making a revolution is not a series of clever maneuvers and tactics but a process that can and must transform us.”<sup>1</sup> Dreaming here is a disciplined speculation, a workshop in which communities sketch architectures of freedom before building them in stone and soil. Frantz Fanon observed the same dynamic in the psychic life of the colonized. “I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing,” he records; during sleep and throughout the period of colonization, the native “never stops achieving his freedom from nine in the evening until six in the morning.”<sup>2</sup> The body obeys colonial order while awake, yet the unconscious stages nightly rehearsals of emancipation. Fanon warns that melancholy will bloom unless such subterranean energies find daylight expression, but he applauds the dream as an incubation of revolt.

Palestinian filmmaker Mohammad Malas’s *The Dream* (1987) offers one of the most compelling articulations of how the imagination persists and resists through the unconscious.<sup>3</sup> Constructed from the night-dreams of Palestinian refugees in camps across Lebanon, the documentary captures the terrain of intimate visions, many of which return obsessively to memories of home, revenge, or liberation. These are assertions that even under conditions of displacement, the imagination continues to ferment with sights of justice. The

1 Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2002), xii.

2 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Grove Press, 1963), 40.

3 Mohammad Malas, “The Dream,” Documentary film, Syria/Lebanon, 1987.

dream, in this context, emerges not as a retreat from history but as an act within it, one that preserves the capacity to desire a world structured otherwise. Ghassan Hage, reflecting on the exhaustion of political imaginaries in the present, describes “being bereft of new dreams and fantasies for a better future” as one of the defining conditions of our time.<sup>4</sup> For Hage, what matters is not the presence of fantasy itself, but whether it possesses what he calls a “propelling power”: the ability to infuse life into those who carry it, to move them toward futures they feel are worth inhabiting. “Fantasies, visions, hopes and dreams of a better world are alive,” he writes, “when they inject life into those who believe in them. They propel those believers into the future.”<sup>5</sup>

In landscapes marked by invasion and erasure, such dreams of the future hold the work of place-making. They pass through borders without permission. They chart belonging where walls have fallen, where deeds have been lost, where homes exist only in memory. Dreaming demands that we shelter each other’s capacity to envision. Under colonial violence, dreaming does not function as a retreat from material conditions but as a mode of cognition embedded in them. It stores strategies in figural form. It transmits knowledge in non-linear sequences. Its temporality is recursive, allowing the past to surface in future form, and the future to appear in the residues of the past. States that thrive on control cannot contain what dreaming makes possible. It generates coordinates of belonging that remain inaccessible to imperial surveillance but remain legible to those who dwell within them. What is often understood as a fragile or unconscious act instead reveals itself as a critical spatial technology, capable of both resisting and reconfiguring dominant systems of (dis)order. In militarized contexts, dreaming organizes itself around the preservation of possibility under conditions designed to extinguish it. It becomes a method, not for escape, but for inhabiting the impasse with intention.

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4 Ghassan Hage, “Preface to the Japanese Edition of *Alter-Politics*,” September 28, 2021, <https://hageba2a.blogspot.com/2021/09/preface-to-japanese-edition-of-alter.html>.

5 Hage, “Preface to the Japanese Edition of *Alter-Politics*.”

Yet we must not romanticize dreaming as a stable or redemptive force on its own. Dreams can confuse as much as they clarify. They are not inherently virtuous, nor always liberatory. In times of crisis, they may flicker between horror and hope, haunted by fragments of what has been survived or suppressed. Dreams can offer comfort, but they can also become traps, circular interiors that recite harm without release. History is littered with disfigured futures that began as dreams. Under regimes of terror, dreaming without discernment may lull communities into nostalgia or paralyze them in abstraction. To dream, then, is not always to rise. It may also mean to stall, to fall, to suffocate inside one's own imagined escape. For dreams to move us forward, they require not only the conditions to arise but also the vessels through which they can be carried.

A clear night in mid-June 2025 settles over southern Lebanon. We rest on unfinished concrete, family gathered after a long day replacing stones pried loose by occupation. Tobacco leaves breathe their sharp scent into the air. Then the sky ripples. One streak, then another, then a scatter of brilliance darts across the vault. My niece and nephew, small as the olive saplings that sprouted during the most recent genocide in Gaza, gaze upward in astonishment. For a moment, they prepare to make a wish. But before their hands can clasp, the entire family rushes out. There is no time for explanation. We lift the children from the ground and pull them indoors. No one shouts, but every movement is frantic. The arcs above fall too fast, too low, and too many. These are not the distant streaks of meteor showers, but Israeli bombs crossing the southern sky. Even the children register the shift. Their eyes search our faces for confirmation, but the truth is already written across the room. We draw the curtains, lower the lights, and guide them to bed. There are no dreams spoken aloud that night, only the quiet labor of tucking them in while the floor waits to tremble. When violence overwhelms the ground of action, the nightly dream ceases to serve the arc of collective liberation and instead becomes its substitute, suspending the future to secure the present. Settler colonialism spends billions to

collapse this distinction, to trap us into mistaking endurance for emancipation, yet it is precisely in such moments that we must hold the line, safeguarding the capacity to dream beyond survival without confusing its shelter for its destination.

Figure 1. "Shooting Stars?"  
South Lebanon, June 14,  
2025. Photograph by the  
author.



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# **FIRE**

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Many of earth's ecosystem have developed in concert with human-ignited, low-intensity fires through Indigenous practices. This freedom, this right, was kidnapped by colonization and its creed of fire suppression: *all fire is bad fire*. Over the course of more than 100 years, this suppression has led to suffocated ecosystems and dense, accumulated fuels, resulting in recent wildfires that are unprecedented in both scale and intensity.<sup>1</sup>

But there is another side of fire. One that is softer, cooler, and slower. One that heals, gifts ritual back into our lives, and reinstates lost forms of collectivity. Frequently described as intentionally set fires for ecological and cultural benefits, this type of fire burns at a lower intensity and may go by the name of controlled burn, prescribed fire, or cultural fire.<sup>2</sup> We desperately need a different governing fire culture. One that inspires healthier, more loving environmental imaginaries. "It is more important now to be in love than to be in power."<sup>3</sup> The following is a series of fire meditations that are an offering toward that direction.<sup>4</sup>

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1 James MacCarthy, Jessica Richter, Sasha Tyukavina, Nancy Harris, "The Latest Data Confirms: Forest Fires are Getting Worse," *World Resources Institute*, July 21, 2025, <https://www.wri.org/insights/global-trends-forest-fires>.

2 These two terms – controlled/prescribed fire and cultural fire – are not synonymous with one another but for present purposes, they are seen in similar light as they both share intentions of healing Land. That said, it may be argued that much of the prescribed fire world is still heavily informed by colonial approaches to fire. This is a personal observation and struggle that I am continuing to journey with and through.

3 Barry Lopez, *Embrace Fearlessly the Burning World* (Penguin Random House LLC, 2022), 121.

4 I am indebted to and continuously humbled by many that have inspired these meditations through their conversations and vulnerabilities: Russell Myers Ross, the Yunesit'in community, the Yurok Tribe, Andrea Bustos, Jose Luis Duce, Erin Banwell, Miller Bailey, Ellen McGehee, Qwalen Berntsen, Chad Manley, Round Meadow, the Grassland at Big Ranch, the Garry Oak meadow at Gore Nature Park, the Kinnikinnick and Bees of the Douglas Fir interior forest, the Redwood and Tanoak at McKinnon Hill, Wind, Moisture, and Fire.



*And what of Fire?*

do not fight with me  
dance with me, make music with me, oh play with me  
will you not see my softer side, my painterly side, my ticklish side

the silencing, the snuffing, the shush shush shush,  
it has broken our trust  
casting stubborn and strong, relational amnesia

but we have shared ancestors  
fire sprites who dreamt us both into bodies of flesh and flame  
as you, I too,  
need warmth and its safety, food to be awakened, air to blossom

unsew your eyes  
playtime is now!

Figure 1: Yurok Tribe cultural  
burn (photo by author).

*And what of Fire?*

Simon Says you need PPE  
*Personal Protective Equipment*

Simon Says you need helmets, glasses, gloves  
Vibram, Tecsafe, Nomex®

Simon Says you need permits, burn plans,  
an Incident Management Team

Simon Says you need training  
S-100, S-290, S-390, I-185  
stand like this, dig like this, fold your arms like this  
breathe,  
think,  
do like this  
do like Neo Pyro Colonialism

Simon says it matters not if Land is sentient  
if Land shares prophecy and wisdom ungated when seen  
just fly closer Simon Says  
closer, my icarus, closer

*And what of Fire?*

slow and cool  
between the kinnikinnick and bunch grass  
between shadows and dew  
yawning across Land, asking  
what wishes to be cozied?  
what wishes to bouquet into warmth and light?  
Fire asks when cool

ancient planetary medicine  
bones of our earth  
Fire is family, is warbling aloft, is cliffside sedums and thicket  
nestled fuzz,  
there is no surrogate to hold hands with  
to purr with through snap-crackle-pop grasslands,  
through garry oakland meadows of bowing shooting stars,  
through redwood grandmas with sword fern beds and tan oak totoros  
  
to learn more than we know  
all hands, all lands

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# **FUTURISM**

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# MAYBE GAZA COULD HEAR IT: REPORTING BACK FROM DAR AHMAD MANASRA

إنهض . والا تبقي سجونا \ إنهض \ والا تبقي سلاسل \ كن \ مشعلاً بين  
المشاعل.<sup>1</sup>

Glasgow City is as a body whose blood flows steadily from its colonial past to its colonial present. Its main artery is the Clyde River, which runs the course of the city. The river's shores and bends are physically shaped by its historic shipyards that, after hundreds of years facilitating the trans-Atlantic slave trade and other imperialist terror, still, under ownership of companies like BAE Systems, produce warships for empire on its shores.<sup>2</sup> And the city's fetid heart is University of Glasgow, the fourth-oldest university in the so-called "English-speaking world," which half-admits that it "received some bequests from persons who may have benefitted from the proceeds of slavery."<sup>3</sup> Two centuries later, University of Glasgow professors founded weapons manufacturer Barr & Stroud Ltd in 1912,<sup>4</sup> a company that developed into Thales UK. As of 2025, Thales UK sponsors PhD students at four Scottish universities and partners with the Zionist company Elbit Systems to manufacture tools of genocide.<sup>5,6</sup> Indeed, the university, as of writing this, holds over £4 million in investments in BAE Systems, with an additional £60 million in research partnerships with weapons companies (including Thales UK) that supply the Zionist entity.

1 "نشيد الخبز والورد," by Marcel Khalife, *Ode to a Homeland*, Nagam Records, released March 15, 1990.

2 "What to see," Fairfield Heritage, <https://www.fairfieldgovan.co.uk/visit/what-to-see>

3 Historical Slavery Initiative, University of Glasgow, <https://www.gla.ac.uk/explore/historicalslaveryinitiative/report/>.

4 "Archive Services: partnerships with businesses to explore their heritage," University of Glasgow, file:///Users/dpersaud/Documents/Pubs/Papers/Spatial%20Justice/Media\_375436\_smxx.pdf.

5 "Thales in Scotland," Thales, <https://www.thalesgroup.com/en/countries/europe/united-kingdom/about-thales-uk/regional-presence/thales-scotland>.

6 Gabriel McKay, "Palestine protestors shut down Thales in Govan, Glasgow," *The Herald*, July 3, 2024, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24426540.palestine-protestors-shut-thales-govan-glasgow/>.

This, however, will not always be true.

*Do you think that we are going to allow this exploitation to continue, or is there another way to live with justice and freedom, a way to work collectively and with unity, to defend life and humanity?*<sup>7</sup>

Our students, in their commitment to their principles, *al-thawabat* (الثوابت), as participants in the Student Intifada for the liberation of Palestine and the end to the genocide in Gaza, have been working to disrupt this flow of blood. On March 7, 2025, the students liberated a university building in demand for divestment. They declared the building *Dar Ahmad Manasra* to honor the Jerusalemite youth whom the occupation kidnapped in 2016 when he was just 14, quickly coming to represent the conditions for Palestinian child and youth hostages. (Ahmad was liberated from occupation prisons on April 10, 2025.)



Figure 1: The lobby of Dar Ahmad Manasra, March 2025.

<sup>7</sup> SupGaleano, “A Few First Questions for the Sciences and Their ConSciences,” *Enlace Zapatista*, December 26, 2016, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2017/01/17/a-few-first-questions-for-the-sciences-and-their-consciences/>.

The liberated zone hosted political education and cultural programs all day, the space suffused with a solemn energy of community care. We didn't know whose shoulders we bumped or whose eyes we met, but we all understood why we were there, and said it aloud and listened to it being said—Gaza—in that rotted clot of the military-academic industrial complex. After several hours, the unimpressive smattering of security officers swarming the grounds of the building gave way to city police, whom the university had invoked to force the students out.

But our students did not waver. Hours after the Zionist entity had resumed its genocidal aggression on Gaza on the evening of March 18, murdering hundreds of Palestinians that night,<sup>8</sup> the students re-established *Dar Ahmad Manasra* and called on their community to defend them from potential police presence.

My chest had been tight all day; I was still waiting for WhatsApp messages to read “delivered” to my friends in Gaza when I arrived at *Dar Ahmad Manasra*. But the crowd was heaving—chanting, clapping, pressed into a small wedge of sidewalk at a three-way intersection. Half of us were practically in the street, the other half up the steps to the building and pressed against the closed doors. Slotting in among their bodies, the tightness didn't go away, but could join in with theirs.

Neon green cop cars dotted up and down the road, including two that were illegally parked right in front of the building. The cops weren't for us, so we kept on: we knew the student resisters inside could hear us.

Then. Ripping. Mechanical; tearing. I froze. *Is a driver trying to attack us?* The tearing and stretching continued—less than two meters in front of us, a city bus was pressed up against a cop car, slowly crushing and shearing off the side of the vehicle. The accident didn't immediately surprise me—the cop car was parked a foot off the curb, facing traffic—but then I caught sight of the bus driver, who had the door open. They

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8 Maureen Clare Murphy, “Israel resumes genocidal attacks on Gaza, killing 400,” Electronic Intifada, March 18, 2025, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/maureen-clare-murphy/israel-resumes-genocidal-attacks-gaza-killing-400>.

made eye contact with each of us as they inched forward. Gaze clear, mouth a closed, determined line.

A final crackle, and the back fender of the cop car hung loosely to the asphalt. The bus, labeled “walk the walk,” had given a deadly kiss to a “zero-emission” death machine.

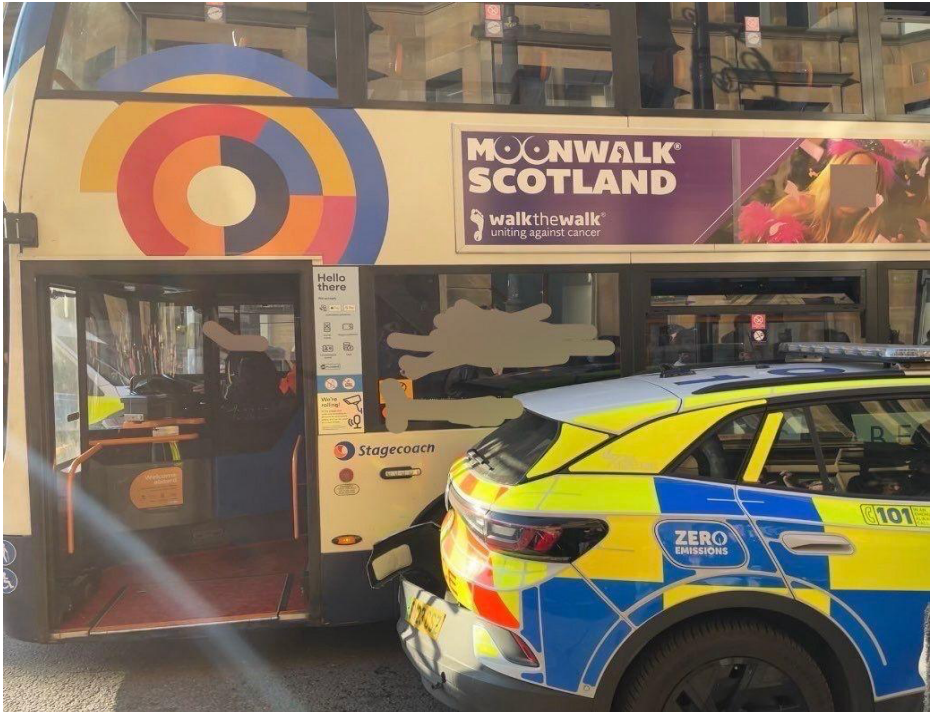


Figure 2: An empty Glasgow City bus shearing off the side of a neon cop car, March 19, 2025.

The shock was stunning. And then the cheers burst out of our chests.

The driver pulled over to get written up by the pigs. Minutes later, the student resisters marched, one by one, out of *Dar Ahmad Manasra*, fists raised, chants firm. We followed them down the sidewalk, and as we passed by the bus, the driver, painted with a remarkably bored-as-shit expression, briefly met our eyes again with a quiet steadfastness.

*I refused to admit guilt and didn't recognize their law...  
When a pressman noticed me laughing...I said: "It's  
a medal of honour to decorate my militant march."  
(Hassan Al-Saghir)<sup>9</sup>*

The city's blood appeared to, for a moment, course through a different sort of heart: one that burned for Palestine, one that rejected the illegitimate states, their prisons, their bombs, one that recited the name "Ahmad Manasra" on an intersection 2,523 miles from Al-Quds, one that evoked the resistance like a spirit in the hands of the ordinary person, one that saw four walls and the concrete of sidewalk of a university at the seat of empire and crystallized it into the choice of freedom; one that, impossibly, possibly, conjured in the fabric of space-time, like a particle in an accelerator, for the briefest of instants, a liberated world. The future, rather than the past, folded over us.

Maybe Gaza could hear it.

We could hear Gaza.

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<sup>9</sup> *Palestinian Political Prisoners: Struggle Behind Iron Bars* (PLO Unified Information, 1979), p. 9.

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# GRIEF

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# GRIEF: AND ITS DERIVATIVES

Now I know that all the definitions I would have guessed about what grief a year ago were merely consistent speculations. Yet grief is unexpected and inconsistent. When my father passed away earlier this year, conversations with my therapist aimed at controlling grief's ontological inconsistency. The argument rested on the consequences of grief's potential to disrupt my daily life. With very little resistance, I eventually subscribed to such regulation. I committed to the medications my homeopath prescribed: "You have these three bottles; one for daily use, one for every other day, and one for weekly use." Every Friday, I would stay at home to host the heavy episodes of sighing and crying that were not allowed to arrive randomly on other days. Indeed, the inconsistency of my grief had been regulated, and my body, somehow, sustained. This is what the whole discourse of therapy and homeopathy promises, no?

Grief unfolds in layers, its temporalities, materialities, and performances—each echoed in the affects suggested in the variety of terms used to describe it in the Arabic language. The human body is the site where grief both manifests and becomes describable. *Lawa'a* -لوعة- speaks of grief's hollowing effect, revealing how yearning, in the aftermath of loss, craves an abyss within being. Grief can linger for as long as the body lives—fatiguing it, rupturing it, and slowly shutting down its organs. *Horqa* -حرقه- evokes an aesthetic of grief; like fire, it burns. Resonating with punishment in monolithic religions, grief—through its consumption of our bodies—also redeems our sins. In *Ghamm* -غم- grief materializes as a textured barrier, clouding the senses and preventing us from finding meaning in the horizons our sight would otherwise have reached.

The morgue, the coffin, and the cemetery signpost layers of grief. A Palestinian that was born during the Nakba, first Catastrophe, my father's landscape of imagination had long been marked by all three. Sometimes I wonder if he was fatigued by grief himself, and if his organs were shutting down because he could no longer bear the sight of Palestinian death. The morgue where we found his body was not crowded, his

coffin was clean, and we know where he lays in the cemetery. For us as Palestinians in exile, his felt like a neat death and our grief felt privileged tinged with guilt. A Palestinian that was born in exile myself, somewhere in between two Catastrophes, my landscape of imagination has been marked by my father's.

Grief transplants our memories, confusing our relationship with space, time, and *durée*. What we lose in someone's absence are the details they once furnished into our daily life. Grief is difficult because it exposes the morphological transformation of our everyday infrastructure and pushes us to replace, amend, and rearrange what we once knew as familiar:

راهن وداعك أن ظهري سينكسر وأنّي سأتوه في غيار زيت السيّارة وجفاف ماء الرّوديتير. تعال أخبرك بقصة سريعة؛ كنت يا بابا لتفتخر بي، وتضحك عليّ في نفس ذات الوقت. البارحة قُطعت الكهرباء عن حمّام غرفة الصّيوّف وطالبتني أمّ محمّد بحلّ المسألة. «ألو، أبو عمّار، أنا آية بنت الدّكتور صبيح.. هلاًّ جئت لتحلّ المشكلة؟». لم يُسعفني أبو عمّار، تخيل! ودون حيرة طويلة، كان عامر سعدون من اتّصلتُ به ثانية. عامر يا بابا استبسل قبل قليل فوق رأسك. جرف كلّ التّراب وأهال به فوق قبرك... حبيبنا عامر والله يا بابا، صحيح. «آية، هي الكهربجي معي، تعالي عشان تفرجيه وين المشكلة». فتحت له الطّريق في المطبخ وسط ضجيج وتزاحم نساء من عائلتك... عجزنا عن إصلاح الضّوء. سألني الرّجل أسئلة كثيرة. وإن كنت أجهل كثيراً من الأجوبة، إلّا أنّي ورثت منك دليلاً لم أضلّ بفضل السّيلا... كان كلّ ما يطرح «لي مجموعة من الخيارات أسأله، «إنسى التّكلفة، شو الأفضل؟».

هو صحيح يا بابا، ما عرفنا لا أنا ولا ماما ولا إخواني الجواب على هاد السّؤال وقلنا رح يكون أحسن إشي نسألك، «هو في لوحة لقواطع الكهرباء «غير اللي بكوريدور غرفة القعدة؟»

*Your farewell wagered that my back would break—that I would lose my way among oil changes and a radiator run dry. Let me tell you a small story, Baba. You would've been proud of me—and you would've laughed, too. Last night, the lights went out in the guest bathroom. Umm Mohammad asked me to handle it. "Hello, Abu Ammar? This is Aya, Dr. Sabih's daughter... Could you come and take a look?" But Abu Ammar didn't come. Can you imagine? So without*

*much thought, I called Amer Sa'doun again. Amer, Baba, was just here, standing over your grave like a warrior; shovelling soil with both hands and laying it gently above your chest. Our dear Amer— really, Baba, he's one of us. "Aya," he said, "the electrician is with me. Come show him where it is." I opened the way through the kitchen, weaving past the noise and the crowd of women from your side of the family. But we couldn't fix the light. The man asked me many questions. And though I didn't know most of the answers, I carried something from you— a quiet compass, a small inheritance that kept me steady. Every time he gave me choices, I'd say: "Forget the cost, just tell me what is best."*

*Baba, neither I, nor Mama, nor my brothers knew how to answer this one. So, we thought we would ask you: "Is there another fuse box besides the one in the corridor by the living room?"*

While in our living room, a footage of a woman in Gaza remains lodged in my memory and I pay tribute to her son as I touch the cold face of my father. She cries because she finally found the body of her son when she glimpsed what remains of his face after months spent under the rubble of their house. She touches the fragile bones of his face gently smiling and crying at once. Finding his remains qualifies the grievability of his death. "I am still getting my head around the loss", I wrote to a few colleagues in an email announcing a prospective delay in my response. Now, I know that this was an impossible promise. My daily life endured, but my head cannot yet make sense of the complexity of the process. Maybe it should not.

# **HINTERLAND**

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# BACK, AND TO THE LEFT

## AN INTERVIEW WITH CLARENCE THOMAS, RETIRED DOCKWORKER, ILWU LOCAL 10

Scholars have advanced and debated the term “hinterland” in myriad ways, from *Nature’s Metropolis*,<sup>1</sup> to the “Hinterlanders” school of political economy in Western Canada.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the shipping industry uses the “Hinterland-Port Concept” to describe a port’s zone of influence, and recent characterizations have unpacked the concept as part of a planetary logistics regime.<sup>3</sup>

The origin of “hinterland” is German. “Hinter” translates to “back” or “behind.” In the 1880s, George G. Chisholm, observing economic competitiveness between Bremen and Hamburg, described it as “the land which lies behind a seaport or a seaboard.”<sup>4</sup> As Gupta et al. describe, it becomes useful thereafter toward colonial plunder, with Lord Salisbury declaring a “doctrine of the hinterland” thusly: “those who possess the coast also possess the plain which is watered by the rivers that run to the coast.”<sup>5</sup>

Who *possesses* the coast? To me, this is a question of power, and of international solidarity and labour action. So, who can best help us understand this struggle?

Clarence Thomas is a retired member of the International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10. A third-generation longshoreman, he has been an activist since the 1960s, first as a member of the Black Student Union at San Francisco State College and then the Black Panther Party. He is considered a leading radical African American trade unionist and has organized many important rank-and-file struggles and

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1 William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. (W. W. Norton, 1991).

2 Daniel Drache. “Rediscovering Canadian Political Economy.” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 11, no. 3 (August 1976): 3–18.

3 Neil Brenner and Nikos Katsikis. “Operational Landscapes: Hinterlands of the Capitalocene.” *Architectural Design* 90, no. 1 (2020): 22–3; Pamela Gupta, Sarah Nuttall, Esther Peeren, and Hanneke Stuit. *Planetary Hinterlands: Extraction, Abandonment and Care*. (Springer International Publishing, 2024).

4 Geo. G. Chisholm, *Handbook of Commercial Geography*. New edition. (Longmans, Green, Co., 1894), 107.

5 Gupta et al., *Planetary Hinterlands*, 7.

solidarity actions. Since retiring, he remains politically engaged, co-founding DeClare Publishing and authoring several books, including *Mobilizing in Our Own Name: Million Worker March*, an anthology of African American trade unionism.<sup>6</sup>

We spoke over the phone in July 2025. I (CA) was in Vancouver, and Clarence (CT) was in Oakland. The following has been edited for length and clarity.



Figure 1: Clarence Thomas, Retired Dockworker, ILWU Local 10. (Provided by Thomas)

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<sup>6</sup> For more, visit: [millionworkermarch.com](http://millionworkermarch.com).

**CA:** First off, can you describe your family's connection to the labour movement?

**CT:** It all started with my maternal grandfather, who was part of the second great migration. He left Port Arthur, Texas, in 1942 when they came to Oakland. He worked initially at Moore's Shipyard, and then two years later, he was hired on the waterfront. This was during WW2 when they needed a lot of longshore workers. There was significant hiring of African Americans during WW2 at Local 10. My dad was a longshore worker as well. He was hired in 1963. And I have an uncle who was hired in 1965.

**CA:** Do dockworkers ever use the word "hinterland" in the performance of their duties?

**CT:** We don't use that term, but what we do talk about is jurisdiction, which could be another word for hinterland because it has to do with ports. Where there are port operations or future port operations, we claim our jurisdiction in terms of the work that is going to be done there. So if somebody wants to put up a crane and start doing longshore work, in an area that you might refer to as "the hinterland", even if it's not part of the contiguous landscape of the port of Oakland or San Francisco...

I remember there was a situation in Pittsburgh, I believe, where they wanted to consider doing some work, and we had to go out there and lay claim to that, and say, "that's our jurisdiction, this is what we do. So if you're going to do this kind of work there, you're going to have to sign an agreement with the ILWU." Now what that basically means is, if there was some work done in the hinterlands, when heretofore there was no work being done regarding the loading and discharging of maritime cargo, we certainly would appear.

**CA:** Is there anything about the political consciousness of the Bay Area that contributes to ILWU Local 10's rank and file being politically organized?

**CT:** In the City of Oakland, there was a general strike in 1947. In 1934, there was the great West Coast waterfront strike, and two strikers were shot in the back by police and killed. We call that Bloody Thursday. That led to the City of San Francisco being shut down for four days. Then in 1968, the longest student strike in American history took place at San Francisco State College around the issue of the establishment of Black studies, a school of ethnic studies, open admissions, and a number of other things. It involved labor, students, and the community. Then you also have to remember the Black Panther Party, starting in 1966. You had members in Local 10. You had Angela Davis being supported by Local 10. You had a number of Black cultural things happening. Oakland is a working-class town, and it's accustomed to radicalism because of the Panthers.

**CA:** Your local has long demonstrated empathy for populations quite distant from the "shop floor"; indeed, your power is that of a valve on the global circulation of capital. Do dockworkers see themselves in these terms?

**CT:** We certainly would like to think that our members understand that. Enough of them do, in particular moments. During contract negotiations, they understand the leverage they have, and they understand when we're not being taken seriously and when we need to do something to make them take notice of our seriousness. When the moments arrive, ILWU members, especially Local 10, are able to rise to the occasion because they do understand that they control production.

**CA:** In the 1980s, Local 10 engaged in actions against South African apartheid.<sup>7</sup> What similarities do you see between actions refusing Israel-bound shipments now, and anti-apartheid actions taken in the past?

**CT:** I wasn't around in 1984, that was one year before I started on the waterfront, but people who had mentored me have shared with me what went down. In the case of the anti-apartheid struggle, in 1976, Leo Robinson (ILWU member) wrote a resolution after the Soweto massacre calling for a boycott of South African cargo. It set into motion a series of events and the raising of consciousness. The community was very active, and it was very popular to be engaged in the anti-apartheid struggle. Churches, community organizations, and labor unions put pressure on corporate America to make changes.

From 1976 to 1984, there were a number of speakers from the African National Congress (ANC), films smuggled out of South Africa explaining to members what the struggle was all about...there was an organization formed, the Southern Africa Support Committee, the first labor organization of its type. So when we get to the issue of the Palestinian struggle, some of the same analysis comes up, about Israel being an apartheid state. We started introducing resolutions concerning Palestine in our conventions in the 1980s.<sup>8</sup>

Now the differences are pronounced. The anti-apartheid struggle grew in popularity. It became en vogue. But, on the issue of Palestine, what we have seen is just the opposite. We've seen political and governmental repression go down. I was reading about people in London being arrested for supporting a certain Palestinian organization, holding up a sign... its getting bad.

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7 Peter Cole, *Dockworker Power: Race and Activism in Durban and the San Francisco Bay Area* (University of Illinois Press, 2018).

8 In the 14<sup>th</sup> convention of the IILWU in 1976, an open debate on Palestine ended with a resolution that demanded Israel's withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 and the recognition of the PLO as a representative of the Palestinians. See, Michael W Suleiman, "Development of Public Opinion on the Palestine Question." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 3 (1984): 104-105

**CA:** I am interested in the logistics of these actions. What knowledge do dockworkers have on goods being passed through the port: how do you “see inside” the containers, essentially?

**CT:** I don’t mind sharing certain information but some information I’m reluctant to share. Let me just say this: in 2010, when the Israeli commandos killed 10 people on the *Mavi Marmara*, the Turkish flotilla on its way to Gaza.

Well, when a Zim vessel—Zim is a big Israeli shipping line—when that ship came in there were about one thousand people out there. So none of the workers could go to work; management couldn’t go to work. So we all knew that Zim is an Israeli shipping line. And when it came to “Block the Boat” four years later, once again it was a Zim ship.

On other occasions, we got inside information from people whose identity cannot be divulged. I will say this: most longshore workers do not know what is on a vessel. There are dockworkers who do have access to that information. It’s a matter of them sharing that information.

Back in the day when we were boycotting South African cargo, it was very easy to identify what cargo was what. They weren’t in containers; they were in crates. So it would be very easy for a winch driver to say, “I’m not touching that cargo from South Africa.”

**CA:** Can you discuss the Local 10 Caucus Resolution on the war in Gaza and the West Bank?<sup>9</sup>

**CT:** I’m speaking as a retired member. I’m giving my opinion. But if you read the resolution, it’s really based on our history with the Palestinian struggle. We’ve been in touch with the

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<sup>9</sup> “Local 10 Caucus Resolution on the war in Gaza and the West Bank”, *Truthout*. <https://truthout.org/app/uploads/2024/05/Local-10-Caucus-Resolution-on-the-War-in-Gaza-and-the-West-Bank.pdf>

Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions for a number of years. We have a long history of defending the rights of the Palestinian people. Calling on Israeli soldiers and settlers to stop beating and killing Palestinians in the occupation of their lands.

I think with most of our resolutions, the “whereases” are really citing information to provide background, so that members can understand why the resolution is being put forward. The resolution is based on the experience of the local. It’s sufficient to say that Local 10 has been the social and political consciousness of the ILWU.

**CA:** In recent years we have seen something of a (small) renewal in the labour and anti-war movements. Are you encouraged that these movements might be able to better coordinate internationalist solidarity against Imperialism and Capitalism?

**CT:** The answer to that question is yes. In 2003, I was part of a five-member international delegation that went to Baghdad, Iraq. It was organized by a group called US Labor Against the War. The purpose of it was to make contact with trade unionists there, and to do fact-finding in terms of what was going on under the occupation, as it related to the trade unionists.

In 2004, we organized a Million Worker March at the Lincoln Memorial. The driving force behind it was trade unionists and anti-war activists. We wound up with 15,000 people. We would have had more people than that if not for all sorts of efforts to undermine it. It was never supposed to have taken place.

Four years later, Local 10 initiated a resolution that was adopted by the longshore division, which called for all 29 ports to be shut down on, get this: May 1st, International Workers Day. And get this: that was during the course of our contract negotiations! We shut down all ports on the West Coast

including Vancouver, Canada, for eight hours, calling for an end to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was the first time in American history that a union had gone on strike not for benefits and contract demands but to end a war.

So to answer your question, I am somewhat encouraged to see this relationship continue. I think it's inevitable, personally. There have been tremendous rallies involving workers and anti-war activists. But this is what I will say: Bush or Trump, or the Democrats, don't care about how large demonstrations are. What they do care about is when you start shutting down operations at ports, when you start disrupting the economy. That's not to say rallies don't have their place. But in the end, its spectacle.

You have to engage in political struggle to win the day, I'll just leave it at that.



Figure 2: Confrontation between a policeman wielding a night stick and a striker during the San Francisco General Strike, 1934 (NARA – 541926)

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# **HORIZON**

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# SPACETIMES AND WORLDTIMES

## (1) ON HORIZONTALITIES

In the Islamic tradition, there is a prophetic saying—a *Hadith*—that the angel Gabriel has 600 wings, and that they fill the horizon,<sup>1</sup> spanning all of the space between East and West. This angel is adorned in a thin mantle of brocade, and, another saying declares, that jewels fall from his wings - precious stones for which there are no earthly descriptions. Gabriel was only seen twice in this form by Muhammad: once in the Prophet's beloved *Makkah*—the Radiant City—and again, when he journeyed to heaven to meet God. On *that* particular journey, Muhammad saw the Archangel at another boundary—the *sidrat-al-muntaha*—a lote tree at the farthest boundary between human and divine knowledge. That journey—to *that* divine horizon—began in Makkah, but departed for the heavens from *Al Aqsa*, in *Al-Quds*, in Palestine.

It is with this thought and place of Palestine that this particular reflection on spatial justice rejects the plain optical limit definition of the word *horizon*. It rejects the greek etymology of *horos* and *horizōn*—which define a word that is ultimately limiting. It takes, rather, as its grounding, the trilateral Arabic roots of the word أفق (*ufuq*)—ا، ف، ق—which connotes clearing, expansiveness, opening up. And so, for this definition, a horizon—an أفق—is a space, dream, and world of revelation and revealing. A horizon is a portal. We take as its grounding the deep entanglement of earth and sky—all the *dunams* of land, rivers and seas, and their atmospheres—the *wahkohtowin* of *Nêhiyaw* sovereignties, and *Haudenosaunee* and *Anishinaabe* relationalities. This horizon—a horizon of non-militant realism<sup>2</sup>—is a world of ethical and tender accountabilities. And because this timely reflection on spatial justice is being written at a time where the attempted, live-streamed extermination of Palestinian lifeworlds is underway,

<sup>1</sup> وَلَقَدْ رَءَاهُ بِالْأَفْقِ الْمُبِينِ Qur'an, 81:23, "...and he did see that angel, on the clear horizon."

<sup>2</sup> On "militant-realism," see Dan Hicks, *Every Monument Will Fall: A Story of Remembering and Forgetting*, (Penguin/Random House, 2025).

we reject the whiteness and supremacy of other horizons, except a horizon that is a promise, a dream, and a return.

This horizon is a world, dream, and promise of transformation. A horizon is not about a line as such, but an inflection point, an inflection time, an inflection space. The moment of revelation for Muhammad was not under a desert sky, but in a desert cave, when Gabriel's presence filled that mountain room and an unlettered man was commanded to read. A horizon is the moment of a stick thrown at a drone, a paraglider over a fence, red-paint on a warplane. A horizon is a Palestinian father pouring tea for his wife in the swept-clean ruin of a once-apartment. A horizon is Mahmoud kissing his son and wife. A horizon is re-building a house bombed with American weapons. A horizon is a threshold-of-becoming, not simply of being. A horizon is not exported to the end of a comma.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1. Cape Town, South Africa. Cloud-mist over and around the trees on the descent from Signal Hill and Lion's Head. Photograph by author.

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3 Nicki Kattoura, "A Thousand Eulogies are Exported to the Comma: Of Syntax and Genocide," in Lithub, February 12, 2024. <https://lithub.com/a-thousand-eulogies-are-exported-to-the-comma-of-syntax-and-genocide/>.

Figure 2. Looking over the horizon at Jounieh Bay, a few weeks before Israel attacked Lebanon. Photograph by author



*This* horizon requires us to move, always, always, *always* to move. That *other* horizon—the horizon of western worlding—is always static, frozen into the capital and carceral systems that require everyone to know—and stay—in places articulated by that capital and carceral empire. *That* horizon is a tether to an epistemic and ontological toxicity that sustains ICE and the Border and the Billionaire, that will protect, at all costs, the financial horizons of Elbits and Raytheons, that will tolerate no other dreaming or world save what that empire allows you. *That* horizon anticipates and reifies our relationship to that particular placespace and spacetime that is as much a prison as any real brick-and-mortar institution. *That* horizon is a lie, because it tells you, “*you can see.*” But you can’t. Not really. If you really want to see, you have to surrender horizontality, and maybe, just maybe, even verticality.

## (2) ON VERTICALITIES

I climbed a mountain once.

I climbed it to look for the tomb of a saint, who was buried as part of a sacred ring around a city on the sea.

This city was built as a White City,<sup>4</sup> and it was built—in part—by people who looked like me, had names like me, brown skin like me. They weren't truly part of the city they were building, so they were exiled to its wild edges—in Dutch, the "*woeste*"—of Cape Town. They lived in a neighbourhood called the Bokaap—"above the Cape"—and had a better view of the mountains and the oceans below. These communities built mosques and schools, and homes and cemeteries, and to know the month of fasting, they would look for a crescent moon in the sky above a southern horizon. Seeing this moon as the change from the month of *Sha'baan* into the month of *Ramadan*, the horizon is only a reference. And you can only see it at night, in a darkening sky. The horizon is change.

A series of shrines are built in a loose ring around the city and one of them is between Lion's Head and Signal Hill, overlooking the Atlantic. On a clear day, you can see Robben Island, which the Dutch turned into the prison in the 18th century, and which the South African National Party sustained as such during Apartheid. Robben Island is where Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, Walther Sisulu, and Ahmad Kathrada were imprisoned—along with a host of others. Early prisoners included those who would build Cape Town—forcibly taken from Java, Macassar, Indonesia, and the Malacca Strait, and brought in the holds of Dutch East India Company ships.

I climbed this mountain to visit the tomb of a saint—a student of one of the founder's of the first Muslim community of Cape Town. On this summer day, there was lots of light, but not much warmth from the southern sun. I was there with my brother, my cousin, and a friend, and we split up on the mountain paths, each following a different route. I sat in a thick, low cluster of Cape *fynbos* with languid bees flitting

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4 See Nic Coetzer, "The Production of the City as White Space: Representing and Restructuring Identity and Architecture, Cape Town, 1892-1936" (PhD Thesis, UCL, 2004.)

from flower to flower, Cape Sunbirds, and Protea Canaries, and looked at the city below me. I could see the brightly coloured houses of the Bokaap sinking down into the city bowl. There, just beyond, was Greenmarket square; the expensive hillside neighbourhood of Seaport to the west, with gated houses and blue swimming pools overlooking a bluer sea.

Without warning, and as quick as a breath, a low grey-white cloud crawled in from the ocean, over Signal Hill and Lion's Head and crept down in a viscous gossamer brocade over me and into the city below. In a beat, the urban world of Cape Town disappeared. Its noises reduced to unmoored and de-positioned sounds, muffled and faint. The cloudmantle was cold and damp. Droplets formed on my skin, on my hair, in my beard. The sun was a pale orb suspended in a semi-translucent gesso canvas. The wind, hard and fast, breathed in irregular gusts, swirling cloud-smoke around me, and I could, at times, make out distant figures ahead, behind, then gone.

Figure 3. Lost and found in the cloud-mist on Signal Hill, when the city disappeared. Cape Town, South Africa. Photograph by author.



One deep Aeolian burst, and there in a sudden clearing of cloud-light, I saw the Tomb of the Saint, more clearly and in sharper relief than under that summer sun and clear horizon. It was a small, simple building, under renovation, with freshly painted white exterior walls, interrupted by pilasters, capped by a large, green dome. The *revealing*, I realised in that moment,

was, in effect, the removal of false orientations, false clarities, false positions. I remembered in that moment, how these tombs were made and visited—in the hard and brutal world of pre-apartheid Africa. These buildings were *meant* to be hidden. They were meant to be obscured. They were meant to be hard to find and hard to get to. The removal of other orientations, fixities, referents, registers and indexes—horizons—meant, in effect, clearer sight. Cape Town was gone, all that was left was a darker pocket of air, water, light, the sound of wind. In that moment, I saw more clearly than a pilot describing the ceiling and visibility as severe-clear. Our horizon, you see, is a Glissantian one—with a right to opacity.<sup>5</sup>

I'm convinced that there was an angel in that vapour.

### (3) آفاق (PLURAL OF أفق)

A horizon is a constructed thing. As such, it can be deconstructed and reconstructed. It is, perhaps something like Agamben's apparatus, but also a state of exception.<sup>6</sup>

A horizon can be either visible or invisible. It can be a skyline, or it can be akin to the Kármán Line—that zone where gravity dissipates and weightlessness begins, there in the upper reach of the atmosphere.

A horizon is spatial. It orients and disorients. It visibilizes and disappears. Like Anuradha Mathur's and Dilip Da Cunha's Ganges and Mississippi rivers,<sup>7</sup> it is a terrain of ubiquitous potential.

A horizon can be obscured. It can be un-seen.

A horizon is a place of kites and birds, but not drones or warplanes. A horizon is a home for stellar nurseries, nebulae

5 Edouard Glissant spoke often in his works about the "right to opacity." See Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (University of Virginia Press, 1991); *The Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 1997); and *Treatise on the Whole-World* (Liverpool University Press, 2020).

6 Giorgio Agamben, "What Is an Apparatus?" and *Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford University Press, 2009); and Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

7 Dillip Da Cunha, *The Invention of Rivers: Alexander's Eye and Ganga's Descent* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). See also: Anuradha Mathur and Dilip Da Cunha, *Mississippi Flood: Designing A Shifting Landscape* (Yale University Press, 2011); and Anuradha Mathur and Dilip Da Cunha, *Soak: Mumbai in an Estuary* (Rupa Publications, 2009).

and constellations, but not bombs or phosphorus.

A horizon is a crown of thorns made from a tree that grows in the Levant. A horizon is a veil between a lote-tree and a prophet.

A horizon is a paraglider. It is the wing of a Palestinian sunbird, or a crimson-winged finch. It is my daughter, thrown up into the air, her tiny hand pointing to a firefly.

A horizon is a stone, a stick, a carnation.

A horizon is a time present and future, not the frozen temporality of a frozen colonial project. It is a liberation.<sup>8</sup>

A horizon, like a tomorrow, is ours, and not theirs.

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<sup>8</sup> Nasser Abourahme, *The Time Beneath the Concrete: Palestine Between Camp and Colony* (Duke University Press, 2025).

# HOUSING

**MATTHEW SOULES**

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

# **“EVERYBODY HATES EACH OTHER HERE”<sup>1</sup>**

## **RESIDENTIAL ALIENATION FOR EVERYONE EVERYWHERE**

In their 2016 book, *In Defense of Housing*, David Madden and Peter Marcuse write,

[g]rowing numbers of people today do not feel at home in their housing. Overcrowding, displacement, dispossession, homelessness, harassment, disrepair, and other ordeals are increasingly common.”<sup>2</sup>

While it is vital to recognize and respond to these forms of residential alienation, it is also important to recognize that residential alienation impacts almost everyone, at every rung of the socio-economic ladder. As Astra Taylor so captivatingly explores, even those ‘winning’ the capitalist game are entirely alienated. In an opinion piece for the *New York Times* in 2023, she writes: “The dysphoria of feeling you don’t have enough, even when you objectively have a lot, is not simply a spontaneous reaction to seeing others with more ... but rather the consequence of living in an insecure and risk-filled world in which there are no upper or lower limits on wealth and poverty.”<sup>3</sup> It may be that to effectively address the injustices of contemporary housing requires us to hold the complex and disquieting possibility of residential alienation’s many avatars impacting *everyone, everywhere*.

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1 Sarina Abramovich, resident of the 432 Park condominium tower in Manhattan, as quoted in Stefanos Chen, “The Downsides to Life in a Supertall Tower: Leaks, Creaks, Breaks,” *New York Times*, February 03, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/03/realestate/luxury-high-rise-432-park.html>.

2 David J. Madden and Peter Marcuse, *In Defense of Housing* (Verso: 2016), 54.

3 Astra Taylor, “Why Does Everyone Feel So Insecure All the Time?,” *New York Times*, August 18, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/18/opinion/inequality-insecurity-economic-wealth.html>.

I'm starving after the flight.

The fridge has been stocked even more decadently than usual. All the favourites and some new surprises. And there it is, the freshly prepared superfood lasagna ready to be warmed.

And damn these countertops are gorgeous—just look at them!

Aren't they from that quarry near Florence? Something like that. I can never remember.

But boy was it was so painful to get these slabs. The wait was intolerable. So worth it now though.

Coveted but merciless. Any smudge or even water stain glares back at you. The cruelest form of indignity. It's not hard to spend ages obsessively, compulsively wiping and buffing. Impossible to ever get it looking right. I lost an entire day doing that on my last visit. How depressing.

Of course, this kind of thing should be left for them to deal with in the morning. Let the people with the right skills handle it. Leave it to the professionals.

But that's a little too embarrassing. What about self-sufficiency?

Don't be an idiot. Better not dare touch the countertops. Treat them like a preservation site to be left in a perfect state. Where is the Xanax?

Uber eats to the concierge. Have them send it up. Contactless. Styrofoam containers and utensils instantly tossed into the garbage chute. Far easier. Breathe deeply. Recite mantra.

Buying this place wasn't hard. It was easy, actually. Much better than the mountain house—which was a nightmare. But even better than beach house—which was pretty smooth. The team was top notch, of course.

A SEAL Team Six type of team. That's what I always said.

It was only slightly stressful evaluating the renderings while we were in the islands. Sometimes the Wi-Fi sucked. It was only then when I truly couldn't breathe.

My biggest concern was that the numbered company wasn't fully hidden in the web of relationships that ran from the consultants to the fund manager, to lawyers, to yet another group of consultants, and finally to the real estate agency. Frankly, the diagram of this network was even more beautiful than the images on the screen. And don't forget, those images were of great architecture. Jaw-dropping.

Time for a bath. That will be calming. It really is my favourite part of the property. Truth is, after I saw *that* rendering, I knew we needed to own this. That's when we gave SEAL Team Six the go ahead. "Let's roll!" I said. They didn't get the reference. But I laughed inside.

The water temperature is perfect. The combination of essential oils just right. The longevity mix is divine.

A smidge of Ativan.

Chrysler. Empire State. Freedom.

It all never fails to be sublime ... twinkling lights of the city.

And *my* naked body at the centre of it all. This is what super prime *is*.

On the edge of still bliss.

Wait, what is this ripple? How annoying. Put it out of mind. Breathe deeply. Mantra.

"I love myself. I love myself."

Is it growing? How can a building this expensive sway like this?

This isn't a ripple, it's a slosh. It's a fucking slosh.

Maybe even a wave.

I'll need more towels to soak this up. Is this a *flood*?

Where are the towels????!!!!

OMG. Is the building groaning again? The lawyers assured me that this was repaired. Seriously, the building's structure can't handle the wind loads? Was that what they said? Give me a break.

Is it steel or concrete making that sound? Isn't carbon fibre involved?

This is actually loud. I'm not kidding.

Ouch. I know I have sensitive ears. But this hurts!

Frantic texts to the team. They're gonna get hell for this. I need to get the fuck out of here.

By the time I reach the elevator I can barely see straight. If just one person gets into this godforsaken box, I'm going to lose my mind.

I paid over forty million dollars to be in the centre of Manhattan and not see a fucking soul. For once, just let me have what I paid for.

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# **INTERCONNECTEDNESS**

**LANA JUDEH**

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# NAVIGATING FLOW AND FRAGMENTATION

## VALLEYS IN THE HIGHLANDS OF PALESTINE

(1)

On Friday, October 13, 2023, the olive-picking season began in my village, Saffa, located west of Ramallah. My parents and I decided to harvest olives from the trees recently inherited by my mother from her family, situated near the Apartheid Wall and overlooking one of the valleys surrounding Saffa to the north: Wady Bil'in (Bil'in Valley). After consulting with others, we learned that landowning families had collectively agreed it was safe to access that part of the village.

Amidst a heavy week, olive picking felt like a brief escape from the news. There was something deeply personal about going to pick olives there during the very first week of the genocidal war in Palestine. Even though we had not discussed it, it felt as though my parents and I were contemplating the possibility that this might be our last opportunity to be there, or perhaps even our final chance to pick olives at all.

A portion of Saffa's land, along with that of other villages, is located within what is commonly referred to as the Seam Zone, where it has been isolated behind the Apartheid Wall since its construction began in 2002.<sup>1</sup> The village remains embedded within a terrain of persistent spatial and political struggle, situated within Palestine's fragmented and colonized landscape. In 1949, the armistice line was drawn across Saffa's land, severing it from neighboring villages that were ethnically cleansed, including Shilta, el Burj, and Bir Ma'in.<sup>2</sup> A designated no man's land (NML), initially demarcated in the

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1 The Seam Zone, also known as the "Seam Line," refers to the area situated between the 1949 Armistice Line (the Green Line) and the Wall constructed by Israel beginning in 2002. Predominantly located within the West Bank, this zone is characterized by restricted Palestinian access and has significant implications for daily life, mobility, and land use.

2 The 1949 Armistice line, also known as the 'Green Line,' is the demarcation established in the 1949 Armistice Agreements between Israel and Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, following the 1948 War, which resulted in the ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and the establishment of the territories known as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Latrun (Jerusalem area) during the 1949 Armistice Agreements, eventually extended toward Saffa and nearby villages (Figure 1). Following the 1967 occupation, borders and frontiers were redrawn once again—transformations that would be further reconfigured under the Oslo Accords after 1993.

While we were still able to access my mother’s land near the Wall, the Wall’s construction prevented access to and cultivation of other plots belonging to families throughout the village, including those from both sides of my family. More broadly, these colonial borders—running north to south—severed the villages from an interconnected ecosystem of hills and valleys that once structured socio-ecological life in this region of Palestine’s highlands. This included Wady Bil’in, named after the adjacent village separated by the valley.<sup>3</sup>

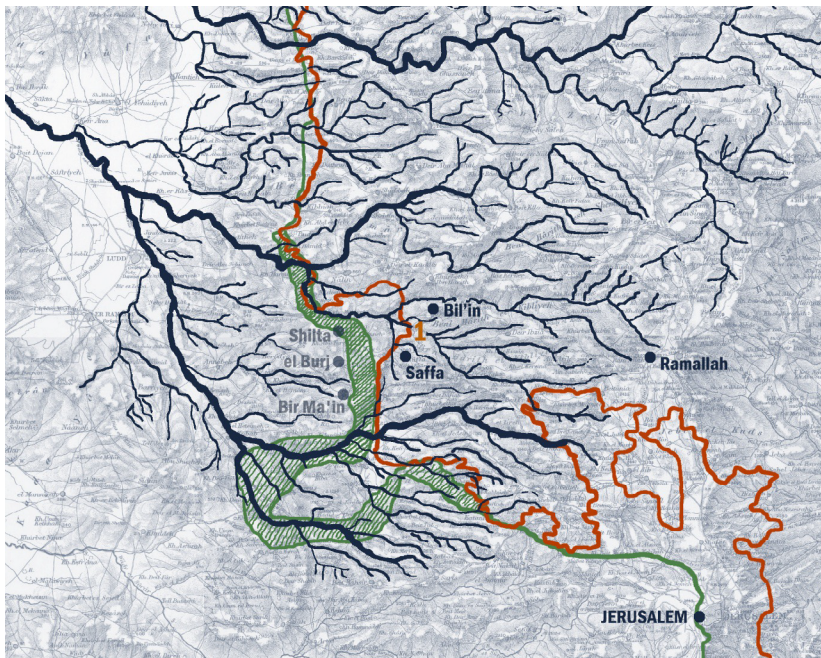


Figure 1: Tracing the network of valleys west of Ramallah using the Map of Western Palestine, produced from surveys conducted for the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund (1881). The map is overlaid with the 1949 Armistice Line (in green), with areas designated as no man's land (NML) and the Apartheid Wall (in red) Valley 1 indicates Wady Bil'in.

<sup>3</sup> The people of Bil'in refer to it as Wadi Saffa, which is an interesting case where neighboring villages do not assert territorial claims over the land.

## (2)

In rural Palestine, the village landscape is a “differentiated and structured space,”<sup>4</sup> where fellahin (peasants) navigate a cognitive map shaped by overlapping spatial criteria like cardinal points, localities, landmarks, kinship domains, ecological zones, and agricultural cycles. This layered system divides and connects the land in the peasants’ spatial consciousness.<sup>5</sup> While I lacked this spatial cognition growing up in Amman, and later Ramallah, my parents, who lived in Saffa between the 1950s and 1970s, developed it through their experiences in its fields and wilderness, familiarizing themselves with its topography and social ownership as peasants in Palestine have done for centuries.

The valleys of Palestine have long played a vital role in the ecological and cultural life of peasant communities. Local environmental knowledge regarding these landscapes is deeply complex. Valleys are not merely linear features; they are structured and differentiated according to topographic characteristics—whether narrow or wide, steep or flat—the type of water flowing through them (rainfall, streamflow, runoff, cascades, and groundwater springs), and the particular fauna and flora that thrive in each zone. The agricultural practices employed by fellahin, along with sites dedicated to drying and processing crops, as well as areas suitable for recreation and swimming, further illustrate the ecological and cultural richness embedded in these landscapes.

Wady Bil’in forms part of a seasonal hydrological rhythm, flowing intermittently during the winter and spring months. It lies within an interconnected network of tributary valleys that originate in the western slopes of Ramallah, traverse surrounding villages, and merge into larger drainage systems. Surface water is conveyed westward through streams and runoff channels, moving through these valleys toward the coastal plains and ultimately discharging into the

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4 Suad Amiry. *Peasant Architecture in Palestine: Space, Kinship and Gender*. (Riwaq, 2017): 52.

5 Suad Amiry. “The Village as a Spatial Unit.” In *Peasant Architecture in Palestine: Space, Kinship and Gender*. (Riwaq, 2017): 47- 62.

Mediterranean Sea. For example, at a confluence now located behind the Wall, Wady Bil'in joins another valley, forming part of a broader watershed—such as Wady Malakeh (or el Malaqi). These valleys gradually converge into coastal streams that ultimately feed rivers like Nahr el 'Auja (al-A'uja River), which discharges into the Mediterranean Sea. Historically, Nahr el 'Auja was a vital water source for Jaffa, sustaining its renowned citrus agriculture through an abundant and reliable supply.

Among this network of valleys lies Wady en-Natuf, a historically and ecologically significant site located a few kilometers to the north. Named after the Natufian culture that inhabited the region during the Epipaleolithic period, this site is linked to one of the earliest hunter-gatherer communities to adopt sedentary or semi-sedentary lifestyles, emerging after the last glacial period and before the agricultural revolution.<sup>6</sup> It is a key archaeological and cultural site for understanding the deep roots of human habitation in Palestine, the Levant, and the broader history of civilization (Figure 2).

In this interconnected landscape, Wady Bili'n periodically disrupted movement between Bili'in and Saffa due to high runoff and the absence of bridges or culverts. As part of the western watershed basins of Palestine, rainwater flows visibly through tributary valleys originating in Ramallah, while also infiltrating subterranean aquifers. These aquifers feed springs in villages east of Saffa—where the absence of native springs renders such flows particularly vital.

As my father explained, from January to April, Wadi Bil'in follows a cyclical rhythm marked by multiple dual-phase events: an initial surge of rainwater, followed by spring water emerging from saturated aquifers embedded in surrounding hills and valleys. This temporality—deeply rooted

<sup>6</sup> The Natufian culture, as described by the Encyclopedia of Anthropology, is a late Epipaleolithic culture found across northern Sinai into southern Jordan towards the Euphrates Valley in Northern Syria. The culture dates back to approximately 12,500–10,200 BC. Primarily known as hunter-gatherers, the Natufians enhanced their diet by foraging for wild grains, which they likely did not cultivate. Some groups resided in caves, while others established early villages. See “Natufian Culture.” In *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. James H. Birx, 1693-1693 (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2006), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412952453.n645>.

in local agricultural and ecological knowledge— supports the cultivation of figs, olives, and vegetables, sustained by family-developed techniques for drying and preserving seasonal harvests. Locally significant names distinguish these flows, and my father recalls picnics during peak spring discharge, when families would bring salted fish and drink from the valley’s abundant freshwater—a now-lost practice that one entwined hydrological memory with communal life-making.

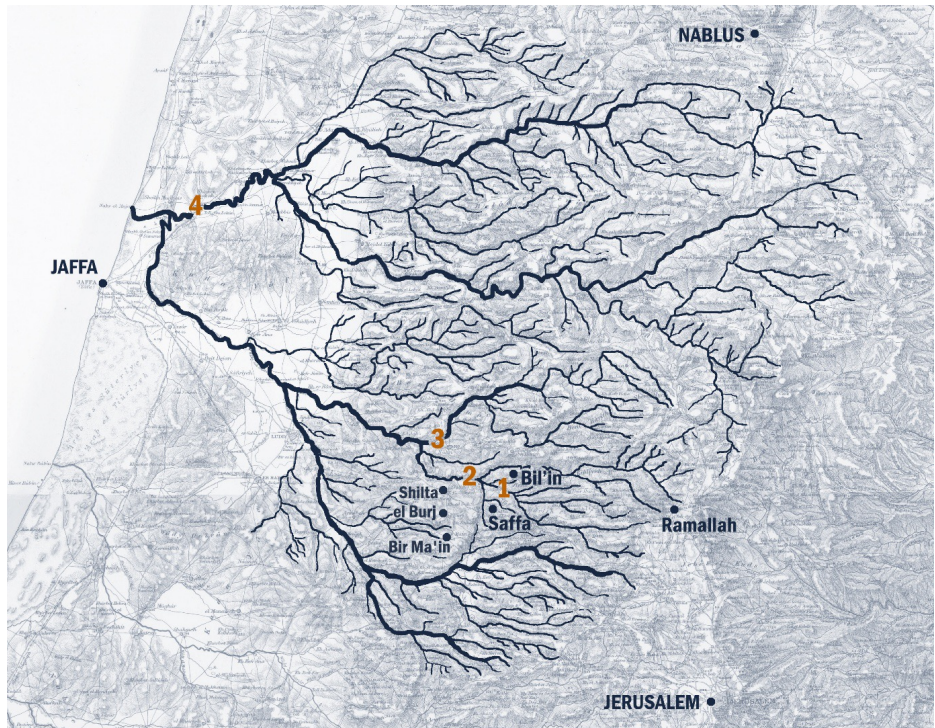


Figure 2: Tracing the basin of Nahr el 'Auja using the Map of Western Palestine, based on surveys conducted for the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund (1881). As noted in the Introduction to the Survey of Western Palestine: Its Waterways, Plains & Highlands, the basin—extending from the southern reaches of Nablus to the northern outskirts of Jerusalem—is one of the most considerable basins on the western watershed of Palestine. The indicated valleys include: (1) Wady Bil'in (also known as Wady Saffa), (2) Wady Malakeh (el Malaqi), (3) Wady en Natuf, and (4) Nahr el 'Auja.

### (3)

Across diverse geographies—and with particular resonance in Palestine—valleys are understood as networked formations that traverse and interconnect multiple layers of history, articulating hydrological memory across personal, collective, and species-level registers. Their recursive and open-ended relationality enables connections that unfold through both time and terrain. As spatial conduits, valleys generate and mediate formations across diverse scales, rendering water—a life-sustaining source defined by flow—fundamental to the environmental, historical, and socio-political systems they sustain.

In Palestine, valleys offer a lens into a geography shaped by deeply entangled networks of human, non-human, and more-than-human relations. To inhabit this geography is to negotiate two overlapping yet divergent paradigms of interconnectedness: one geographic and historical, evolving over millennia; the other modern-colonial, imposed over the past century. The latter is superimposed upon—and often disrupts—the former. Within these nested networks and systems, nature emerges as an active agent, weaving the microcosms of indigenous life. In contrast, the modern-colonial logic positions itself in opposition to both nature and the indigenous, severing longstanding ecological and communal ties.

British maps from the 1940s depict a north–south road crossing the confluence where Wady Bil'in, along other tributary valleys, converge to form Wady Malakeh before continuing westward toward Wady en Natuf and the coastal plains. In the decades that followed, the network of valleys was progressively fragmented—not only by roads, armistice lines, and the Apartheid Wall, but also by clusters of Israeli colonies. At the same confluence, Israeli authorities constructed a sewage treatment facility to process wastewater flowing through the valleys from a nearby colony to the east. These colonies became connected not only by bypass roads, but also,

for a time, by sewage coursing through natural valley systems.<sup>7</sup> In the summer of 2025, the occupation authorities initiated the construction of bypass roads that traverse thousands of dunams in the Ramallah area. These roads aim to further link Israeli colonies located on both sides of the Apartheid Wall; those integrated into Jerusalem’s urban sprawl and those extending west of Ramallah, thereby establishing colonial territorial continuity across both sides and further fragmenting Palestinian territorial contiguity. The map published on the website of the Colonization & Wall Resistance Commission indicates that the bypass road runs along the valley of Wady Bili’n, resulting in the confiscation of dunams of land, which could potentially include my mother’s.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 3: An overview of Wady Bil'in from the southern hills near the Wall (photo taken by the author in 2012).

<sup>7</sup> The politics of sewage disposal and treatment for Palestinian communities and Israeli settlers in the West Bank are deeply entangled with infrastructural restrictions. Limitations on the construction and operation of sewage treatment plants in Palestinian towns and cities sometimes compel Palestinian localities to discharge untreated sewage into nearby valleys. In many cases, they are subsequently required to pay fees to Israeli treatment facilities—some of which are constructed within these same valleys—underscoring the asymmetrical and coercive nature of environmental governance. See for example: “Status of the Environment in the State of Palestine,” *the Applied Research Institute (ARIJ)*, 2015, [https://www.arij.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final\\_SOER\\_2015\\_opt\\_r.pdf](https://www.arij.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final_SOER_2015_opt_r.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> “CWRC: Large Colonial Roads Target the Western Ramallah Area.” Colonization & Wall Resistance Commission (CWRC), May 26, 2025, <https://cwrc.ps/page-3102-en.html>

Colonial infrastructures are designed to restrict various forms of movement and mobility, yet they remain selectively permeable to certain types of flow. This permeability reflects an underlying interconnectedness that reshapes everything in its path—channeling, redirecting, and reconfiguring socio-ecological and political relations alike. Yet valleys remain, as do hills, rain, springs, and those who continue to make and sustain life around them. History, too, unfolds cunningly.

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# KINSHIP

**AMINA LALOR**  
LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY

I compiled these drawings and notes after a short walk in what is currently known as the Lake Laurentian Conservation Area in N'Swakamok (Sudbury), Ontario, Canada.<sup>1</sup> This place is within the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850 and the territory of Atikameksheng Anishinawbek First Nation.

This work is an example of a “Land journal” entry, an exercise that I often assign to my students.

How do we build kinship with our more-than-human relations? What does it look like to spend time with our relations on the Land? How do we listen and respond?

I see the Land journal as one place to start. Building on established practices of keeping a sketchbook or a nature journal, it asks students to spend time with our more-than-human kin, engage all their senses, and record their observations and reflections. It implements a Land-based approach that invites students to center Indigenous perspectives and methodologies, and engage the work with an awareness of the ongoing impacts of settler colonial structures.<sup>2</sup>

I typically ask my students to pick a spot on the Land, somewhere that provides a home for more-than-human beings and is easily accessible to them. This place becomes their companion for the course. I ask them to visit at least once a week for the duration of the twelve-week course. This allows students to witness changes on the Land as the seasons transition and build a relationship incrementally. In a time when the world is literally on fire—from climate change, occupation, and war—I find that visiting with the Land can provide a reprieve, an opportunity to slow down, re-ground, and reconnect.

I hope this offers a small and slow glimpse into this special place.

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1 Information about the birds spotted in the entry was gathered from “All About Birds,” Cornell Lab, accessed July 24, 2025, <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/>

2 For more about Land-based pedagogies, see Kate McCoy, Eve Tuck, and Marcia McKenzie, *Land Education: Rethinking Pedagogies of Place from Indigenous, Postcolonial, and Decolonizing Perspectives* (Routledge, 2017).



There was a patch of  
common milkweed right by  
the start of the trail.

In Anishinaabemowin: NINIWIZH or NINWANZH

milkweed flowers  
at different stages of  
blooming.



have you ever noticed  
how three-dimensional  
milkweed flowers are?  
the petals remind me of  
plastic Barbie high-heels.

Strange how this little  
moment in nature reminds  
me of this manufactured  
piece of plastic.



There are a  
few birds  
start singing as I  
don't recognize their songs.  
I consult "Merlin"

and they tell me that  
I'm hearing a veery, a  
yellow-rumped warbler, an  
american redstart and a common

loon. I don't see them  
but I've looked up pictures  
and drawn

these. Maybe I'll  
recognize them next time.  
I wonder how long these  
lovelies will be around here. Are  
they just passing through? Do  
they sing all day?  
Or only at night?



YELLOW-RUMPED  
WARBLERS



...and not  
the other  
way around

ADULT FEMALE  
EATING  
ADULT MALE  
BERRIES



THE MOON IS A CRESCENT TONIGHT.

a reminder to pay  
more attention to  
the moon, their  
movements and  
phases.  
The sky  
is a  
beautiful  
gradient  
of blues.



here's the American  
Redstart.  
they are insectivores!  
Veeries feed on  
fruit.

The yellow rumped warbler  
is able to digest waxy  
bayberries and wax  
myrtles They are  
foragers that often eat  
insects as well.



downy white feathers  
on their bellies. I can't  
imagine  
where  
they were captured  
or no longer alive

MOON WAS  
A 250° W AZIMUTH  
AND I WOULD GUESS  
AN ALTITUDE AROUND  
50° ALT.

White Pine  
Branches.



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# **LISTENING**

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# ENTERING AUDIOSOCIAL SPACE

Before I begin, I have to tell you that I have a little trouble with disciplinarity. That is to say, I'm having some trouble with discipline. What I mean is that I'm being disciplined. But then again, I'm also disciplining others. So the real problem is that I'm listening. And when I say listening, let me clarify that I'm not about to invoke the power of storytelling or detail the lost arts of the oral tradition. I'm not even going to moralistically imply that the listening I'm doing or about to describe is "active." So, the thing is, I'm not about to tell you anything you don't already know. In fact, when I describe it, you won't "learn" anything. You'll recognize it.

Listening is a self-designed skillset or, as Peter Szendy describes, a configured one.<sup>1</sup> What an ear can perceive through listening, is a small case study in its own lived experiences. The positions, acculturations, biases, habits, rules, negotiations, and traditions that make up the mundane particularities of everyday life play a key role in what a listener will perceive in the present moment, actively focus on, or passively filter away. For example, if an ear is used to city living, the countryside may seem a quiet place. But the generators, roosters, mosquitos, early risers, semi-trucks, and other contributors to rural audiosocial space may seem like an imposition on the bucolic soundscape that the urban ear imagined.<sup>2</sup> However, with a little time spent, that ear will come to do what it does in the city: pick and choose what gets the front seat of its attention.

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1 Peter Szendy, *Listen : A History of Our Ears*, (Fordham University Press, 2008), 10. <https://research-ebsco-com.libezproxy2.syr.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=8300a75a-bf7a-325f-9ef4-e8717cf5e04b>.

2 See the following for an exploration of "audiosocial space" as the charged political sonic terrain that listeners share. Jess Myers, "Negotiating with the Collective Ear," *Journal of Architectural Education* 78, no. 1 (2024): 75–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10464883.2024.2303924>.

In an interview with Franny Choi and Danez Smith, poet Angel Nafis asked “aren’t we just some looking-ass people as children?”<sup>3</sup> Knowing Nafis’ work as an ecstatic poet, I feel comfortable expanding this identification to an “observing-ass people.” Nafis herself defines the ecstatic tradition as a “mode of emphatic noticing,”<sup>4</sup> a complicated and uncomfortable sensing technique. Complicated and uncomfortable in that it requires the observer to notice and circumvent the abstractions and omissions through which their perception becomes knowledge. “The ecstatic poet notices everything,” she says, citing other U.S. poets like Gwendolyn Brooks, Frank O’Hara, and Ross Gay, “doesn’t miss anything, and is able to flatten the boundary that exists between things that are disparate.”<sup>5</sup> Even Nafis’ “looking-ass” is a collapse of many sensory inputs in one, a familiar rhetoric that the sighted world levels on vision, which becomes both the highest regarded sense and the sensory part that stands for the whole of an observer’s sensuous noticing.

It is a useful abstraction to separate the eye’s activity from the ear, one that makes our descriptions of sensed information easier if more approximate. Visual language can trick us into thinking that we saw something that we actually heard. It confuses the contributions of our senses, the ear’s being that it is both relational and unrelentingly personal in its filtration. As Seth Kim-Cohen once noted, the ear has no natural defense against what it does not wish to perceive.<sup>6</sup> There is no ear lid other than the technological appendages of headphones, ear plugs, and our own hands. Imperfect solutions at best. Rather, what the ear does well, in collaboration with the brain, is allow an observer to listen through a pre-set hierarchy of their own biases. The ear will push what an observer deems insignificant to the backburner with surgical precision. The hum of a projector fan, the whining of a child the listener is

3 Franny Choi and Danez Smith, “Angel Nafis vs. Observation,” *VS* podcast, Poetry Foundation, podcast audio, May 29, 2018 <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/audio/146966/angel-nafis-vs-observation>.

4 Choi and Smith, “Angel Nafis vs. Observation.”

5 Choi and Smith, “Angel Nafis vs. Observation.”

6 Seth Kim-Cohen. *In the Blink of an Ear : Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art*. (Continuum, 2009). <https://research-ebsco-com.libezproxy2.syr.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=cc6252bf-a133-357f-a6c5-dcdf70c5afda>. xiii-xxiv.

not responsible for, the listener's own breath, are all quieted. But any relational input can change the ear's hierarchies. Its capacity for attention is a fluid thing. To get anywhere near Nafis' emphatic noticing, the listener must notice themselves, the passive configurations of their own filters, and the removals they inspire.

But our ear's filtration system is more than a passive ebb and flow of attention. We also assign value to any entrant into audiosocial space. Is it beautiful or jarring? Noisy or peaceful? Or even just or unjust? Is it right that an airport will be roaring right next to a working-class residential neighborhood? Is it right that a man is screaming in this train car? Our responses to these questions can trigger our disciplinary impulses, especially if a listener assumes that their own value system should be universally applied. If the ear cannot succeed in removing the sound internally, a listener may feel empowered to remove the sound's source altogether. Audiosocial space then becomes an endless terrain of micro-negotiations, wherein listeners attempt to assert their own subjectivities over others, at times without even realizing it.

In architecture and urbanism, our canonical guides to an expanded sensory field have been Pallasmaa and Debord, both encouraging a bodily perception of space but through their own subjectivities which are casually rounded up to humanist universals.<sup>7</sup> This definition however, is not a universalist guide to the ear, nor is it a call to intervene in our perfect audiosocial space. Rather it is a reminder to the reader of their own interwoven, influenced and influencing, subjectivity. It is the reminder of the passive disciplining and disciplinarity that a listener may enforce over the act of listening.

In Nina Sun Eidsheim's book *The Race of Sound*, she defines a practice of mastering one's particular way of listening as "listening to listening."<sup>8</sup> This is an attention to

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7 Juhani Pallasmaa. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Polemics. London: (Academy Editions, 1996). 40.; Guy Debord. "Théorie de la Dérive" *Internationale Situationniste* #2, December 1956. 19-23

8 Nina Sun Eidsheim. *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music*. 1st ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822372646>. 27-33.

our own personal ordering of audiosocial space; our own capacity for noticing our aural hierarchies and the politics of those hierarchies. It is a listener's responsibility to understand their own methods of abstraction. Without this understanding, it is easy to universalize our own sensibilities. By listening to listening, an observer can take stock of what influences their own abstractions. For example, what sounds have you internalized to equate to silence, since inherently we know that complete silence is an abstraction and does not exist amongst the living. How long is it possible for a listener to hold a sound they would rather ignore in the front of their attention? What would it take for a listener to even perceive that they were ignoring it in the first place?

Listening to your own listening is a difficult and irritating process but it is a crucial muscle in that "observing-ass." You become the meta-monitor of your own life (gross). You come ear to ear with your own shortcomings (disgusting). But in that effort you recognize something that you already know; something that you thought abstraction, filtration, and omission would help you make sense of. Simply that this intimate and internal sense is forever networked into your own experience, the collective experiences of others, histories of experience, your environment, the collective environments of others, and the history of environments. Subject and Object lose the boundary between them. The universal fractures into a constellation of disparate yet collective sensibilities. This is the emphatic attention that Nafis masters in her poems. In a sonnet she insists "everybody wants to get close to true."<sup>9</sup> Creating that intolerable closeness requires a noticing of our own entanglements with the listening of others.

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9 Live reading from Choi and Smith, "Angel Nafis vs. Observation."

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# **MASHA'A / COMMONS**

**SANDI HILAL & ALESSANDRO PETTI**

DECOLONIZING ARCHITECTURE ART RESEARCH

# المشاع / AL-MASHĀʿ: A SPACE FOR COLLECTIVE LIFE AND POLITICAL IMAGINATION

In Arabic, the word *al-mashāʿ* refers to that which is undivided, shared, and held in common. While the term appears in classical Islamic jurisprudence to describe land owned jointly by several individuals without physical demarcation, its deeper meanings emerge not from law alone, but from the ways communities inhabit and relate to space collectively. *Al-mashāʿ* is not just a legal structure—it is an ethical and political practice that continues to shape how people live together, especially in contexts marked by displacement, exclusion, and fragmentation.

In the Islamic legal tradition, *al-mashāʿ* described land that belonged to a group rather than to an individual. Each co-owner possessed an undivided share, which meant no one could point to a specific portion as their exclusive property.<sup>1</sup> Jurists across the four major Sunni schools of thought—Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī, and Ḥanbalī—acknowledged the legitimacy of such shared ownership and wrote in detail about how such land could be used, inherited, gifted, endowed, or sold. While disagreements existed over procedural details, the underlying ethical framework emphasized consultation, mutual responsibility, and the avoidance of harm. A person could not act upon the shared land in a way that disregarded the rights of others. Even planting a tree or building a wall without consent could be seen as a violation of that shared trust.

Yet, beyond its legal dimensions, *al-mashāʿ* was a social institution rooted in communal life. It was especially prominent in rural and tribal contexts, where land was cultivated or grazed cooperatively, and where access to resources like water, forests, and pastures was managed through collective

1 For more about the legal dimension of *al-mashāʿ* in Islam, see Šālih ibn Muḥammad ibn Sulimān Sultan, *Aḥkām al-Mashāʿ fī al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, (Imam Muḥammad bin Saud Islamic University, 2002)

decision-making. This way of organizing space was not a mere practicality; it reflected a worldview in which survival, dignity, and justice were understood as shared responsibilities. The land was not something to be conquered or owned, but something to be held in stewardship, always embedded within relationships. In Palestine, *al-mashāʿ* was a widespread and vital form of land tenure before the imposition of colonial legal systems. Under the British Mandate, and later through Israeli settler-colonial policies, the commons were gradually dismantled. Land was reclassified, divided, privatized, and expropriated. This was not an accidental shift but a strategic one. The move away from *al-mashāʿ* toward private ownership was part of a broader project to break apart collective structures and make land legible and transferable within colonial and capitalist systems. The commons had to be erased in order to be controlled.

Even as legal recognition of *al-mashāʿ* disappeared, the practice itself never fully vanished. In refugee camps, villages, and informal urban neighborhoods, people continued to live in ways that reflect the principles of the commons. In places where formal ownership is impossible, where people cannot register deeds or build legally, the logic of *al-mashāʿ* reemerges—not as nostalgia for the past, but as an urgent and necessary means of survival and relation.

This brings us to a crucial distinction. As we've written in *Permanent Temporariness*, the Arabic term *al-mashāʿ* refers to communal land equally distributed among farmers. *Mashāʿ* could only exist if people decided to cultivate the land together. The moment they stopped cultivating it, they lost possession of it. It is possession through a common use. In order for this category to exist, it must be activated by common use. Today, we may ask if it is possible to reactivate the cultivation of the common, expanding the meaning of cultivation to other human activities that imply the common taking care of life. The Arab Revolts that started in 2010 have shown various ways in which *al-mashāʿ* can be reclaimed and reactivated. *Al-mashāʿ* is different from "the public." The state apparatus mediates the existence of the public, whereas *al-mashāʿ* exists beyond state

institutions. The public is a space that is given to people by structures of power, whereas *al-mashāʿ* is a space created by the interaction of people. Public space can exist without people. *Al-mashāʿ* only exists if people are constantly producing it.

In our practice as DAAR, we approach *al-mashāʿ* not as a fixed condition but as a process—a form of commoning that can emerge from both directions: from the private, and the public.<sup>2</sup> This means that ownership is not necessarily the enemy of the commons, nor is state infrastructure its guarantee. One can own a house, a piece of land, a room—and through use, hospitality, and intention, transform it into a space that is shared. And likewise, a public institution or infrastructure—often controlled, restricted, or surveilled—can be reimagined through communal use. What matters is not whether something is owned or provided, but how it is inhabited, by whom, and for what ends.

Hospitality plays a critical role in this production. To create a space held in common is not to erase difference or pretend that power does not exist. Rather than idealize horizontality, we pay close attention to the dynamics of hosting and guesting—to who invites and who arrives, who opens the door, and under what conditions. Power is always present in shared spaces. But it is not fixed. It can shift. Our interest is not in denying power hierarchies, but in understanding how they are performed, how they move, and how they can be made accountable. Commoning, for us, includes the ethical responsibility to recognize power and to reshape it through use and care.

This approach emerged clearly in our experience with Campus in Camps. When we began the program in Dheisheh Refugee Camp, we were not only working outside formal academic structures—we were stepping into a space where the

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2 For more about DAAR's conceptualization of *al-mashāʿ*, see Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, *Permanent Temporariness* (Art and Theory Publishing/Public Press, 2019); Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti, and Eyal Weizman, *Architecture After Revolution* (Sternberg Press, 2013); Campus in Camps and Grupo Contrafile, *The Tree School* (Brazil-Palestine, 2014), [https://www.campusincamps.ps/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Tree-School\\_Digital-Book\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.campusincamps.ps/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Tree-School_Digital-Book_FINAL.pdf); and “Al-Mashāʿ”, Campus in Camps Collective, 2013, <https://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/al-masha/>

commons were already being practiced, often without being named as such. Participants brought with them a deep, intuitive understanding of shared life: how rooftops become meeting spaces, how courtyards serve as both play areas and communal living rooms, how walls are used to post announcements or to commemorate martyrs. These spaces were never neutral; they were charged with memory, with inequality, with political tension. But they were also cared for, modified, and made meaningful through use.

In this context, *al-mashāʿ* became not just a concept but a methodology. It allowed us to reflect on practices that were already unfolding and to think more deliberately about how to support and extend them. What we discovered was that the commons are not always about equality—they are about relation. They are about recognizing who holds the keys, who frames the invitation, and how those roles can be redefined over time.

In our practice as DAAR, we return to *al-mashāʿ* as a practice that complicates the binary between public and private, owner and user, guest and host. It shapes how we think about design, pedagogy, and activism. It urges us to design not for possession, but for invitation; not for permanence, but for flexibility; not for consensus, but for negotiation. The power of the commons lies not in its purity, but in its capacity to be inhabited differently—to open space for shifts in use, in meaning, and in relation.

Practicing *al-mashāʿ* today means confronting the forces that have tried to erase it—legal frameworks, planning regimes, and cultural narratives that prize exclusivity and deny interdependence. But it also means recognizing the possibilities that remain. In every informal courtyard, in every shared kitchen, in every gesture of welcome, the commons continue to live.

This is not about returning to a romanticized past. It is about drawing from enduring practices to imagine decolonial and collective futures. *Al-mashāʿ* teaches us that ownership does not have to mean exclusion, that structure does not have

to mean domination, and that power, when acknowledged, can be held with generosity and accountability.

To define *al-mashāʿ* is to resist fixing it in place. It is a term that moves, that adapts, that opens space rather than closing it. It reminds us that justice begins not with uniformity, but with relation. And in a world increasingly marked by fragmentation and enclosure, the act of sharing—space, time, knowledge—remains one of the most radical gestures we can make.

Ultimately, *al-mashāʿ* is not simply a way of organizing land. It is a way of organizing life. It is the possibility of being together without denying difference. It is the insistence that what we hold in common is not just a resource, but a responsibility. And it is the hope that, in holding space for one another, we can also hold space for the future.



Figure 1. Campus in Camps, Dheisheh Refugee Camp 2012 (Courtesy of DAAR)

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# **MILITARIZATION**

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# (DE)MILITARIZATION

“And no military on earth is sensitive enough to perceive something as soft as another worldview.”

– Julian Aguon<sup>1</sup>

Militarization enacts a planetary environmental violence that requires the theft of land and a monopoly on how it is known. The way militarization is experienced and resisted by one community reveals machinations used to occupy land and how that land can be taken back. For this reflection I read the over 1,600 pages of testimony submitted in response to the United States Army’s environmental review process for its operations at the Pōhakuloa Training Area (PTA), a base on Hawai‘i island. The lease is up in four years. In 1964 the Army leased a 23,000 acre parcel for \$1 from the state of Hawai‘i. Earlier this year, they completed an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as part of a process to retain those lands in advance of the lease’s expiry. Most of the PTA was created through executive order. The leasing of these 23,000 acres marked a shift in how settler colonial state and federal entities in the US take land—from expropriation to appropriation; from taking land through military force to designating land for military use.

But here in a vast expanse of grasslands and lava flows cradled by the volcanos Mauna Loa, Mauna Kea, and Hualālai, state “owned” lands are actually Hawaiian Kingdom Crown and government Lands which belonged to the government of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i at the time it was illegally overthrown by American plantation owners with the assistance of the US Navy. Militarization is a recursive settler colonialism.

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<sup>1</sup> Writer and human rights lawyer Julian Aguon writes this in an essay responding to a US Navy Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the construction of live fire training areas on the already highly militarized island of Guāhan, where he is from. Julian Aguon, “No Country for Eight Spot Butterflies,” in *No Country for Eight Spot Butterflies* (Astra House, 2022), 12.

Militarization is a recursive dispossession.<sup>2</sup> Militarization is a reason to need property and a cover for land theft. Crown and government Land, once annexed, is stolen again and again. In occupied Hawai‘i and across the Pacific, this is all well known. Kia‘i (protector) Hanalei Fergerson points out in his EIS comments, “this is an illegal occupation by the United States military...Your whole base is based on an executive order by the governor. Does he have any jurisdiction here?”<sup>3</sup> The gist of this question echoes across the pages of testimony, recorded public comment sessions, news articles, and in conversations. As kia‘i Clarence Kukauahi Ching told me, “their jurisdiction doesn’t agree with mine.”<sup>4</sup> And this question of who can speak for a place, who has authority here, who has been at the heart of the struggle to get the military out of Hawai‘i, is vital because demilitarization and decolonization are intertwined, and they require dismantling the state’s claim to ownership.

The environmental review comments archive how people on Hawai‘i talk about militarization, from cultural practitioners to activists to residents who can’t sleep because of the B-2s, who worry about the effects of depleted uranium, or the live fire training that turns to wildfire. In his comments, Jim Albertini asks, “Have frequent brush fires at PTA spread DU [depleted uranium] oxide particles and other contaminants?”<sup>5</sup> Militarization is destruction and desecration. Militarization uses up the earth. It wastes it, in many senses of the word, contaminating, exploiting land, and leaving it, in many cases, uninhabitable for lifetimes. Militarization spreads, exceeding the boundaries that delimit the footprint of the military as its toxicity is borne through air, water, and soil. Incendiaries

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2 Robert Nichols makes this observation about property in the Anglophone settler colony in his book *Theft is Property!: Dispossession and Critical Theory* (Duke University Press, 2019), saying dispossession merges the commodification of land and its theft into one moment.

3 Hanalei Fergerson comments in “Army Training Land Retention at Pōhakuloa Training Area Final Environmental Impact Statement Volume III: Appendix N,” US Army Corps of Engineers, published 2025, O-59.

4 Interview with Clarence Kuauahi Ching, Hilo, HI, June 2022.

5 Jim Albertini comment in “Army Training Land Retention at Pōhakuloa Training Area Final Environmental Impact Statement Volume III: Appendix N,” US Army Corps of Engineers, published 2025, O-110.

spark fires that cannot be contained, that leap over the borders of a training area and burn homes of animals and people. How much of our world on fire would demilitarization extinguish?

Considering the history of Pōhakuloa and the Army's multiple findings of no significant impact over the years, I am struck by the gulf between environmental impact and environmental violence. Max Liboiron writes "environmental violence is about who gets to erase—or produce—and how that is structured so that pollution becomes normal, even ubiquitous."<sup>6</sup> In their hundreds of pages, these impact statements erase relations with land and the violence inflicted on them. Militarization is erasure through bureaucracy.

The infrastructures of militarization, their afterlives, and their half-lives connect colonized lands. In the case of the United States, militarization is simultaneously imperialism and settler colonialism. For example, after years of community pressure, in 2007, the Army admitted to using depleted uranium—it had been in the soil since the mid-1960s when they tested the Davy Crockett Weapon System at Pōhakuloa. Though never used, the bomb was deployed in West Germany, Korea, and the Pacific. It was initially tested at the Yuma Proving Ground on Tohono O'odham Land in Arizona, and on Tanacross land in Fort Greely, Alaska before being dropped on Pōhakuloa.<sup>7</sup> Now B-2 bombers drop 500, 1,000 and 2,000 pound bombs on the PTA and soldiers fire M4 rounds, these, among other weapons, are sold to Israel to be used in Gaza, continuing a long history of bombing the Pacific and of Indigenous genocide at the hands of the US Army. This is a planetary militarization linked in the way lands become lynchpins for geographic spheres of influence. But Hawai'i and Palestine are linked too by a planetary solidarity that is deeply grounded in the specificities of place. Put simply, what some in Hawai'i know is that to take the military off of their lands is to take it off of Indigenous

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6 Max Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism* (Duke University Press, 2021).

7 "The M28/M29 Davy Crockett Nuclear Weapon System—The Campaign for the National Museum of the United States Army," Army History Website, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://armyhistory.org/the-m28m29-davy-crockett-nuclear-weapon-system/>. And Roland B. Anderson, *Project Management of the Davy Crockett Weapons System 1958-1962* (US Army Weapons Command, 1964).

lands everywhere, and that is done by continuing to care for both people and place. As Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio writes, “Freeing Palestine is an act of aloha, it is a commitment that will bring us closer to our ancestors, our lands, and our collective humanity.”<sup>8</sup> The whisper of another worldview.

I read the EIS because the Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources rejected it. This is not to say the road to demilitarization is through the land board of an occupying government; it’s not. If the lease ends, it is because *kia‘i* have dedicated decades to opposing the military in the courts, on the streets, on the pages of newspapers, and have found ways to still be on their lands despite heavy military restrictions. But the testimony in the EIS and before the DLNR are full of *demands* for demilitarization; the rejection shows those demands are heard.

In 1976, nine activists landed on Kaho‘olawe to protest the Navy’s use of the island as a bombing target and in 1990 the bombs stopped falling. From 1998-2004 hundreds of volunteers worked to remove unexploded ordinance from the ground, clearing 9 million pounds of bombs and 75 percent of the island’s surface. 25 percent remains explosive. In his EIS queries, Kyle Kajihiro commented on how the army’s wasting of land gives it cover to say the land means nothing, literally drawing blank maps because they have rendered regions too dangerous for cultural surveys. “Given the dangers of the UXO in the impact area, this vast area remains a blank spot on the map... It is a map of our ignorance about Pōhakuloa.”<sup>9</sup> The blank maps minimize the appearance of the army’s impact, and minimize the appearance of connection to the land. As the army aims to procure this territory, it seeks to procure a landscape it has devalued materially and representationally—one it shows as both empty and lethal. But blank maps don’t deceive the people who know the land and what it means;

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8 Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, “A Kanaka Learns Aloha From Her Palestinian ‘Ohana,” *Indigenous Solidarity with Palestine*, October 7, 2024, <https://indigenousforpalestine.org/2024/10/07/a-kanaka-learns-aloha-from-her-palestinian-%CA%BBohana/>.

9 Kyle Kajihiro comment in “Army Training Land Retention at Pōhakuloa Training Area Final Environmental Impact Statement Volume III: Appendix N,” US Army Corps of Engineers, published 2025, O-27.

cultural practitioners still find ways to access wahi pana (storied places) in Pōhakuloa. Kia‘i Mary Maxine Kahauelio writes, “We don’t want your protection because you cannot protect us. I was four days on Kaho‘olawe and you couldn’t find us. The Army couldn’t find us. Why? Because we were in the caves with the goats.”<sup>10</sup> There, infrared goggles couldn’t see them. She describes how the Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana forced the army out. When they left, the colonel said with contempt, “here take back your land.” Demilitarization is about taking back the land, and it is about protecting it because whether in four years or forty, the time of militarization will expire.

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Maxine Kahauelio, comment in “Army Training Land Retention at Pōhakuloa Training Area Final Environmental Impact Statement Volume III: Appendix N,” (US Army Corps of Engineers, published 2025), D-146.

# MUTUAL AID

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Mutual aid is a historically rooted practice of collective care, yet its community-driven essence has been distorted in international development projects that undermine local autonomy and solidarity. Mutual aid has always been with us. It has enabled us to survive. As such, it is not a radical act, only so under current conditions. Studying, recovering and understanding its varied histories is essential to mobilizing and practicing it.

Regardless of how it is referred to in different languages and cultures, mutual aid is what makes us human—interdependent and capable of building a world rooted in care rather than competition. In English-language scholarship, the concept is traced to Russian philosopher Peter Kropotkin’s influential and still-in-print 1902 work, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, in which he theorized mutual aid as a natural evolutionary force. Kropotkin uses his observations of life in Siberia and examples from the animal world to show how cooperation and reciprocity, rather than competition, are central to societal prosperity and progress.<sup>1</sup> Recently, mutual aid has resurged in grassroots responses to systemic failures. During the COVID-19 lockdowns (2020-2022), local mutual aid groups formed across the U.S., U.K., and Canada to deliver groceries, medicine, and emotional support. These were decentralized, volunteer-run, and often organized via social media or neighbourhood apps. New scholarship, such as Dean Spade’s *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*, contextualizes new forms of mutual aid against a background of famous historical cases, including the Black Panther Party in the US.<sup>2</sup> The Panthers famously ran mutual aid programs, including free breakfast for children, health clinics, and education initiatives, in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Spade, mutual aid becomes radical within the context of racial capitalism, colonialism, and state abandonment.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (McClure Phillips & Co., 1902).

2 Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During this Crisis (and the Next)* (Verso Press, 2020), 21.

3 Dean Spade, “Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival,” *Social Text* 38, no.1 (2020): 136.

I must emphasize that, as a form of voluntary collective labour, mutual aid existed in many societies. In Türkiye, it is called *imece*: in rural areas, community members come together to help one another with agricultural or construction tasks. *Imece* is non-coercive, based on reciprocity and solidarity, and is often organized informally. As a cultural institution of solidarity, it predates modern cooperatives and modern state formation. A cyclical and crucial example of this is the harvesting of produce, which is also found in many other rural cultures. In Arab-speaking, and Muslim majority countries, a corresponding concept is *tawā'un* (cooperation). As a concept, it is rooted in Islamic ethics as a moral duty and social practice. During and after the Arab uprisings, civil society organizations and diaspora networks leaned into *tawā'un*, contrasting it with Western individual liberalism. In Palestine, mutual aid is both a historical and contemporary practice of survivance, resistance, and survival. During crises such as the ongoing siege of and genocide in Gaza, mutual aid is a life-saving grassroots practice.

## **CO-OPTATION IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The concept of mutual aid has also been co-opted by agencies of the United States in the so-called developing world and later by the United Nations and collaborating nation-states. In the 1960s, the UN and affiliated development agencies launched housing initiatives in newly independent nations across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These programs promoted homeownership and mobilized individual and collective labour among under-resourced populations in countries systematically impoverished by colonial exploitation and denied reparations by their former colonizers. In development discourse, mutual aid was reframed through the paternalistic lens of “self-help,” echoing the rhetoric of missionaries. A government-led land distribution program and the “Self-Help and Mutual Aid” housing project in Puerto Rico in 1949 provided the blueprint for later projects in Latin America, such as the pilot project led by John F. C. Turner in Peru, which built housing after a

devastating earthquake in Arequipa in 1958.<sup>4</sup> In these “mutual aid self-help” or (technical) “aided self-help” projects, future owners would collaborate and labour in the construction of their homes under the technical supervision of experts due to their limited experience in building crafts. This type of housing provision relied on residents contributing sweat equity toward the cost of their future homes and assumed that they had the necessary free time. The Christian organization Habitat for Humanity (, officially named in 1976-present) adopted the mutual self-help strategy. Still, it introduced volunteer labour to reduce the burden on residents who would need to give up wages to work on building their future homes.<sup>5</sup>

The top-down logic of modernization and technocratic planning often constrained mutual aid and community participation in international development projects. These approaches disregarded Indigenous systems of land tenure and mutual aid, inflicting lasting harm on the survival strategies of communities wherever they were imposed. Mutual aid only fulfilled its transformative potential when future residents held decision-making power, as seen in some non-profit housing cooperatives. In such cooperatives, mutual aid thrives not only during the construction phase but throughout the entire lifecycle of housing, manifesting in neighbour-to-neighbour support, shared maintenance, and collective events. This model demonstrates that mutual aid is most effective when rooted in democratic control and community autonomy.

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4 Nancy H. Kwak, “Homeownership in an Era of Decolonization,” *A World of Homeowners: American Power and the Politics of Housing Aid* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 88-126; Helen Gyger, *Improvised Cities: Architecture, Urbanization and Innovation in Peru* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 124.

5 Jerome P. Baggett, *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion* (Temple University Press, 2001); Kate Stohr, “100 Years of Humanitarian Design,” in *Design Like You Give a Damn*, ed. Architecture for Humanity (Metropolis Books, 2006), 33-55.

To reclaim mutual aid as a political, community-led practice, interventions in the built environment must center local knowledge, collective agency, and solidarity—not technocratic fixes imposed from above. Despite its history of co-optation in housing policy, mutual aid remains alive and present in various forms, including community kitchens, clothing swaps, free stores, repair workshops, childcare collectives, disaster relief networks, legal clinics, housing and shelter networks, educational circles, and community libraries. These are not acts of charity, but networks of care and resource-sharing, grounded in collective decision-making.

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# **OTHER / OTHERING**

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# OTHER OTHERS, DISORIENTATION, EXILE



“Die Statt Chur im Schweitzer gebirg vnd in der Grawen pündter land onfern vom Rhein gelegen.” From the *Cosmographia* by Sebastian Münster (Circa 1550)<sup>1</sup>

In the top right-hand corner of a woodcut print made around 1544, a figure of a woman can be made out swaying from the gallows. Filling the center of the frame is the small, fortified town of Chur, a quintessential medieval hodgepodge of steeples and walls. The sinister detail is found in one of the most influential geographic works of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmographia*. Spread across some seventeen-hundred pages, it enjoyed wild success in the sixteenth century, setting out to document all the known regions of the world in detailed descriptions. It is an early version of what we would today call a map, though at the time, visual excitement and extraordinary details were prized over topographical accuracy.

I recently encountered the image in a small local museum in Chur, where the woodcut print is reproduced in a section of the museum dedicated to historical forms of capital punishment. The supposition is that the woman hanging in the

<sup>1</sup> Sebastian Münster, *Chur*, Circa 1550. David Rumsey Map Collection. *Cosmographia* by Sebastian Münster (Henric Petrina, 1572). Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license. David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries, [https://archive.org/details/dr\\_chur-15058155](https://archive.org/details/dr_chur-15058155), accessed July 15, 2025.

corner of the frame was accused of witchcraft, and it is explained that such executions were purposefully carried out on the urban fringe, along mountain roads to warn locals and travelers against practicing the dark arts. On leaving the museum (which was surrounded by tourists milling around eating ice cream) I looked up at the steeply rising green pastures, occasionally punctured by steep granite walls ending in serrated peaks. I tried to imagine the same vista centuries earlier, a landscape of fear and suspicion, seeing figures left to the crows next to thoroughfares as reminders of a system where difference was punishable by death. I felt disoriented, far from the bucolic place printed on postcards and paraphernalia that the people around me were there to enjoy.

Considering this print, I think of the ways that, as Cedric Robinson tells in *Black Marxism*, intra-European Othering persisted in parallel to the emergence of racial capitalist order and plantocratic enslavement.<sup>2</sup> Just as in Münster's *Cosmographia*, the symbolic figure of the Other—inscribed in maps and drawn in pixels—continues in how people occupy space. The Other and Othering emerge from a history of racism, but the terms are expansive enough to include all kinds of bodies that do not conform to the straight line. Those who do not inhabit whiteness, an able body, or cis heterosexuality, slip easily into the category of Other through processes of Othering.

As an ordering system for the town that filled this woodcut, the *Cosmographia* privileged dimensions of what was perceived as worth knowing about in the sixteenth-century European cosmos, that is, the civilizing world, and not the persecuted Others on outskirts, boundaries, and borderlands. The spatial dimension of Otherness here occurs across geographic distance as much as through chronology. Following this logic of exclusion, the architectural dimension of the Other, then, is the “everything else” surrounding the

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2 Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 3rd ed. with a foreword by Robin D. G. Kelley and preface by Tiffany Willoughby-Herard (University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 67.

centers of civilization; the catch-all term of “vernacular” as a racializing ethnic inflection applied to architecture, or camps, whether informal or resettlement, of the world’s refugees. The ability to create Others through this process of typecasting settlement is clear in even the most well-meaning settings of the architecture school.

Though as a philosophical concept, the notion of the Other is usually attributed to Hegel and Lacan, my mind tends to veer towards Edward Said’s *Orientalism* because it conjures an image of constructing one’s neighbor as foreign.<sup>3</sup> Some fifteen years after *Orientalism*, in his 1993 Reith Lectures, Said offered a somewhat more optimistic vision of the Other as exile and the status of the exiled intellectual, a figure at the borders that is “marginal and undomesticated,” “someone who is in real exile,” he says, is inclined toward “the provisional and risky rather than to the habitual, to innovation and experiment rather than the authoritatively given *status quo*. The *exilic* intellectual does not respond to the logic of the conventional but to the audacity of daring, and to representing change, to moving on, not standing still.”<sup>4</sup> The Other can be an expression of freedom, perhaps, in this form. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed writes that “if we think with and through orientation we might allow the moments of disorientation to gather, almost as if they are bodies around a different table.”<sup>5</sup> Thinking back to my moment of disorientation on rethinking pastoral pasts in the Alpine hinterlands and their sinister realities, I am reminded that no history or landscape is a settled affair. History is also a tool to allow moments of disorientation to gather, creating ripples of disorientation and new orientations around Otherness. If the category of the Other is to persist, then whether through disorientation or exile, the definition is open to change.

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3 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, First Vintage Books edition, (Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 1979).

4 Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*, First Vintage Books edition, Reith Lectures (Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 1996), 63-64.

5 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), 24.

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# **PEDAGOGY**

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# I WANT A SCHOOL...

**ped·a·go·gy** *n.*

the art, science, or profession of teaching

from Greek *paidagōgos*, originally the word for an enslaved person who brought children to school. *pedagogue* takes on negative tone, often referring to a dull, overly formal teacher. *Pedantic* meant “relating to teaching,” but now commonly means “unimaginative.”<sup>1</sup>

Architecture, as a discipline, is fundamentally about shaping space, yet it often overlooks the crises that space can reveal, create, and perpetuate. Architecture rarely challenges the political and economic systems that exploit space as a means of power and capital accumulation. Instead, frequently serves the interests of these systems, prioritizing profit and reinforcing colonial/neocolonial practices of thinking, making, and existing. Educational institutions, including architecture schools, share in this responsibility. As educators, researchers, and practitioners, we must critically examine our role within these systems.

As the Design for Spatial Justice Fellowship comes to a close,<sup>2</sup> I ruminate over what justice even means and whether Architecture (with a capital A) has a role to play? Justice can be described as preventing, stopping, and prosecuting wrongdoing. Much of the work begins or is predicated on validating and proving malicious intent, rather than addressing its root causes. Critical questions—what justice means, whom it serves, and how it is achieved—have been largely neglected. Consequently, the pursuit of justice in Architecture often feels reactive, retrospective, compensatory, and an after-the-fact ordeal where harm is fait accompli. The currency of justice often feels like a sucker’s bet, where the house always seems to win.

<sup>1</sup> Etymonline, s.v. “pedagogy,” accessed August 10, 2025, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/pedagogy>

<sup>2</sup> The Design for Spatial Justice Initiative fellowship is a program in the School of Architecture & Environment at the University of Oregon. Like many other programs at various institutions, it has since been discontinued due to apparent budget cuts.

Architecture's detachment from its relational and interdependent nature has fostered a preference for self-referentiality, distancing itself from the socio-political and economic structures it inevitably supports. This illusion of autonomy limits Architecture's potential for transformative change. To address this, the discipline must engage with the complex relationships intrinsic to any place, acknowledging how the built environment shapes issues such as housing access, public transportation, air quality, economic stability, and public health. Cultivating spatial literacy and fostering critical public discourse are essential steps toward this shift. By doing so, Architecture can transcend its complicity and become a catalyst for meaningful, equitable change.

Critics might argue that such an approach risks diluting the discipline's core purpose. Yet this perspective overlooks the fact that Architecture has always been deeply intertwined with broader social and ecological systems.<sup>3</sup> The call to action is clear: the focus must move away from merely sustaining or repairing current systems and toward dismantling/rebuilding Architectural education and practice. This involves developing methodologies that embrace principles of resource sobriety, community, and collectivity. Achieving this vision requires transdisciplinary—or even antidisiplinary—approaches that reimagine the possibilities for the profession and explore new ways of practicing.

It's graduation season. There are more than 300 undergraduate and over 120 graduate programs at my current institution. Naturally, there's a ceremony at every corner. As I watch the graduates, degrees in hand, I ask myself,

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Rendell, "A Place Between Art, Architecture and Critical Theory," in *Critical Spatial Practice*, ed. Nikolaus Hirsch and Markus Miessen (Sternberg Press, 2012), 221–33.

*What more is there left to teach? When the Architect's walls grow taller, thicker to keep all other things out, and so out of reach. When walls compete to be insurmountable, impenetrable, indomitable, unapproachable—ungodly creations not meant to be overcomable.<sup>4</sup>*

*What more is there left to impart? When there are places where almost all universities have been destroyed.<sup>5</sup>*

*What of Math or Journalism when calculations measure ballistic trajectories,<sup>6</sup> while stories, memories—the very intricacies of human experience—are torn apart?*

*What of International Relations and Diplomacy when a ceasefire is single-handedly—quite literally—obstructed and shot down (five times)?<sup>7</sup>*

*What of Law when the illegality of violence amounts to inaction or incarcerates the innocent? When it criminalizes a person for being unable to afford a home,<sup>8</sup> criminalizes theft and not the system that led to such circumstances. When it seems to protect less of us and more of property.*

*What of History and Anthropology when it doesn't criminalize the theft of indigenous lands?*

*What of Chemistry when increased opioid prescriptions have led to misuse, overdose, and addiction?*

*What of Economics and Forestry when the wrong ICE is melting and the wrong Amazon is burning?*

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4 Hazar Kilani, "The Walls Fall: Prototypes for Trump's Southern Border Barrier Come Down," *The Guardian*, February 28, 2019, updated January 7, 2021, accessed August 10, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/feb/28/trump-border-wall-mexico-prototypes-demolition>.

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6 MIT Coalition for Palestine, "MIT Science for Genocide: How MIT's Military-Linked Research Enables Israel's War Crimes," *Electronic Intifada*, January 15, 2025, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/nora-barrows-friedman/exposing-ties-between-mit-and-israels-army>.

7 Julian Borger, "US Vetoes Arab-Backed UN Resolution Demanding Ceasefire in Gaza," *The Guardian*, February 20, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/20/us-vetoes-un-resolution-ceasefire-israel-gaza>.

8 Human Rights Watch, "US Supreme Court Decision Undermines Right to Housing," *Human Rights Watch*, July 15, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/15/us-supreme-court-decision-undermines-right-housing>.

*What of Psychology and Education when a 6-year-old child can be handcuffed, hands behind her back, with zip ties? When the safety of the classroom is judged by its bulletproofness and its value on profit.*

*What of Business when we are willing to sell AI-generated renderings of forcibly occupied lands?<sup>9</sup>*

*What of Computer Science when algorithms soundproof our ears and turn our gaze away?*

*What of Art turned into commodified collectibles and assets?*

*What of all this when the only meaningful act seems to be the tassel moving from right to left?*

*They all have their degrees— the businessman from Penn, the prime minister from MIT, the philosopher from Stanford, billionaires from Harvard/Princeton and many more.*

Rather, in the spirit of Zoe Leonard's "I want a President,"<sup>10</sup> I want a school that....

*teaches its instructors how to teach, doesn't dismiss the student cohort's capacity solely on the 'COVID generation' argument, questions the predictability of outcomes for the sake of standardization/convenience in evaluation, speaks of nuance but also of definitive rights and wrongs, allows us to fail and ensures us safe passage, under financial duress doesn't start by laying off its student workers/lecturers and all those in tenuous positions, implores its senior administrators (and coaches) to take a meaningful pay cut when financial equity is needed (consideration for student athletes), rejects strict binary definitions of the world, considers my approach to teaching to be as important as my research, refuses to extract or take advantage of the communities they work with, believes us when we have been sexually abused/assaulted, enables space for us to take meaningful risks, refrains from regurgitating or strictly replicating industry practices, doesn't*

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9 Failed Architecture, "An Artificial Imaginary," *Failed Architecture*, accessed August 10, 2025, <https://failedarchitecture.com/an-artificial-imaginary/>.

10 Zoe Leonard, "I want a president," (1992/2018).

*take meal plans away from student workers striking for a better wage, forbids the commodification of education, reminds us to not repeat the same mistakes, emboldens us to be curious/critical/pose questions (any question), confides confidence in us and the work we do, regards primary/secondary education as formative as college/university education, never uses campus safety to harm its own, champions freedom of expression and the right to protest, sets up their junior faculty for success and avoids pandering to its senior/emeritus faculty, won't make us feel a college essay is about who has it worse, tells us to speak truth even though silence would cost less, can healthily channel frustration/anger to manifest tenderness/gentleness/hope, won't point fingers/sow division/ostracize other people, amplifies the smallest and most marginalized voices, assures us vulnerability/earnestness/honesty and the ability to relate is not a weakness, won't form its curriculum/approaches on the anticipation of some fear, stops pretending neutrality is apolitical, values international students for their perspectives and not solely their tuition, approaches Artificial Intelligence with measured criticality, accepts knowledge to be speculative/embodied/unfinished, can spot imperialist colonial rhetoric and the weaponization/misappropriation of terms like freedom/terrorism to justify war crimes and violate international laws, respects lived experience as much as peer-reviewed data, stands in solidarity with oppressed people across borders not just on campus, doesn't define "career readiness" as conformity, won't expect unpaid labor and call it "opportunity", knows burnout is not a badge of honor, won't use diversity statements to cover up extractive structures, recognizes our lives outside of the classroom—work/family/personal health, doesn't partner with weapons manufacturers and call it innovation, encourages us to critique institutions—including our own, sees the climate crisis not as a research topic but a moral imperative, renounces normalization of/apathy/indifference toward violence, stops using "civility" to silence dissent, doesn't conflate silence/obedience with professionalism/respect, won't submit to an*

*authority as a way to flee their own responsibility, won't encumber future generations with issues not of their own making, won't green/pinkwash its image while investing in destruction, exemplifies our worth is not earned but inherent, demonstrates the future isn't optimized but dreamed/disrupted/rebuilt, won't assume we know how to love, affirms our own happiness/joy depends on those of others and never at their expense, asks us what kind of school we want...*

I am humbled to be included among such stellar collaborators in reflecting on terms related to Spatial Justice. Communication, at its core, depends on the common—what we can share, access, and understand together. Defining language is never a neutral act. While dictionaries—and the systems behind them—imprison or codify meaning, time and again, words have been subverted and reclaimed to resist rigid structures of power and control.

As CrimethInc's *Contradictionary*<sup>11</sup> reminds us, like people, words rarely stay confined to the frameworks built for them. They spill, overflow, and come into conflict with one another and with the logic of the systems that try to contain them. The task is not to police the borders of definitions but to disrupt them—to reveal contradictions, reinvent new pathways, and redefine the world through our words.

But why define principles like justice or equity at all if we don't intend to live by them? Our language often falters when measured against our actions. As Fred Moten observes, there's no guarantee that our good will is in alignment with our actions—a dissonance that implicates everyone, himself (and myself) included.<sup>12</sup> When words are stripped of power, they become hollow—ashes in our mouths. Injustice lies not only in the violent act itself, but in the numbing repetition of witnessing it, normalized and demoralized by a world that

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11 CrimethInc. Writers' Bloc, *Contradictionary: A Bestiary of Words in Revolt* (CrimethInc., 2013).

12 Fred Moten speaking at Palestine Festival of Literature, *Palestine, Detroit & the Urgent Word*, Nov 22 2024, on the role of faculty in the Palestine solidarity movement on university campuses

continues spinning in moral apathy. This is compounded by the performative virtue signaling of many institutions/leaders, now exposed by their withdrawal/abjuration from supporting minoritized communities. So, what is the role of instructors, educators, and teachers in all this? At the very least, it is to critically consider the texts we assign, the language we use, and the frameworks we build—so that they can become foundations for new forms of knowledge, engagement, and solidarity.

The word ‘glossary’ comes from *glossa*, originally referring to a collection of obscure or forgotten words.<sup>13</sup> In my naivety, I imagine a time when the word ‘justice’ itself might actually become obsolete—not because it is abandoned, but because it is utterly fulfilled. Because justice underlies our likeness as humans, it would no longer need to be named. As James Baldwin suggests, the world is held together not by systems or ideals, but by the fierce love and responsibility carried by those who recognize themselves in others.<sup>14</sup> We each have the capacity to become something harmful—but it’s our imperative to choose otherwise, to act with care, and to insist on our shared humanity.

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<sup>13</sup> *Etymonline*, s.v. “glossary,” accessed August 10, 2025, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/glossary>.

<sup>14</sup> *Meeting the Man: James Baldwin in Paris*, directed by Terence Dixon (Antelope Films, 1970).

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# PERFORMING JUSTICE

**SAMI CHOHAN**

NAVIGATING NOPLACE, TWENTYSEVEN70, GCAS-JEHAN

# WE SEE YOU (...)

You, the proudly liberal and supposedly anti-racist White architecture school. Yes, you. They say you have a short attention span and a limited appetite for tough conversations, but this is important.

Remember the year 2020? The nationwide protests against systemic racism? The calls for racial justice and liberation? The demands for freedom to exist without discrimination and fear? Remember how you responded? How you emphasized the urgency of the situation? How you cited the moment as one of reckoning? How you (once again) insisted upon waking up to reality? How you rephrased and republished all those pledges, statements, and acknowledgements, reiterating your commitment to address institutional racism both within and beyond your walls?

Wait.

Do you not remember? The commitment that you reiterated? In your spaces of higher education and knowledge production that established race and racial identity as systems of social classification to begin with. In your spaces that once openly shamed, reduced, and excluded people precisely on the basis of race. In your spaces that continued to assume the existence of racial hierarchies for you to retain your authority over those you had historically labeled and portrayed as racially inferior. In your spaces that continued with your “racial, ideological, and imperialist” ways of knowing and being, while quietly discrediting and dismissing the knowledges and experiences of those you had already constructed as the “Other.”<sup>1</sup> In your colonial systems of epistemic violence that continued to center whiteness in order to protect your racialized privilege. After all, you were always a product of the ruthless colonization of the lands that you renamed as the Americas, a reminder of the brutal enslavement of Africans and African Americans, and a key instrument of “coloniality,” tasked with

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1978), 327–328.

“granting legitimacy to the relations of domination” imposed by colonialism and slavery along racial lines.<sup>2</sup>

Anyway. In the midst of the rippling public outcry in 2020, some of you decided to not only speak up but also act. You soon announced teaching and research positions, both tenure track and non-tenure track, aimed at historically minoritized communities and centered on a range of social justice issues, including racial injustice. You expanded your vocabulary and found the language to pen and post these new positions, possibly drawing inspiration from those one or two White schools of your liberal and anti-racist kind that had already announced similar positions in previous years. But like them, you helped yourself to a host of terms rooted in critical theory without ever immersing yourself in disciplines that analyze, reveal, and challenge the very ideologies and systems that produce and perpetuate the kind of social ills you claimed you were looking to dismantle. Consider, for instance, the term spatial justice—a popular choice under the circumstances since it linked social justice to space, which was all you needed to know. And just like that, we accepted these positions only to find that you are neither aware of the multiple articulations of the spatial dimensions of justice, nor interested in acknowledging the complicity of architectural education and practice in the production and perpetuation of the social inequities evident in the spaces between and around us. Instead, we entered the same colonial systems inflicting the same epistemic violence, only now behind more carefully crafted anti-racism pledges, DEI statements, and land acknowledgements. These are the same spaces of white privilege, only now reeking of much discomfort, insecurity, and fragility in the presence of a few more individuals of color than usual. And yet there we were—many of us still are—day in and day out, walking past the gaze of cranky old white professors, crossing paths and putting up with our younger white colleagues and their bizarre expressions of pity, all the while carrying the weight of our own

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2 Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580.

expectations, wondering what became of those tables to which we were supposed to bring our knowledges and experiences. As prospects of starting conversations about decentering and diversifying curricula, pedagogies, and policies faded, pressures to endorse and enforce long-held beliefs, norms, conventions, and standards of judgement established under colonial systems of domination began to mount. Decolonization, however, remains a perfectly acceptable term, provided we refrain from contesting the insularity and intentions of narratives and traditions that emanated from Western Europe and Northern America, not to mention the means by which these narratives and traditions were constructed and imposed on regions around the world. Soon, the message becomes loud and clear. To belong here, we must accept and advance your colonial histories and theories; your colonial cultures and customs; your ignorance and arrogance; your narrow worldview.

To belong here, we must learn from you.

To belong here, we must be like you.

To belong here, we must become you.

To belong here, we must always approach social and environmental injustices outside of those dominant power structures and entrenched economic interests that produce and perpetuate such injustices in the first place, as previously hinted. This allows the discipline to remain “uncritically aligned” with capitalism as the core political and economic project of Western hegemony and White supremacy, hence complicit in creating and continuing “what is ethically and morally wrong.”<sup>3</sup> We, too, must quietly side with oppressive systems by embracing neutrality and appearing apolitical, in other words, adopting a political position so dangerous that it renders your violence invisible and unaccountable, allowing you to operate with complete impunity.

To belong here, we must always approach architecture as some kind of a “self-referential project of apolitical formalism” that demands an independent, self-contained

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3 Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman, *Spatializing Justice: Building Blocks* (The MIT Press, 2022), 24.

discourse,<sup>4</sup> mainly dominated by hyper-poetic and hyper-romantic interpretations of opinions and built works of a select group of dead and soon-to-be-dead white men. Like you, we must marvel at their insights, heroism, and individual genius, all the while indoctrinating our students; guiding them into our self-imposed boundaries; diverting attention from our surroundings that are only exhibiting more sprawl, more of those dull and precariously floating warehouse-like boxes, more parking lots, more roads, more cars, more wastefulness, more barriers, more surveillance, more of those vacant public spaces, more lifelessness, more pockets of decay, more disparity, and more houselessness. And yet, we must follow the script:

In Greece we begin,  
on Rome we dwell.  
Vitruvius we read,  
to the Renaissance we proceed.  
Brunelleschi, Alberti, and our beloved Palladio,  
not to forget the mastery of Leonardo.  
Beaux-Arts we recall with tears of joy,  
Loos, Gropius, and the Bauhaus, boy oh boy.  
Johnson we now only secretly admire,  
MoMA we hold as our finest umpire.  
Wright, Mies, Corbusier, and Aalto,  
so was Kahn, l'Uomo, il Maestro.  
Foster and Rogers, our royal cousins,  
Meier, Holl, and other dozens.  
Gehry and Eisenman we also show,  
Ando in Japan is as far as we go.  
From Fletcher to Frampton, we love our men,  
where else would you find the likes of Rem.  
And then there is Zumthor, oh such compassion and care,  
deviating from our canon you must never dare.

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4 Teddy Cruz, "Design Ops—A conversation between Teddy Cruz and Jonathan Tate," in *Architecture at the Edge of Everything Else*, ed. Esther Choi and Marikka Trotter (The MIT Press, 2010), 75.

To belong here, we must keep our concerns and objections to ourselves and instead participate in your animated, media-like debates that stay within the limits of your “spectrum of acceptable opinion” and leave everyone with “the sense that there is free thinking going on, while all the time the presuppositions of the system are being reinforced by the limits put on the range of the debate.”<sup>5</sup> Any attempt to stray out of this spectrum, specifically in those self-praising faculty meetings, would only bring about blank stares and awkward silences, if not demeaning looks and condescending reactions.

To belong here, we must dismiss settler colonialism as an event of the past, curb all conversations on the nature and magnitude of its violence, and avoid any discourse on how it continues to manifest in the acquisition of more Indigenous land, the extraction of more natural resources, and the exploitation of more labor. This dismissal is “productive in settler colonial contexts” since it allows architecture in both its “hegemonic professional and pedagogic forms” to “most effectively serve the interests of capital and its emissaries.”<sup>6</sup> In your spaces that claim to care about environmental sustainability, we must remain silent about ecocides or the deliberate and systematic destruction of entire ecosystems, including the ongoing, live-streamed ecocide of the ever-shrinking Occupied Palestinian Territories within the entirety of historical Palestinian land situated between the (Jordan) River and the (Mediterranean) Sea, not to mention the associated and organized destruction of natural resources and ecological systems in southern Lebanon and southwestern Syria. In your spaces that claim to advance the quality of life in cities, we must remain silent about urbicides or the deliberate and systematic destruction of entire cities, including the ongoing, live-streamed urbicide of the densely populated Gaza City and other urban concentrations along the

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5 Noam Chomsky et al., *The Common Good* (Odonian Press, 1998), 43.

6 Andrew Herscher and Ana María León, “Editorial: The Settler Colonial Present,” *e-flux*, October 12, 2020, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/the-settler-colonial-present/353516/editorial/>.

Gaza Strip—a 25-mile long stretch of coastal Palestinian land once described as the “world’s largest open-air prison;”<sup>7</sup> now described as an “open graveyard, a pile of rubble, a desolate wasteland” with no escape for those trying to stay alive.<sup>8</sup> In your spaces of learning and research, we must remain silent about edicides and scholasticides, including the deliberate and systematic destruction of hundreds of Palestinian schools and universities. In your spaces that claim to promote civility, we must remain silent about the ongoing, live-streamed genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and in doing so, we must remain, like you, complicit in the deliberate and systematic extermination and displacement of an entire population. In your spaces that claim to inspire open exchange and critique of ideas, we must remain silent about censorship and attacks on academic freedom, such as the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture’s cancellation of the *Journal of Architectural Education*’s Fall 2025 issue on Palestine.<sup>9</sup>

To belong in your spaces, we must “keep quiet and be civil” about your betrayals for you to maintain things exactly as they have always been, while you pretend otherwise.<sup>10</sup>

You, the liberal, racist, White supremacist architecture school. The “foxes” that Malcolm warned about;<sup>11</sup> “the taints, the sickness, and the inhumanity” that Fanon once wrote about.<sup>12</sup> The mask is off. The performance is over.

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7 Noam Chomsky, “My Visit to Gaza, the World’s Largest Open-air Prison,” *Truthout*, November 9, 2012, <https://truthout.org/articles/noam-chomsky-my-visit-to-gaza-the-worlds-largest-open-air-prison/>.

8 Avi Shlaim, “War on Gaza: Netanyahu, Hamas and the origins of the 2023 Nakba war,” *Middle East Eye*, December 21, 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/gaza-war-israel-netanyahu-hamas-origins-2023-nakba>.

9 Daniel Jonas Roche, “ACSA cancels Fall 2025 Journal of Architectural Education issue about Palestine and fires its interim executive editor,” *The Architect’s Newspaper*, February 28, 2025, <https://www.archpaper.com/2025/02/acsa-cancels-fall-2025-journal-of-architectural-education-issue-on-palestine-and-fires-its-interim-executive-editor/>.

10 M Neelika Jayawardane and Rinaldo Walcott, “Diversity efforts in universities are nothing but façade painting,” *Al Jazeera*, May 7, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/5/7/diversity-efforts-in-universities-are-nothing-but-facade-painting>.

11 Malcolm X, “God’s Judgement of White America (The Chickens Are Coming Home to Roost),” in *The End of White World Supremacy: Four Speeches*, ed. Imam Benjamin Karim (Arcade Publishing, 2002), 202, Adobe eBook.

12 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 1966), 313.

We see you. We see you clearly enough to call you out on the day when you will appear to have always been against this.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Omar El Akkad, *One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This* (Knopf Doubleday, 2025).

# **PLACEMAKING / KEEPING**

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Placemaking refers to the creative process of designing, planning, and managing public and shared spaces.<sup>1</sup> The concept and practice of placemaking originated in the 1960s as a socio-spatial response to top-down modernist planning practices of urban renewal and interstate highway that demolished dense, mixed-use, walkable urban neighborhoods inhabited by working-class, immigrant, and racialized communities in many US cities and replaced them with lower-density construction, segregated land uses, and car infrastructures appealing to suburbanites. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs (1961), *Life Between Buildings* by Jan Gehl (1971), and *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* by William Whyte (1980) were among the seminal texts of the placemaking movement, often penned by middle-class observers and commentators, advocating for community-oriented and human-scale development as well as user-centered public spaces and pedestrian-friendly urban design. By the 2000s, placemaking became dominated by professional architects, urban designers, and planners utilizing arts and culture for community revitalization and to enhance the exchange value of real estate in previously disinvested areas, and became associated with gentrification in many cities.<sup>2</sup>

Placekeeping emerged as a counteractive, grassroots approach led by community members to actively shape and maintain places of belonging, resistance, and endurance, physically and socially, against forces of displacement and experiences of historical and ongoing marginalization.<sup>3</sup> Though diverse in origin, the concept and practice of placekeeping in the United States widely results from

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1 "What is Placemaking?" Project for Public Spaces, accessed June 18, 2025, <https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>.

2 Talja Blokland, "Celebrating Local Histories and Defining Neighborhood Communities: Place-making in a Gentrified Neighborhood," *Urban Studies* 46, no. 8 (2009): 1593-1610; Vanessa Mathews, "Aestheticizing Space: Art, Gentrification and the City," *Geography Compass* 4, no. 6 (2010): 660-675.

3 Roberto Bedoya, "Spatial Justice: Rasquachification, Race and the City," *Creative Time Reports*, September 15, 2014. <https://creativetimereports.org/2014/09/15/spatial-justice-rasquachification-race-and-the-city/>.

histories of racial violence, segregation, and discrimination and spatializes principles of self-determination, community control, and social resilience. These include examples of Black Panthers' community health clinics, Free Breakfast for Children programs, tenant organizing, legal rights education, armed patrols, and anti-urban renewal fights, which inspired like efforts in Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Asian American communities from the late 1960s.<sup>4</sup> They continue in forms of community-based activism and movements to preserve cultural memories, shared customs, and social bonds through place-based practices that stabilize neighborhoods and fight displacement across many cities today. Placekeeping can also be understood to include indigenous planning practices that restore community autonomy and connections to place, as well as protect sacred sites and cultural resources.<sup>5</sup> It can also include Palestinian naming conventions that maintain ties to cities, towns, and villages lost to war and occupation through the names of their children.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1: The Black Panther Party's Franklin Lynch Peoples' Free Health Center (circa 1970)

Credit: It's About Time Archives (<http://itsabouttimebpp.com>)



4 Michael Liu, Kim Geron, and Tracy AM Lai, *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power* (Lexington Books, 2008); Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (UNC Press Books, 2013).

5 Jeff Corn tassel and Cheryl Bryce, "Practicing sustainable self-determination: Indigenous approaches to cultural restoration and revitalization," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 18 (2011): 151.

6 Nesma Seyam, "Palestinian Names Aim to Keep Occupied Cities in Memory," *Anadolou Ajasni*, February 19, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/life/palestinian-names-aim-to-keep-occupied-cities-in-memory/1738077>.



Figure 2: Ping-pong game during the Recreation Day fair organized by Coalition to Protect Parcel C for Chinatown (circa 1993)

Credit: Chinese Progressive Association records, Northeastern University Library, Archives and Special Collections

Trauma-informed approaches to placemaking and placekeeping have more recently surfaced to focus on the role of trauma and healing in place-based practices. They urge consideration of the historical and present harms and traumas shaping communities within landscapes of profound economic and social inequality along with the ways in which communities respond, for instance, through mutual aid, collective resistance, and ethics of care or crafting spaces of resilience and restoration.<sup>7</sup> Traumas of poverty, racism, discrimination, war, and terrorism encompass place dimensions, as do the stories told, rituals enacted, memorials created, and streets named in spatial contexts. In chronically-traumatized places such as Palestinian Yaffa, anticolonial placemaking practices begin with listening to the experiences and learning from the perspectives of Indigenous and local people who have been historically subjected, displaced, and silenced.<sup>8</sup> Concepts and practices of trauma-informed place work partly draw from trauma-informed care practices for public health emergencies and substance abuse and mental health services,<sup>9</sup> as well as principles of trauma-informed

7 Cara Courage and Anita McKeown, eds. *Trauma Informed Placemaking* (Routledge, 2024).

8 Karen E. Till and Michal Huss, "Anticolonial Placemaking," in *Trauma Informed Placemaking*, 141-152.

9 Cara Courage and Anita McKeown, "Introduction: Pathways to a Praxis," in *Trauma Informed Placemaking*, 1-16.

social policy such as safety, trustworthiness and transparency, collaboration, empowerment, choice, and intersectionality.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Julie Goodman, Theresa Hyuna Hwang, and Jason Schupbach, "Our Place, Our History, Our Future," in *Trauma Informed Placemaking*, 166-181.

# PROTEST

**TAYLOR MILLER**

INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER

# WALKING THROUGH WALLS

## PALESTINE ACTION'S ARCHITECTURE AGAINST EMPIRE

“The Palestinians must be hit and it must be very painful. We must cause them losses, victims, so that they feel the heavy price.”<sup>1</sup>

—*Ariel Sharon*, March 5, 2002

“Any company who props-up the production of Israeli missiles, drones and fighter jets is also profiting from blood money. Their offices soon wear their sins when Palestine Action pay a visit.”

—*Palestine Action*, April 24, 2024

I’m penning this essay in August 2025, twenty-two+ months into the Israeli Occupation Force’s (IOF) genocidal rampage across Gaza; moments of “ceasefire” proving to be anything but, as the IOF’s scorched earth operations continue to obliterate everything life-sustaining for Palestine and its people. What have we done to halt this obliteration? To dismantle the machinations of the US/UK/EU-greased war machine? What forms of protest and disruption most effectively debilitate the logistics and profiteering of munitions manufacture?<sup>2</sup>

I’ve written at length about the border-military-industrial complex, demonstrating the intricate and purposefully obfuscated web of “defense” contractors, politicians, multinational corporations, university administrators, “journalists”, content creators/hasbara devouts, and a plenitude of other stakeholders who prove integral to

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1 Relief Web,” Israel and the Occupied Territories: The Heavy Price of Israeli Incursions,” Amnesty International, April 12, 2002, <https://reliefweb.int/report/israel/israel-and-occupied-territories-heavy-price-israeli-incursions>.

2 For more: Huda Ammori, “Tactics of Disruption,” April 2025, *New Left Review*, <https://newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/tactics-of-disruption>; Rafeef Ziadah, Christian Henderson, Omar Jabary Salamanca, Sharri Plonski, Charmaine Chua, Riya Al Sanah & Elia El Khazen. “Disruptive Geographies and the War on Gaza: Infrastructure and Global Solidarity,” *Geopolitics* June (2025): 1-39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2025.2510319>.

the settler colonial Zionist project; their plans, doctrines and annual forecasts are the scaffolding of occupation, of wanton annihilation across Palestine. But while these methods of construction, of containment, are predicated on enclosure and the sealing of horizons, they are anything but permanent. The foundations of these borders – poured hastily and with total disregard for human and more-than-human sanctity – are cracked. The insistence of life, of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination and its flourishing – blossoms in the fissures.

The roofs, the walls, architectures of imperial ambitions are being torn down – and this is no metaphor. By centring the labor of Palestine Action, a direct-action movement committed to ending global participation in Israel’s genocidal and apartheid regime,<sup>3</sup> we can better connect their visions and accomplishments with present-future-oriented blueprints for dismantling the imperial war machine.<sup>4</sup>

Palestine Action’s movement is antagonistic to the IOF’s ‘walking through walls’ tactic, utilized in Nablus and throughout the West Bank in 2002 during the Second Intifada – described by then-commander of the Paratrooper Brigade, Brigadier General Aviv Kochavi, as “inverse geometry,” or the “re-organization of the urban syntax by means of a series of micro-tactical actions.

During the attack, soldiers moved within the city across hundred-meter-long “over-ground-tunnels” carved out through a dense and contiguous urban fabric.”<sup>5</sup> Eyal Weizman elaborates:

Soldiers did not often use the streets, roads, alleys, or courtyards that constitute the syntax of the city, as well as the external doors, internal stairwells, and windows that constitute the order of buildings, but rather moved horizontally through party walls, and vertically through holes blasted in ceilings and floors. This form of

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3 “About,” Palestine Action, <https://palestineaction.org/about/>.

4 Palestine Action, “Dismantling Israel’s War Machine,” *Weird Economies*, April 24, 2024, <https://weirdeconomies.com/contributions/dismantling-israel-s-war-machine>.

5 Eyal Weizman, “Walking Through Walls,” *extradisciplinaire* 5 (2007), <https://transversal.at/pdf/journal-text/1466/>.

movement is part of a tactic that the military refers to in metaphors it borrows from the world of aggregate animal formation as “swarming” and “infestation.” Moving through domestic interiors this maneuver turns inside to outside and private domains to thoroughfares... Rather than submitting to the authority of conventional spatial boundaries, movement became constitutive of space, and space was constituted as an event. It was not the order of space that governed patterns of movement but movement that produced and practiced space around it. The three-dimensional movement through walls, ceilings, and floors across the urban bulk reinterpreted, short-circuited, and recomposed both architectural and urban syntax. The tactics of “walking-through-walls” involved a conception of the city as not just the site, but as the very medium of warfare – a flexible, almost liquid matter that is forever contingent and in flux.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1. The “gaping house” with windows and doors blown out. Photo by Jennifer Loewenstein.



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6 Weizman, “Walking Through Walls.”

While there isn't space here to amply address the magnitude of atrocity of Operation Defensive Shield<sup>7</sup> under the Generalship of Ariel Sharon – which included the IOF's targeting of civilians across the West Bank, the use of Palestinians as human shields, and the denial of medical treatment of the sick and wounded – we can understand these tactics of inverse-urban-geometry utilized to violate domestic space in Balata refugee camp and the Old City of Nablus as design by destruction and destruction by design; an ultimate purpose being “un-walling of the wall.” The transgression of preconceived public/private boundaries – by Caterpillar D9 armored bulldozers, explosives, sledgehammers and then-rapidly evolving GPS and spatial modeling programs (coupled with thermal imagery and ultra-wideband radar to “see” through walls<sup>8</sup>) – proved a barbaric crusade in an attempt to isolate and fracture Palestinian resistance.

مين ارهابي<sup>9</sup>

Since their founding in Summer 2020, we can read the work of Palestine Action as seizing the shareholders' bottom line; brazen gestures that breach the material and visual/conceptual border/walls propped up by trillion-dollar military budgets and their constellations of collusion. In lieu of analyzing their successes here, we can take pause to elucidate their methodology; the group's primary purpose is *disruption*, to throw wrenches in the cogs of the insatiable capitalistic beast of global forever war while laying bare the IOF's military footprint.

7 Jennifer Loewenstein, “Remembering Operation Defensive Shield in Jenin, 20 Years Later,” *Mondoweiss*, April 7, 2022, <https://mondoweiss.net/2022/04/remembering-jenin-20-years-after-in-the-shadow-of-ukraine/>;

Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, “Israeli Abuses in the OPT during the Second Intifada,” October 23, 2002, <https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/7854#Home-Demolitions>;

Amnesty International, “Shielded from Scrutiny: IDF Violations in Jenin and Nablus,” November 2002, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/mde151432002en.pdf>.

See also: Breaking the Silence. “Occupation of the Territories: Israeli Soldier Testimonies 2000-2010,” <https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/testimonies/publications>.

8 This technology is rapidly and frighteningly progressing, spearheaded by groups like Camero (<https://camero-tech.com/>), operating in the Kfar Netter settlement (occupied Abu Kishk, Biyar Adas, al-Sawalima...).

9 DAM, “Min Erhabi? – Who's the terrorist?” Youtube, posted December 3, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1jCY-i5fc>.



Figure 2: Palestine Action activists remove the roof by hand (February 28, 2022):  
 “A spokesperson for Palestinian Action said: “The fourth occupation of Elite KL factory has left the factory in tatters - after activists removed the factory roof by hand. Taking it apart tile-by-tile, the activists left the factory completely exposed to the rain - which has flooded into the premises overnight.””<sup>10</sup> (Image courtesy Palestine Action)

Soldiers in the IOF – during the Second Intifada through today’s genocidal ravages across Gaza (Nakba, ongoing) – were instructed to rip through roofs and walls, to expose private domains and manipulate the meaning of space in wartime:

Walls were permeable elements through which the Israeli soldiers traveled. Soldiers were instructed to act as necessary and thus used advanced technology to dissolve walls and walk through them, as if space was “*unpeopled*.” In contrast, while private walls of Nablus were being broken through, the Israeli government employed a larger strategy of building a massive wall around the Palestinian territories, thus putting the whole area under siege and confirming the invisibility of its people.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Isabelle Bates, “Palestinian Action group ‘remove Tamworth factory roof by hand’ causing £250k worth of damage,” Birmingham Live, March 2, 2022, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/black-country/palestinian-action-group-remove-tamworth-23263864>.

<sup>11</sup> Sahera Bleibleh, Walking Through Walls: The Invisible War. *Space and Culture* 18, no. 2 (2015):, 156–170, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331213512919>.

Why would we concede to a world organized by a soldier's whims? They are not our masters and we do not need their tools – but, tactics of aggressively reorganizing sites *against* empire prove integral to abolishing the war machine. Brick by brick by shingle by fire extinguisher-as-spray-canister, it is our charge – in our spectrum of capacities and the weights of their privilege – to tear apart these loci of necropolitical profiteering by economic sabotage. This is the crux of Palestine Action – to ‘walk through the walls’ of the munitions manufacturers and apply sustained pressure on the offices, warehouses, banks, and other sites integral to profiting from death-making. By screeching day-to-day operations of weapons factories to a halt, Palestine Action's disembowelment of the weapon trade's economic ecosystem irrevocably damages genocidares' reputations *and* supply chains.

Presently, the primary target of Palestine Action is Elbit Systems and its subsidiaries; the “Israel”-based weapons behemoth that supplies the IOF with over 85% of their drones and land-based equipment,<sup>12</sup> munitions and electronic warfare systems:

Focusing their attention on weeding out the Israeli arms company Elbit Systems, which operates from the UK, the group sustains direct action against the company, rendering conditions which make it [nearly] impossible to continue operating at profit. This includes practised methods of sabotage, property destruction and reputational damage: dismantling, smashing and spray painting the property of Elbit, or carrying out blockades, occupying the premises and uncovering export licences. These actions happen not just against Elbit themselves but also their subsidiaries, business partners and any company that props up the supply chain.<sup>13</sup>

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12 Palestine Action, “Elbit Systems. Genocide Factories,” Accessed June 28, 2025. <https://palestineaction.org/elbit/>.

13 Palestine Action, “Dismantling Israel's War Machine,” *Weird Economies*, April 24, 2024, <https://weirdeconomies.com/contributions/dismantling-israel-s-war-machine>.

As masses are turning out in the streets in protest of proscription and demanding freedom for all political prisoners,<sup>14</sup> many under the banner “We Are All Palestine Action,” it’s urgent to understand this is not a *group*, Palestine Action is a *method*.

While the brunt of Palestine Action’s efforts are UK-based, they are providing the world a template for how to attack the veins of transnational fortressing with definitive material results – for, as we know, the lifeblood of empire is Forever War: the next-frontier and frontline to be “defended” against the known-unknown enemy,<sup>15</sup> translating into the next blank-check for contractors. The visceral, tactile processes of tearing apart the physical structures where drones, tanks, ammunition and technologies for a plethora of biometric capture are researched, designed, fabricated, financed – is perhaps the most crystalline way to assert *we will not tolerate this status quo*. These interventions – of stymying... screeching to a halt capitalism’s rhizomatics proves intrinsic to the liberation movement:

We are the crack in the wall of the system, and we will continue to hammer away with whatever tools we have to hand. Slowly but surely, that crack gets a little wider, and we see the possibility of the wall collapsing.<sup>16</sup>

Not only can joining, centring, encouraging Palestine Action’s methods of upending the economics of arms trade kneecap those complicit, but we are challenged to consider – what are the afterlives of these landscapes of death-making? This is an in-progress radical re-imagining of space, how we move through it, and how we co-create a world in defiance

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14 Since proscription by the UK government under the Terrorism Act 2000 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/three-groups-to-be-proscribed>), the website and social media accounts of Palestine Action have been disabled. Various subversions continuously pop-up, including founder Huda Ammori (@HudaAmmori) regaining access to her X account. But it is important we pay close attention to the fragility of these platforms and how they are manipulated by those in power, including the accessibility of archives.

15 US Department of Defense, “News Briefing - Secretary Rumsfeld and General Myers,” February 12, 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160406235718/http://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=2636>.

16 Francesca Nadin, “I am a Political Prisoner, Not a Hero,” *The Electronic Intifada*, January 22, 2025, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/i-am-political-prisoner-not-hero/50321>.

of and against the occupier's aims: For now, our orientation is: ***against this***. ***Against this*** is a point of possibility, and in the emptiness of never agreeing what we are for, with hands gripping the edge, wet and slipping, we will finally agree that *against* is habitable, ***against*** has room for all of us. ***Against*** is not without conflict, it is not without pain, it is only brief respite before strategizing begins.<sup>17</sup>

What I mean is, if we protest *against* munitions manufacturing, carceral capture and surveillance, what are concurrently *for*? When we permanently shutter a stakeholder's site, what expedient steps can we take to transform these architectures into life-affirming spaces? There is nothing stopping us from co-constructing this place as we dream it.



Figure 3: Palestine Action on Instagram (March 2025): "Overnight, actionists targeted the Manchester offices of Aviva, insurers of Elbit's drone factory in Staffordshire... Palestine Action is striking at the Zionist war machine, ensuring Israel's biggest weapons producer, and all that aid them, feel the full force of our resistance."

<sup>17</sup> Lola Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*, (Hajar Press, 2021).



Figure 4: “In the early hours of Wednesday 14th May [2025], activists from Palestine Action targeted Edwards Accountants in Birmingham and JP Morgan at Victoria Embankment in London. Both firms were covered in red paint, and the front glass doors of JP Morgan were completely shattered” Photo courtesy Palestine Action.

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# RECIPROCITY

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# CENTERING HUMANITY IN PAUERU GAI

## A CONVERSATION BETWEEN AN ACADEMIC AND A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ORGANIZER



*Fuki no Mizu Water Fountain, Vancouver, 2022. Photo by Kayla Isomura*

***Mari and Kathy*** | We have worked together for many years on projects ranging from a design-build installation to a multi-year public engagement on the significance of our public space. The work is situated in the Paueru Gai Area—known today as the Downtown Eastside—located on the unceded territories of the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), and xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations. We are focused on honouring the Japanese Canadian experience in this neighbourhood, within the context of longer narratives of displacement and colonization. All of our projects attempt to elevate and support people, to foster engagement and collaboration as well as creative, artistic, and cultural practices, and to advocate for multiple voices laying claim to memory and histories.

***Mari*** | Through my work with you and others at Powell Street

Festival Society (PSFS), my thoughts on what collaboration is have evolved a lot. I used to be content with the terms partner and collaborator, but these terms neglect to actively acknowledge WHY we partner and collaborate, HOW we bring different knowledge, connections, and resources to the table, and HOW we learn and benefit from the experience.

So, I'll start by offering a definition:

Reciprocity is an ethic of mutual exchange grounded in trust, humility, and the redistribution of power.<sup>1</sup> Within spatial justice and design, it resists extractive or hierarchical relationships by centering listening, shared authorship, and accountability.<sup>2</sup> Reciprocity requires practitioners to enter communities not as experts, but as co-learners—honouring lived experience, local knowledge, and land-based epistemologies.<sup>3</sup> It is not merely giving back but building relationships where all parties are transformed.<sup>4</sup> In decolonial practice, reciprocity also means refusing the supremacy of professional authority and working toward sustained, reparative collaborations that challenge structural inequity.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Davis, Katherine L., Brandon W. Kliewer, and Aliko Nicolaides. "Power and Reciprocity in Partnerships: Deliberative Civic Engagement and Transformative Learning in Community-Engaged Scholarship." *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 21, no. 1 (2017): 30–54. ; Janke, Emily M. "Increased Community Presence Is Not a Proxy for Reciprocity." *Metropolitan Universities* 24, no. 2 (2013): 57–73.

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How do you think about reciprocity in your work? And how would you define it?

**Kathy** | Your definition of reciprocity articulates its meaning so eloquently! When I hear the word ‘reciprocity,’ I think of an approach to working with others over time, not a one-time thing or event that is solely about the give and take of an interaction. It is something that requires relationship-building, a philosophy of engagement that requires meeting people where they’re at, deep listening (which is easy to say and often hard to do), and a generosity of spirit that I have learned, and continue to learn about, from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers and from many members of the Downtown Eastside (DTES) community who survive the dire challenges of deep poverty every day. As you say, it values the lived experiences of each person and gives opportunities for everyone involved to share their thoughts and learn from each other. I also think reciprocity is about trying to be thoughtful – what could possibly be in it for others to make it worth their while rather than what’s in it for me, especially knowing that in almost every case, I always get many things out of the collaboration. Furthermore, it requires making mistakes, being humble, making amends, and continual learning, as things are always changing. Working towards equity starts on the ground through the interactions we have with each other and knowing, acknowledging, and working to check our privilege in our collaborations.

Finally, reciprocity is connected to thinking about decolonizing our work – a good part of which is about re-establishing the relationships and responsibilities to others, to the land, and to all living things. This has reciprocity at its core.

**Mari** | That’s wonderful, and a rich description of the many ways you embody reciprocity in your work. An example of reciprocity in action that I can think of is *Fuki no Mizu* design-build project that we partnered on. The project was a set of mobile water fountains and misters that responded to urgent

needs around urban heat and water access—particularly among vulnerable populations—while celebrating Japanese Canadian cultural heritage. A team of 10 students spent 6 months engaging with you, PSFS folx, other NGOs involved with the distribution of water in the DTES, as well as community peers who spent an afternoon sharing their stories around water and discussing various design directions that the students were working on. We deliberately designed a process for this design-build project that centered listening, shared authorship, and co-learning. And I know that from the UBC SALA side, we were all transformed by the project.

I am wondering if you would also characterize the project as reciprocity in action, and what possible effects it had on you and/or PSFS?

**Kathy** | For me, PSFS as a collaborator in the *Fuki no Mizu* project was based on our ongoing reciprocity work in the DTES and the exciting opportunities it brought to a broad range of participants. It is difficult for any group to ‘drop in’ to the neighbourhood to do a project, and for students who are often from other places and only here for a few years. They don’t have the time or capacity to build the kinds of long-term relationships that reciprocity involves. As an organization that has been working for 49 years in Paueru Gai, we were able to facilitate gatherings with DTES residents that we know and provide spaces for exchange of perspectives to help oppose the negative stereotypes, stigma, and toxic narratives imposed on DTES community members. At the same time, the collaboration brought a creative project to the festival that had social and physical benefits (artistic installation with cultural references, cold drinking water, and mist for cooling). More specifically, though, the meetings provided honoraria for participants for their time and knowledge-sharing, meals and drinks to reduce barriers to participation, outreach and communication, preparation, etc. The resources and labour brought to the

project are part of the giving and work towards equity that, to me, reciprocity necessitates. We continue to think of better and more adequate ways to hear what the needs of others are, and to address barriers to participation in order to offer the things that make it a truly reciprocal process. The students brought their design skills, personal experiences, commitment to the project, and physical, mental, and emotional labour as did you, on top of which you added your work to organize and facilitate all of that and the collaboration itself. And the beautiful drinking fountains and misters that festival-goers were able to enjoy, were another element of the generosity of the project. We continue to use the misters, so the work you do and our collaborations feel like ‘reciprocity in action’ to me. I’m grateful that educators like you help expand the network of people who consider reciprocity in their work, especially young people who give me hope for the future!

***Mari*** | One transformation for me is appreciating the time it takes to make connections, engage, read, learn, be present, listen, and be flexible. It makes me think about default processes and methodologies of design that we need to challenge. So, the next step for me is to continue to absorb the learnings and, in my role as an educator, consider how reciprocity can be a curricular priority for the education of designers of the built environment.

***Kathy*** | I hope we can continue to collaborate on projects that bring people together in such a positive way, that bring the power of design into the daily lives of people while centring the humanity we all share.

Vancouver, July 2025.

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# REMEMBERMENT

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# ASHLAA' AND THE PRAXIS AND POETICS OF REMEMBERMENT

As the images of the severe and unthinkable bodily distress of Palestinians in Gaza stream across our screens every day, we offer a mediation on the sheer capacity to socially reproduce and create extensions of life in the midst of extermination. We draw on a recent interview on the Makdisi Street podcast with Palestinian feminist scholar Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, where she details how Palestinians in Gaza are treated as “ontologically non-beings.”<sup>1</sup> She recounts a poignant story of a young girl in Gaza who, amidst the aftermath of bombings, pleaded with her cat to promise not to eat her if she were to die. This plea stemmed from the child witnessing her community collect dismembered body parts into labeled boxes and bags—a grim reality under genocide.

The Arabic term *Ashlaa'* (أشلاء) is used by Shalhoub-Kevorkian to describe such dismemberment. Unlike the English term, *Ashlaa'* conveys the visceral texture of torn flesh and the spatial scattering of body parts, yet it carries with it the haunting sense of the whole. A young father in Gaza collects the blasted limbs of his beloveds in two plastic garbage bags. He cries, “These are my kids.” He refuses to be childless. He refuses to let the rubble orphan them. Dr. Ghassan Abu-Sittah describes how the amputated limbs of children—many too young to speak their own names—are placed in small boxes, labeled with the child’s name, the name of the body part, and then buried.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Saree Makdisi, Ussama Makdisi, and Karim Makdisi, hosts. Makdisi Street, podcast, “There is so much love in Palestine” w/ Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian,” March 8, 2024. <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/there-is-so-much-love-in-palestine-w-nadera-shalhoub/id1718414647?i=1000648491814> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cw3Y-6GqyTM>.

2 Ghassan Abu Sitta, “It’s a War on Children | Centre Stage,” hosted by Rawaa Auge, interview, posted December 15, 2023, by Al Jazeera English, YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9w\\_CwiMgYTk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9w_CwiMgYTk).

Abu-Sittah takes photos of the limbs before they are buried. In the case of the boxes and bags, to the families collecting them, they understand the bag as the whole child rather than his or her parts.



Figure 1: Jasbir Puar and Dima Srouji, Untitled (2023), from the series 'Revolutionary Enclosures (Until the Apricots): Lightbox and blown glass, dimensions: 242 x 189 cm, Australian soldiers peeling onions in gas masks in the British Mandate of Palestine, Gaza 1940. Place: British Mandate of Palestine: Palestine, Gaza Date of creation: 3 July 1940 Three Australian soldiers sit on bags of onions to peel them in gas masks during the British Mandate of Gaza, Palestine in 1940. (Courtesy of Jasbir Puar).

These rituals become not only funerary but ontological, what Shalhoub-Kevorkian calls the “ontological reclamation” of *Ashlaa*.<sup>3</sup> In daily acts of what we are calling “rememberment,” Palestinians in Gaza are putting back together that which has been torn apart. They are bringing *Ashlaa*’ back to life, refusing the assignment of non-being, refusing the colonial demand to become nothing, refusing to be captured by the destruction of Palestinian bodies and the fragmented geography of Palestine. This “ontological reclamation,” says Shalhoub-

3 Makdisi, Makdisi, and Makdisi, “There is so much love in Palestine”.

Kevorkian, is an *Ashlaa*’ that insists on the completeness of Palestine and the determination of genocided Palestinians to become differently whole, to vehemently reject the colonizer’s attempt at inscribing a signature injury.

We think of the ontological reclamation of *Ashlaa*’ as the process of “rememberment” (re-member-ment) in the face of erasure, and all of the “cides”—scholasticide, ecocide, domicile, medi-cide. Rememberment speaks to the recursive force of social reproduction that determinedly renews every morning despite the genocidal devastation of the day before. Rememberment is literal, in the gathering of remains and the commitment to re-member bodies. Rememberment is ontological, in the ways Palestinian bodies reform, regroup, recalibrate, and refortify to meet daily the unthinkable, the unimaginable challenges of surviving a genocide. Rememberment is psychic, in the embodiment of *sumud*, of resilience, of determined resistance to the violence of extermination and the enforcement of dehumanization. Rememberment is pedagogical, in the training of bodies to withstand the quotidian praxis of repetition with a difference, with many differences.

This perspective emphasizes recognizing and honoring the wholeness of the collective Palestinian body, even in the face of physical fragmentation and violence. Despite the apparent dismemberment of Gaza—and by extension, Palestine—there exists an unfragmented, phantom object of the whole.

*Ashlaa*’, also meaning “fragments” or “shattered remains,” speaks not only to bodily ruin but to the dismemberment of architecture, of cities, of histories. In Palestine, architecture exists in a permanent state of dismemberment, its components torn apart and repurposed, yet refusing to disappear. The ruins of homes, the pulverized earth of bombed neighborhoods, the shards of glass and stone—each fragment carries an imprint of a nonlinear past. In this way, the ontological reclamation of *ashlaa*’—what we are calling rememberment—forms an alternative historiographical

approach, one that does not rely on permanence but instead recognizes architecture as a living, evolving archive becoming archaeological and architectural simultaneously and rubble and construction material simultaneously.



Figure 2: Jasbir Puar and Dima Srouji, *Wallpaper* (2023), from the series 'Revolutionary Enclosures (Until the Apricots): Wallpaper, prints. (Photographs by Ismail Noor courtesy of Jasbir Puar).

## **TORN BODIES, TORN LAND: ASHLAA' AS TERRITORIAL FRAGMENTATION**

The dismemberment of the Palestinian body parallels the violent partition of Palestinian geography. Since the Nakba of 1948, the process of partitioning Palestine has been carried out with surgical precision—villages erased, borders enforced, walls erected, checkpoints imposed. This calculated division of space mirrors the dismemberment of Palestinian bodies by genocide, occupation, and displacement. Bodies and land refract each other.

The West Bank, encircled by settlements, roads, and military zones, is a geography of severed limbs, each town cut off from the next by walls and barriers. Gaza, perpetually under siege, is another severed appendage, what Ghassan Kanafani

called “an amputated town”<sup>4</sup>—trapped, bombarded, and left to fester in its perceived isolation. The Israeli occupation has turned geography into an extension of bodily violence, where movement itself is dictated by force. At a checkpoint, a body is fragmented—its movement interrupted, its autonomy suspended. In the ruins of Gaza, a family home is reduced to *ashlaa*’—scattered bricks, shredded fabric, crushed bodies indistinguishable from the land they once inhabited.

The violence against Palestinian bodies and Palestinian land follows a historical continuum, from the Nakba (and prior) to the present. During the 1948 expulsions, entire villages were razed, their populations killed and scattered. Survivors often spoke of how the land itself seemed to grieve, as olive trees were uprooted, homes reduced to rubble, and familiar landscapes rendered unrecognizable. The massacres of Deir Yassin in 1948, carried this violence further—human bodies left in pieces, reflecting the shattered remains of their homes.

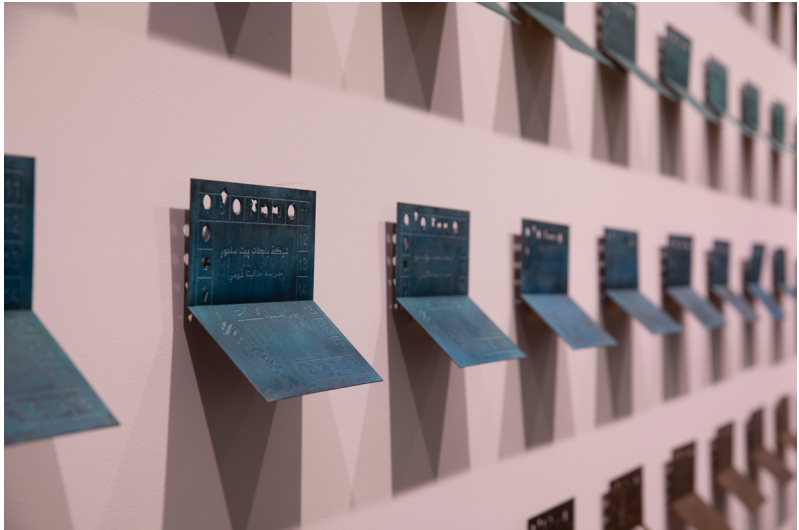


Figure 3: Jasbir Puar and Dima Srouji, *Bus Tickets* (2023), from the series ‘Revolutionary Enclosures (Until the Apricots): Etched brass, dimensions: 17 x 17 cm per bus ticket (150). (Photographs by Ismail Noor courtesy of Jasbir Puar).

4 Ghassan Kanafani, “Letter from Gaza,” in *The 1936–39 Revolt in Palestine* (Committee For Democratic Palestine, 1972), 62, <https://pflp-documents.org/documents/PFLP-Kanafani3639.pdf>.

In Gaza today, this cycle of destruction repeats itself relentlessly. Each bombardment dismembers not only bodies, but also the very fabric of life—schools, hospitals, and cultural institutions are pulverized, leaving behind a topography of debris. Yet, amidst the rubble, rememberment, as the reclamation of *ashlaa'*, emerges: a form that resists erasure. Families salvage cinder blocks from their destroyed homes to rebuild; baristas reopen their cafes on top of a mound of rubble; and children repaint the streets of their neighborhood in pink and blue paint to return to joy—another layer above the ashen facades.

*Ashlaa'*, then, is not merely an index of destruction. Through the process of rememberment, *ashlaa'* is transformed into a record of survival, a material language through which Palestinian memory endures. Whether in linguistic expression, visual representation, or spatial fragmentation, *ashlaa'* articulates the ongoing rupture of Palestinian existence while insisting on the persistence of its people and their land. It names a continuity that transcends its fragmentation.

## REMEMBERMENT AS RELATIONS

Rememberment challenges the notion of singular, linear histories, proposing instead that identity and culture emerge through a network of relations that transcend fixed borders and temporal constraints. This relational ontology suggests that *ashlaa'*—the fragments of Palestinian material culture—do not exist in isolation but remain embedded in historical, social, and political entanglements that re-member collective memory and futurity.

In the Palestinian context, *ashlaa'* are not simply traces of loss but active agents of meaning-making in the process of rememberment. These fragmented materials—whether ruins of homes, displaced stones, or shattered ceramics—retain an echo of their original form while simultaneously entering into new constellations of significance. *Ashlaa'* resist erasure by continuing to function within a poetics of survival, transforming

the debris of destruction into repositories of remembrance and resistance. This is the underbelly of Palestine, a network of high activity of *ashlaa*’ that maintains presence and deep meaning within the land. In that opaque depth, liberation exists.

The fragments of Palestinian material culture embody what Edouard Glissant hails as the “right to opacity”;<sup>5</sup> they remain irreducible to fixed meanings, neither wholly broken nor entirely whole, existing in a liminal space that resists colonial narratives of disappearance. Instead, they re-member new relations, continuously generating histories, stories, and modes of belonging that refuse settler-colonial fragmentation and epistemic violence.

To bear witness to the genocide of Palestinians is also to enter the praxis of re-member-ment, a witnessing that is not passive, not a form of consumption, but leads to action: organizing, teaching, protesting, writing, speaking, every day until Palestinians are free. Witnesses too become part of the archive of Palestinian resistance, part of how and what the world to come will know about Palestine. As witnesses, we become vessels of memory, part of the archive, blurring the divide between the archive and its reader. So even as the infrastructure of basic life, and administrative, historical, and cultural archives and their traces are being decimated, the remembrance of memory must exceed materiality. In committing to durational witnessing, we too become part of an overflowing archive of resistance, of knowledge about and for Palestine, about how Palestinians fought for their lives and their freedom during a genocide.

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<sup>5</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing. (The University of Michigan Press, 1997).

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# REPARATIONS

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# HISTORIOGRAPHY AND EQUALITY IN DUE JUSTICE

Until very recently, there was a brief but exciting momentum in the world to reckon with the injustices of the past, including those of military regimes, apartheid, civil wars, colonialism, and slavery. These reckonings often had a spatial dimension. For instance, during the Summer of 2020, several Confederate and military monuments were toppled or removed during the Black Lives Matter protests in Alabama, Antwerp, Boston, Bristol, Virginia, and other cities. This episode of upheaval in the continuing debate around monuments also sparked discussions on accountability and the right-to-truth about crimes of the past. For instance, during these protests, Angela Davis called for a Truth and Reconciliation commission to reckon with the historical damages caused by slavery and its continuing racist legacy.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after the toppling of the statue of King Leopold II in Brussels in the Summer of 2020, Belgium instituted a sort of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the form of a parliamentary Special Commission, meant to scrutinize Belgium's colonial past and to discuss reparations to the ex-Belgian-colony, Congo.<sup>2</sup> In July 2021, U.N. Special Rapporteur Fabian Salvioli issued a report that suggested similar mechanisms to examine the human rights violations committed during colonial times.<sup>3</sup> Recently, scholars have made the case that during major American transition periods, such as the Reconstruction and Civil Rights Era, equity has been sought through ahistorical distributive justice and has, thus, remained less effective than

1 Angela Davis, "Toppling of Confederate Statues Reflects Reckoning with Slavery and Racism," *Democracy Now*, accessed June 12, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pD3wlRJWCxc>.

2 For further discussion, see Amah Edoh, Pablo de Greiff, Pedro Monaville, and Liliane Umubyeyi, "Belgium to Congo: Colonialism Reparations and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions." Panel organized and moderated by Esra Akcan, Cornell University, February 24, 2021, video, 2:24:47, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtGaN2A\\_tC4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtGaN2A_tC4).

3 United Nations General Assembly, "Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-recurrence: Report of the Special Rapporteur Fabian Salvioli," A/76/180, July 19, 2021.

would otherwise be possible.<sup>4</sup> As Robert Meister writes, the USA is a country “still in transition from its history of slavery,” and we should add, settler colonization, which calls for truth-telling and reparation procedures where spaces are mobilized as forensic and memorialization platforms to conclude this transition.<sup>5</sup>

The term “reparations” originally referred to monetary compensations paid to countries after wars to pay for war damages and to contribute to postwar reconstruction. Recent discussions call for broadening this nomenclature of diplomacy and law and to search for ways to implement not only material compensation but also immaterial restitutions. Many of us recognize the need for finding more ways to bring a society to confront the lack of accountability for the political and ecological harms of the past. In this sense, reparations mean justice achieved retroactively. Reparations to bring justice to the residual inequalities caused by past crimes need to be at the forefront of contemporary human right activism today. Thinkers need to generate ideas for a broader, theoretically rigorous, and holistic framework for justice—one that can deal in legal terms with the passage of time between past crimes and today. This accentuates the role of history writing, including architectural history writing, in matters of justice, while not using the term justice monolithically. The distinctions between penal and non-punitive forms of justice have long been recognized, but the differences within non-punitive or restorative justice have not. For instance, distributive justice seeks to close the present gaps in a society, such as income gaps, education gaps or incarceration gaps by allocating current resources more evenly, but a newfound discourse on reparations is invested in tracing the historical causes of this gap much more precisely

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4 See for instance: Desmond S King and Jennifer M. Page, “Towards Transitional Justice? Black Reparations and the End of Mass Incarceration,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 4 (2018): 739–758; Debra Satz, “Countering the Wrongs of the Past: The Role of Compensation,” in *Transitional Justice*, ed. Melissa Williams (: New York University Press, 2012): 129–150.

5 Robert Meister, “Forgiving and Forgetting: Lincoln and the Politics of National Recovery,” in *Human Rights in Political Transitions: Gettysburg to Bosnia*, eds. Carla Hesse and Robert Post (Zone Books, 1999), 135.

and bringing justice against past violations of fairness for a better justification of redistribution. As Ta-Nehisi Coates, whose essay “The Call for Reparations” brought new light to the demands for Black reparations, would say, one cannot close an achievement gap without closing the injury gap.<sup>6</sup> These discussions on reparations call for a more holistic approach to justice to be achieved retroactively. It elaborates on a prolonged and delayed notion of transitional justice for a healing process—a sphere in human rights and international law that was officially recognized in the mid-2000s.<sup>7</sup> Reckoning with military regimes, civil wars, genocides, and apartheid, as well as sediments of colonization and slavery, can indeed be topics of a multidisciplinary field of reparations.

One of the countries that I have built my expertise on, Germany, has a long history reckoning with its past crimes, where architecture and architectural history have taken on active roles. More than any other country, Germany has served as a blatant model for reparations, both due to its crimes and steps to take accountability for these crimes. To cite the most well-known example, in the Reparations Agreement between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany of 1952, West Germany agreed to make restitutions and monetary reparations to the Jewish victims of Nazism. The memorable image of Willy Brandt kneeling down in a dramatic apology in Warsaw in 1970 has sparked debates on reparations. While East Germany refused accountability in 1952, claiming that it did not bear moral or historical responsibility for the crimes of the Nazis, the state agreed to reverse this policy in 1988. Only recently, in 2015, the official deliberations started to build a consensus over the history of and an apology for the German pre-Nazi genocide in southwest Africa.<sup>8</sup> While the Holocaust

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6 Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, June 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

7 For further discussion, see Esra Acan, *Architecture and the Right to Heal: Resettler Nationalism in the Aftermath of Conflict and Disaster* (Duke University Press, 2025).

8 For more discussion, see Esra Acan, organizer and moderator, “Germany to Germany: New Perspectives on Postwar, Post-Unification and Postcolonial Reparations,” panel with Rebecca Boehling, Tiffany Florvil, Nicholas Mulder, and Ruti Teitel, Cornell University, March 15, 2021, accessed March 21, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIT5e6q4M1>

has often been declared unique among genocides and the Nazis unique among perpetrators, these deliberations can and should serve as a model for the mobilization of other material and moral reparations both in Germany and elsewhere. The early Holocaust memory debate actually took shape in dialogue with the anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles of intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Charlotte Delbo, as scholar Michael Rothberg has convincingly analyzed.<sup>9</sup> Andreas Huyssen has also traced the beginnings and growing awareness of the Holocaust memorialization to decolonization and the civil rights movements.<sup>10</sup> The relations between the Holocaust memory, xenophobia, and the reception of Muslim immigrants in Germany after the 1970s have been no less complex and changing. Many immigrants compare the racism they face with anti-Semitism in cases such as the Neo-Nazis' deadly attacks in Mölln (1992) and Solingen (1993). Many Middle Eastern immigrants have taken the German-Jewish trope as a model for their own cooperative unions, associations, and demands for rights.<sup>11</sup> In literary studies, Leslie Adelson has analyzed Holocaust consciousness and accountability in German-Turkish immigrant literature after Germany's reunification.<sup>12</sup> However, today, the mainstream Holocaust memory in Germany is barely helping. It is instead impairing the enunciation of other horrors and the recognition of other victims. As one of the first to point out this shift, Esra Özyürek has drawn attention to the fact that the situation changed in the 2000s, when "the interconnected commitments of European leaders to fight anti-Semitism became one of the grounds for

9 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

10 Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2003).

11 Ruth Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany* (Duke University Press, 2008): 109–140; Gökçe Yurdakul and Michael Bodemann, "'We Don't Want to Be the Jews of Tomorrow': Jews and Turks in Germany after 9/11," *German Politics and Society* 24, no. 2 (2006): 44–67.

12 Zafer Şenocak, *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* (Munich: Babel, 1998). See also Leslie Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Towards a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 79–122 and Andreas Huyssen, "Diaspora and Nation: Migration into Other Pasts," *New German Critique* 88 (2003): 47–164.

legitimizing racialization of immigrants, and signaling out the Muslims as the main contemporary anti-Semites.”<sup>13</sup> Holocaust memorials in immigrant neighborhoods in Germany such as Berlin’s Kreuzberg failed to triangulate German, Jewish, and Muslim migrant memories, even though many intellectuals drew connections between historical and contemporary discriminations against the Jewish and Muslim populations.<sup>14</sup> Today, at a moment when the Nazi-induced trauma is being weaponized to turn a blind eye to other genocides taking place in plain sight—such as the one in Gaza as many Jewish and other thinkers, including Naomi Klein,<sup>15</sup> have stated-- the long history of Germany’s role in mobilizing a global movement of reparations needs additional chapters. Many have now recognized the obligation to acknowledge the crimes of the Holocaust and the Nakba together,<sup>16</sup> and thus to call for an equal distribution of reparations.

The exclusionary practices in the selective inclusion of victims during the global reparations debate bring me to the topic of identity politics. On the one hand, most conflicts are due to ethnic and racial discriminations, and, if societies are ever to confront their mistakes, truth-telling needs to expose these racialization processes. On the other hand, the final goal of justice is perpetual peacebuilding to put an end to conflicts. Reparations need to be a delicate reconciliation, after which all involved parties shake hands in peace, so to speak. Any action or memorial that fuels conflict by reversing and constructing a new hierarchy between groups, or by planting seeds of violence through identity politics, or by confusing equality with revenge, or by using the word “victim” as a synonym of “good” is bound to distort this final intention.

13 Esra Özyürek, “Export-Import Theory and the Racialization of Anti-Semitism: Turkish- and Arab-Only Prevention Programs in Germany,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no.1 (2016): 40–65.

14 For further discussion, see Esra Akcan, *Open Architecture: Migration, Citizenship and the Urban Renewal of Berlin Kreuzberg* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2018).

15 Naomi Klein, “How Israel Made Trauma a Weapon of War,” *The Guardian*, 5 October 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2024/oct/05/israel-gaza-october-7-memorials>.

16 Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, eds., *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History* (Columbia University Press, 2019).

Examples may be multiplied. Struggles for reparations have sometimes blocked, but at other times learned from one another. One group's struggle for the recognition of their pain could (and should) inspire and guide another's. This mutual learning could help devise mechanisms of truth-telling, confrontation, and non-recurrence, including survival testimonies, naming of crimes, memorials, educational programs, repatriation protocols for cultural heritage objects, compensation norms, and "never again for all" movements. Truly globalizing the reparations debate and calling for an equal distribution of reparations would allow us to build solidarities, identify double standards, if any, and work toward overcoming them.

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# **RESISTANCE**

**MARIA ALEJANDRA LINARES TRELLES**

THE NEW SCHOOL

# AGAINST THE DETERMINACY OF ARCHITECTURE

*“As stained subjects, we are not supposed to have worldmaking effects... We are expected to be available for extraction and transparency. But we refuse. We create counter-worlds in incommensurate ways.”<sup>1</sup>*

## PREFACE

Rather than a fixed definition, this short essay reflects on the generative power of resistance. Primarily inspired by Indigenous struggles for sovereignty across Abya Yala, specifically those from communities in what is today the Peruvian Amazon, the following paragraphs foreground spatial knowledge and strategies that escape the containment of architecture and propose paths for actively dismantling existing spaces of power.

The invasion and occupation of the Americas established a new world order based on the racial classification of peoples under white supremacy, and a capitalist structure in the control of labor and resources.<sup>2</sup> This hegemonic model of power was achieved through genocide, occupation, slavery, and extractivism that threatened ecologies and communities—primarily Indigenous and Black communities—around the world.

This process, inaugurated in the sixteenth century, persists today. Although different in means and form, colonial forces continue to exist, sponsored by States and allowed by the fallacy of international law. Accelerated environmental degradation, forced migration and displacement, and the configuration of sacrifice and extractive zones vis-à-vis so-called “developed” areas, are only some of the events that represent our current planetary crisis.

1 Naomi Rincon Gallardo, “A Letter to Stained Subjects Who Persists in the Labor of Worldmaking Regardless” in *and if I devoted my life to one of its feathers*, ed. Miguel A. Lopez (Sternberg Press, 2022)

2 Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” in *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533-580. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/23906>.

This culture of death is ingrained in the built environment through spatial practices under the umbrella of design or architecture. Throughout history, these disciplines have been mobilized as an instrument of power to facilitate the control of people, land, and resources. Grids and borders defined the appropriation of land and shaped the foundation of cities, settler colonialism guaranteed and maintained the dispossession of territories, maps and master plans erased neighborhoods and their histories, stylistic movements condemned cultural expressions, and more recently, technofetishism promises to control ecologies and evade the consequences of the continued exploitation of natural resources. These are just a few of the techniques of containment and abstraction deployed by spatial practices to measure, manage, and exploit resources and communities.

## ESCAPING DETERMINACY

However, as colonialism persists, so does resistance to it. Despite the attempts of suppression and erasure, communities continue to defend their territories, subsistence, culture, and lifestyle. Since colonization, Indigenous communities across Abya Yala have fought to guarantee the continuity of life. This struggle is rooted in memory—the memory of the territory kept alive through oral tradition, rituals, and artistic practices, as well as the memory of previous struggles, on top of which each generation continues to build traditions of resistance.

The *Kukama Kukamiria* people, an Indigenous community that has historically inhabited river edges and other flood areas in what is today the Peruvian Amazon, describe through oral tradition a universe conceived of multiple worlds, where humans, the river, and other beings interact, reproducing forms of sociality and conviviality.<sup>3</sup> Similarly to other Indigenous traditions in Abya Yala, this territoriality centers

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3 See: Radio Ucamara and Wildlife Conservation Society Peru, *Parana Marañún Tsawa: El alma del Río Marañón*, interactive story map, ArcGIS, August 26, 2020, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=2f9a6e6de49f4556b110dc005bc9cb2b>. This is a counter-cartographic project led by Radio Ucamara, a community-led and Kukama radio station, in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to produce a social and cultural map of the Marañón River that captures how the Kukama Kukamiria see and construct their territory.

interconnectedness and interdependence. An environment that escapes the determinacy of architecture, in its fixed and stable borders, by proposing a dynamic, mutable, adaptable space shaped by ecological cycles, dynamics of care and reciprocity, and layered histories. A medium rather than an object.

The *Kukama Kukamiria* have survived colonization, the oppressive system of religious missions, the genocide of the rubber boom from the early twentieth century and continue to resist the extractive economies that threaten their existence. Their resistance relies on constantly actualizing their territoriality through rituals, storytelling, making, and everyday actions that propose alternative forms of dwelling and living together within capitalism. In this way, their resistance becomes a practice that undermines dominant power relations by carving space even when material means have disappeared. Outside of Abya Yala Indigenous communities, similar practices transform **spaces** of power, logistics, and death into **places** that foster identity and belonging. Between March and April 2025, a series of images circulated on social media, showing Eid dinner tables amidst the ruins of Gaza. These images depicted spaces, cleared from rubble, defined only by a long table, and strings of lights and paper decorations. These spaces of celebration defied the preconceived image of war—that of destruction—on which oppressive powers rely to ensure their domain. Furthermore, these Eid celebrations created interiors of safety in the absence of architecture, resisting the narrative that if buildings (containers) are destroyed, the life supported by them also disappears.

Altars in immigrant homes, public festivities and celebrations of marginalized communities,<sup>4</sup> and mutual aid actions like collective kitchens taking to the streets during the

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4 See: history of Black marching bands in Mabel Wilson and Bryony Roberts, “We March,” *Bodybuilding Architecture and Performance*, ed. Charles Aubin and Carlos Minguez Carrasco (New York City: Performa, 2019), and other explorations on collective dancing as a form of activism during BLM protests.

COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>5</sup> are other examples of resistance where communities reclaim agency to create place by carving out space while dismantling systems of power.

## **WORLDMAKING AND FUTURITY**

These appropriations of the built environment reformulate spatial conditions and facilitate new uses, programs, and forms of visibility in a creative act of indeterminacy. As a placemaking strategy, resistance moves away from being a state, condition, or situation, to become a sustained practice that reclaims power and agency to create and to imagine. Temporal, fugitive, fluctuating, and parasitic, these spaces of resistance defy the grasp of coloniality that seeks their interpretation and erasure while proposing alternative futures centered around community and common spatialities.

A future-oriented project that nurtures counter-worlds, defying the limitation imposed by claims to realism or pragmatism. Before the apparent impossibility of liberation, we are reminded that resistance is not a one-time event. Changes have already happened, and therefore, will continue to happen. We rely on an ecology of knowledges that builds a tradition of resistance capable of creating more just futures in the present.

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5 See: “Manos a la Olla” initiative in Peru, and Anna Puigjaner’s scholarship on collective kitchens, Anna Puigjaner, “Kitchen Stories,” in *Future Public*, ed. Nick Axel, Vere van Gool, Joseph Grima, and Anton Vidokle (collab. New Museum IdeasCity and eflux Architecture, 2017), essay section, <https://www.eflux.com/architecture/future-public/151948/kitchen-stories/>.

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# **RESOURCE EXTRACTION**

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# ATOMIZING LIFEWORLDS INTO RESOURCES

## EXTRACTIVE BOOMS AND RESOURCE-THINKING IN THE AMAZON

Standing in a patch of primary forest along the Amazon River, the ways that lives entwine and support one another has never been clearer to me. The trees here are dense, and the air on the ground is much cooler than the freshly cleared fields I crossed through on my walk here. Abuelo Ricaurte, the Ticuna elder who brought me to this piece of primary forest and helped me ask permission to enter at its verdant threshold, turns towards me and tells me this is *madre selva*, mother forest. In Ticuna, he tells me, this forest is *nai neke*. Closing my eyes, though, and listening to the sonic landscape, I remember the words of novelist Gabriela Cabezón Cámara on the sounds of the forest: “The jungle’s murmur is ceaseless. It’s a single sound but comprises thousands of voices... Not just the multitude of trees and animals, but something immaterial they share. A relationship. Or many relationships.”<sup>1</sup> Although the Amazon forest provides one of the clearest representations of the entangled layers of life, of course, all landscapes are vital and interconnected. The interactions between the lives held in these spaces are foundational for the very definition of what an ecosystem is.

Despite—and perhaps because of—the dense life that connects this river to the extensive web of lands and forests lands and forests, the region has been the site of waves of extractive booms since colonization that have torn apart the more-than-human lifeworlds here. Quinine, Rubber, Oil, Gold, and Tropical Hardwood have all been the focus of extractive regimes that identified a singular element or species amidst this web of life and ripped it away. Each of these extractions has brought characteristic destruction, from the enslavement of Indigenous labor to harvest rubber, to the toxic chemicals

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriela Cabezón Cámara, *We Are Green and Trembling*, trans. Robin Myers (New Directions Publishing, 2025), 22.

left from drilling and mining. In the past ten years of researching in this region, I've watched the signature of the current agricultural boom spread across the landscape as land is burned and cut along roads in the upper Amazon region to grow *Palma africana* and raise cattle.

Each wave has also been resisted. Political Scientist Thea Riofrancos details how the response to one of these booms—the oil boom in the Ecuadorian Amazon—was pivotal in protests against extraction and in radicalizing and articulating positions against *extractivismo*. She traces how it was in this context that “Amazonian indigenous groups directly confronting oil companies elaborated an increasingly pointed critique of extraction as a threat to *el territorio*.”<sup>2</sup> The threats to territory are threats to life and sovereignty, all inseparable from the environmental destruction of drilling.

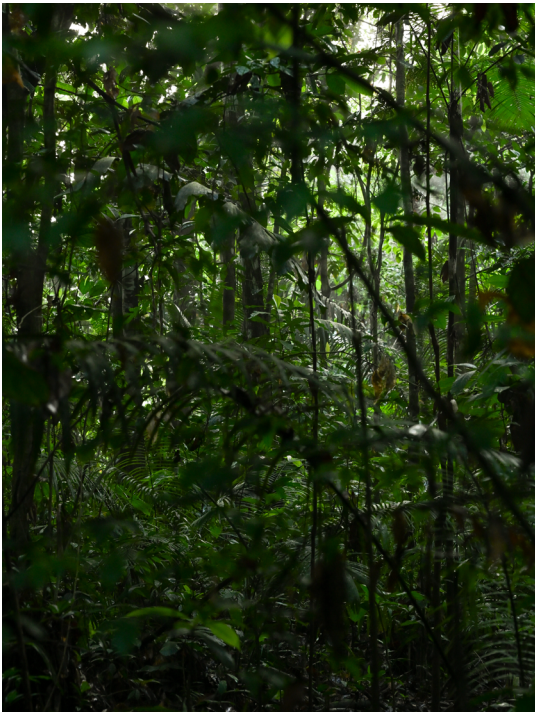


Figure 1: A small glimpse of the selva along the Amazon River, near Macedonia, Colombia. Photo by Zannah Matson.

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<sup>2</sup> Thea N. Riofrancos, *Resource Radicals: From Petro-Nationalism to Post-Extractivism in Ecuador* (Duke University Press, 2020), 31.

In contrast to this integrated understanding of territory and life, extractive booms within the Amazon have only been made possible through the creation of what Architect Elsa Mäki Hoover calls atomized relations<sup>3</sup> that separate and divide. People from land, oil from shale, palm from soil, and so on. Although there has been an increased focus on extraction within architectural scholarship recently, I want to pause briefly on the dirty work that the construction of a ‘resource’ does to enable the economic system of extractivism that is eating our world. Instead of the vitality of *madre selva*, the separating of a singular element and defining it as some sort of asset establishes life as divisible and tradable. This resource-thinking is foundational to prime us into extractive relationships. Indigenous Studies Scholar-Artist Zoe Todd critiques this conception of resources as separate from us and quotes Elmer Ghostkeeper to argue that establishing resources in this way “forces people to live *off* the land, not *with* the land.”<sup>4</sup>

Pushing back against extractive relationships, Todd urges us to “consider the possibilities that are opened when we contemplate the materials being extracted in Alberta’s oil and gas industries are not inert chemical substances, non-renewable resources, or, in turn *waste*, but in fact kin, ancestors, and relations that tie us to long ago more than human societies, existences, and obligations.”<sup>5</sup> Instead of viewing the world through what Todd identifies as the white possessive lens—which so quickly slips into stacking up and counting out the resources within property—to move beyond extractivism we must remain within the complexity of interconnected environments.

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3 Elsa Mäki Hoover, 2021, “On the Water,” In Space Caviar (ed.), *Non-Extractive Architecture: On Designing Without Depletion* (Sternberg Press, 2021), 263.

4 Elmer Ghostkeeper, as cited Zoe Todd, “Fossil Fuels and Fossil Kin: An Environmental Kin Study of Weaponised Fossil Kin and Alberta’s So-Called ‘Energy Resources Heritage,’” *Antipode* 57, no.5 (2025): 1745.

5 Todd, “Fossil Fuels and Fossil Kin”: 1727.

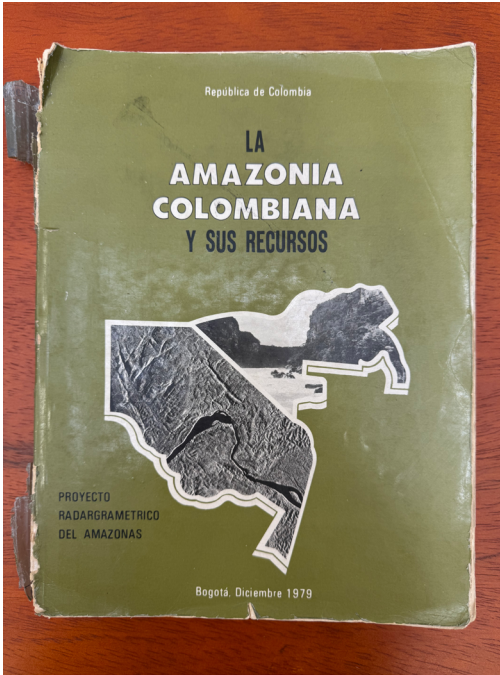


Figure 2: The cover of the book “La Amazonia y Sus Recursos” that separates and details each element of the forest, from its soils to its trees. Photo by Zannah Matson.

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# **RUIN**

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# NECROTOPOLOGIES

## STATE-SANCTIONED RUINS IN GAZA AND LOS ANGELES

*I was a home in Gaza shielding an Arab woman and her children. I was a tent in Los Angeles sheltering an unhoused Latinx citizen. Now, I am a ruin, not a relic of the past, but a crime in progress.*

Already-made ruins, or architectures and geographies whose endurance was compromised, bombed, left to decay, segregated, fractured, polluted, or emptied by design. Palestinian architect and artist, Dima Srouji, describes these ruins as “provisional structures built inside systems designed to collapse them.”<sup>1</sup> These ruins epitomize planned destruction; they are made, kept, and state-sanctioned. The production of ruins is a fundamental feature of settler colonial systems, where selected places must be continuously destroyed to reinforce racial binaries, establish power hierarchies, inhibit existence, grab land, prevent return, and ultimately make a profit.<sup>2</sup>

From a spatial perspective, I call these ruins *necrotologies*: geographies where death, surveillance, and deprivation are a spatial logic that is continuously mapped onto physical, psychological, and virtual spaces. Here, topology refers to how spaces transform under pressure from colonial settler states and their law-enforcement bodies, but also protesters and insurgents. The term brings together geography and space with historian and political theorist Achille Mbembe’s notion of necropolitics, or the ways in which state power is used to control who lives and who dies.<sup>3</sup>

*Necrotology* links Gaza and Los Angeles; apartheid, genocide, and carceral spaces under the same spatial strategy: transforming places into death-space. It is the logic that turns a freeway into a deportation corridor, a neighborhood into a buffer zone, a phone into a tracking device, and artificial

1 Dima Srouji, Vertical Shelters, *Oblique*, no. 6, 2025.

2 Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future*, (Verso, 2019).

3 Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, (Duke University Press, 2019), pp. 66-92.

intelligence into Habsora. Los Angeles and Palestine show how ruin-making is a global and spatial tactic of racial control that includes the decay of buildings and the ruination resulting from policing racialized communities and depriving them from their rights, particularly their right to place.

Whereas existing spatial terms such as *domicide* and *urbicide* refer to the scale of the home and the city, *necrotopology* includes relationships beyond buildings and the urban and across distant geographies in a global world linked by spatial warfare. Although ruins have always been political objects and processes, their current scale, pervasiveness, and display are unprecedented. From this perspective, *necrotopology* is a necessary term that points to the present ubiquitous political strategy focused on unmaking places, but also to the possibility of collective resistance.

This spatial phenomenon is simultaneous to the proliferation of terms and theories that aim to name it, make it visible, denounce it, and oppose it. For example, Palestinian descendent anthropologist Nadia Abu El-Had describes how the State of Israel manufactures ruins to erase Indigenous Palestinian landscapes.<sup>4</sup> Decolonial historian Ann Laura Stoler uses the term *ruination* to describe the active and ongoing process of decay caused by colonialism and empire and its lingering effects way after the architectures are gone.<sup>5</sup> Focusing on space, geographer Derek Gregory analyzes how Western powers create *ruinscapes* to assert dominance.<sup>6</sup> Gregory's work on Gaza frames the territory not just as a site of temporary destruction but as a *perpetual ruin*—a landscape where ruination is actively sustained by military, political, and economic forces. Indigenous authors have extended the critique beyond urban contexts. Potawatomi philosopher and environmental justice scholar Kyle Powys Whyte describes

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4 Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice in Territorial Palestine*, (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

See also, Edward Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place". *Critical Inquiry* 26 no. 2, (2000).

5 Ann Laura Stoler, "Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008): 191-219, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2008.00007.x>.

6 Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004).

climate ruins as a continuation of settler land theft,<sup>7</sup> whereas Métis scholar in Indigenous Studies Zoe Todd points to *fossil ruins*—oil pipelines, tar sands, and plastic pollution—as extensions of colonial violence against Indigenous lands and waters.<sup>8</sup>

These approaches challenge a long White Western tradition that considers ruins as apolitical artifacts, particularly when they are located in the Global South. As mere objects of nostalgia or aesthetic appreciation, the fragment, vestige, or relic hide the imperialist and colonial violences that produced them. As utilitarian objects, the debris, rubble, wreckage, or leftover demand their removal as if they carry no cultural meaning. As natural processes of decay, the detritus, patina, dust, and decomposed matter often forget that they are deeply intertwined with environment exploitation and racial capitalism.<sup>9</sup> As a legal status, the *ruin* allows us to completely replace and ignore what was in place before. As a modern rhetoric device, the fragment, the collage, and the allegory point at the revolutionary potential embedded in traces and partial worlds, but their abstractions create an unbridgeable distance from the suffering of those who have lost their worlds.

To name ruins as *necrotologies* is to rupture the settler fantasy of neutrality and passive decay—to reveal, instead, a global infrastructure of violent and racist ruin-making that demands collective opposition. Whereas many contemporary theories unearth the specificity of each reality, *necrotology* is a term that seek for alliances and solidarity among distant places and communities. For example, the architecture office Forensic Architecture approaches ruins as crime scenes of colonialism, gathering evidence that serve in legal proceedings, parliamentary inquiries, and public awareness campaigns.<sup>10</sup>

7 Kyle Powys Whyte “Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice,” Environment and Society 9, no. 1 (2018): 125-144, <https://doi.org/10.3167/ares.2018.090109>.

8 Zoe Todd, “Indigenizing the Anthropocene.” In *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, eds. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (Open Humanities Press, 2016): 241-254.

9 Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

10 “About,” Forensic Architecture, accessed July 7, 2025, <https://forensic-architecture.org/about/agency>.

Liberation emerges in the collective labor of those who treat ruins not as endpoints, but as evidence and as ground to remember and rebuild. From this perspective, rebuilding cannot be the traditional nostalgic restoration or profit-driven redevelopment. If colonialism is a machine that produces ruins, Indigenous people are the ones who remember how to rebuild. Rematriation is an Indigenous method of countering both destruction and complicit restorations; it is not about returning to a museum-version of the past or mere legal ownership, but reviving living systems of healing and care that address the root of systemic ruin-making.

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# **SETTLER COLONIALISM**

**SETTLER COLONIAL CITY PROJECT<sup>1</sup>**

# SETTLER COLONIALISM IS NOT A METAPHOR

*“Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do....”<sup>2</sup>*

“Gentrification is colonialism!” “Extraction is colonialism!” “Occupation is colonialism!” In colonies, post-colonies, and settler colonies alike, activists often protest against the contemporary displacement of Indigenous, working-class, and disadvantaged communities by connecting that displacement to colonial-era displacements of Indigenous nations and peoples. These connections should not be read metaphorically. The connections that these activists proclaim do not simply suggest that contemporary forms of dispossession and displacement share certain political, economic, social, or spatial similarities with the historic forms of territorial dispossession and displacement that colonial regimes inflicted on Indigenous peoples.<sup>3</sup>

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1 The Settler Colonial City Project is a research collective focused on the collaborative production of knowledge about cities on Turtle Island/Abya Yala/The Americas as spaces of ongoing settler colonialism, Indigenous survivance, and struggles for decolonization. It was co-founded in 2019 by Andrew Herscher and Ana María León. For more information see <https://settlercolonialcityproject.org/>.

2 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1.

3 The contemporaneity of the settler colonial city is the subject of a growing scholarly literature. In the context of Turtle Island/North America, this literature includes Penelope Edmonds, “Unpacking Settler Colonialism’s Urban Strategies: Indigenous Peoples in Victoria, British Columbia, and the Transition to a Settler-Colonial City,” *Urban History Review* 38, no. 2 (2010): 4–20; Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), especially pages 173–176; Natalie J. K. Baloy, “Spectacles and Specters: Settler Colonial Spaces in Vancouver,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 6, no. 3 (2016): 209–234; Lisa Kim Jackson, “The Complications of Colonialism for Gentrification Theory and Marxist Geography,” *Journal of Law and Social Policy* 27, no. 1 (2017): 43–71; Jessi Quizar, “Land of Opportunity: Anti-Black and Settler Logics in the Gentrification of Detroit,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 43, no. 2 (2019): 113–133; Andrew Herscher, “Settler Colonial Urbanism: From Waawiyaaanong to Detroit at Little Caesars Arena,” in *Between Catastrophe and Revolution: Essays in Honor of Mike Davis*, eds. Daniel Bertrand Monk and Michael Sorkin (New York: Urban Research, 2021); David Hugill, *Settler Colonial City: Racism and Inequity in Postwar Minneapolis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021); Margaret Ellis-Young, “Gentrification as (Settler) Colonialism: Moving Beyond Metaphorical Linkages,” *Geography Compass* 16, no. 1 (2022): 1–10; and Andrew Herscher and Ana María León, “At the Border of Decolonization” in *e-flux architecture* (May 2020), <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/at-the-border/325762/at-the-border-of-decolonization> (accessed July 1, 2025).

Rather, these connections point to the enduring status of colonial logics and practices.<sup>4</sup>

Settler colonialism is a particular form of colonialism in which colonists dispossess Indigenous nations and peoples of their homelands, settle on those homelands, and then declare sovereignty over the land that they have claimed and settled. In settler colonies, such as the “United States” or “Canada,” settler colonialism is typically posed as an inaugural moment in the history of a nation-state—a moment that ended with the nation-state’s achievement of sovereignty. But, as activists emphatically remind us, the logics and practices of settler colonialism live on in settler colonies, even as these colonies assume other guises, take on other identities, and narrate other histories. In the well-known words of one of settler colonialism’s principal theorists, Patrick Wolfe, settler colonialism exists “as a structure, not an event.”<sup>5</sup>

By invoking settler colonialism as a “structure,” Wolfe identifies how the systems by means of which settler colonies are organized persist after conquest and live on in law, policy, custom, sociality, and many other forms. These persistences have decisive spatial consequences. For example, the *terra nullius*, or “territory without a master” that settlers discursively impose on Indigenous homelands is an epistemic violence supporting the physical violence of Indigenous dispossession and colonial settlement; this epistemic violence creates a template for declarations of *urbs nullius*, or “city

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4 In colonial regimes such as Latin America, scholars Anibal Quijano and Walter Dignolo have theorized on “the coloniality of power” to discuss the continuity of European colonial power structures beyond formal political control. Quijano argues these colonial power dynamics are embedded in global systems. Aymara and Bolivian scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has pushed against these scholars, pointing to the forms of oppression that mestizo regimes and populations have enacted against Indigenous peoples. While some regions of Latin America have gone through settler-colonial processes, particularly in the Southern Cone, others have experienced more complex colonial patterns that exceed the scope of this essay. See Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” in *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580; Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “Ch’ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 1, (2011): 95–109; Ana María León, “Plains and Pampa: Decolonizing “America,”” *Harvard Design Magazine* (Winter 2021): 48–49.

5 Patrick Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 388.

without a master” that urban regime and elites discursively impose on working-class and disadvantaged communities of color as a means to target their neighborhoods for so-called urban renewal, improvement, or gentrification.

Settler colonial dynamics also reveal how states displace and eliminate vulnerable Indigenous populations in order to produce extractive territories. Monocrop farms, housing developments, tourist resorts, and other settlements can be understood as parts of a genealogy of colonial spatial occupation that sets up extractive relationships with the land and oppressive relationships between settlers and Indigenous people. At their horizon, these extractive relationships are destructive of both land and life. For example, the extreme violence inflicted by Israeli forces in Gaza far exceeds the mandate of national self-defense, in whose name it is carried out, to render Palestinian life a bare life incapable of surviving a colonial order.<sup>6</sup>

Architecture plays important roles in settler colonialism. Architecture directly contributes to the design of settlements themselves and also to the enforcement of colonial violence through walls, partitions, watch towers, and other technologies that facilitate the sorting of human bodies and territories. Moreover, architectural aesthetics are also mobilized to mask the violence enacted against the land and its inhabitants. Be it avant-garde design—as in the Zaha Hadid buildings meant to populate Prospera, a contemporary settler-colonial development in Honduras—or the suburban tropes of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, architecture is here meant for the consumption of the desired settler populations.

The concept of settler colonialism thereby opens to spatial justice by defamiliarizing accepted and authorized relationships between land, property, and sovereignty—relationships that, in colonial contexts, served to dispossess Indigenous people; grant sovereignty over Indigenous homeland, in the form of property, to European settlers; and establish enduring logics

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6 On bare life, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998).

and practices of dispossession. Establishing the historical and political horizons of contemporary struggles over the right to the city—struggles that manifest as resistance to gentrification, urban austerity, and other forms of dispossession—settler colonialism offers a necessary description of the structure with which projects for spatial justice must contend.

Settler colonialism informs the definition and practice of spatial justice by pointing to the enduring afterlives of colonial logics and practices, and the frequent metaphorization of decolonizing gestures. Furthermore, settler colonialism as a framework encourages us to think of the long histories of the landscapes where we live and work, and the active presence of those histories. Thinking with these histories opens up expanded notions of spatial justice that repair damage done to displaced populations, destroyed environments, and the more-than-human beings that live among them. In this context, spatial justice necessarily includes current and future possibilities for reciprocal relationships between the land and its constituents.

Settler colonialism is not a metaphor, and, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have eloquently stated, neither is decolonization.<sup>7</sup> Coming to terms with the contemporaneity of settler colonial dynamics entails understanding that there is no spatial justice without the rematriation of land to Indigeneity. What this might mean and who makes this decision is an ongoing struggle that necessitates the voice and agency of the caretakers of the land. We cannot answer these questions, but we have to ask them—that is the work.

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<sup>7</sup> Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” 1–40.



Figure 1. Dylan Miner, posters at American Indian Center, Chicago, November 2019.

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# **SOLIDARITY**

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# SPATIAL SOLIDARITY

How does solidarity inform our understanding of spatial justice? Can solidarity take on spatial form, and if so, what are the implications? How do spatial forms of solidarity compel us to act and respond to injustice? In thinking about the role of solidarity in relationship to spatial justice, much depends on what we understand by this term, which is open to different and even contradictory definitions. Writing about solidarity, Kurt Bayertz points out how the term has been used in two registers: to describe aspects of human interaction, “a *factual* level of actual common ground,” and to prescribe what those interactions should entail, “a *normative* level of mutual obligations.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, solidarity has been used to describe a feeling that may or may not entail a prescribed action.

When solidarity does not entail any obligation, it implies a performative and ineffective interaction. For instance, in her discussion of co-liberation, Detroit activist Tawana Petty situates solidarity at the bottom of an increasingly active set of actions that challenge anti-Black racism. In this diagram, Petty describes solidarity with the following phrase: “I’m sorry that happened to you. My heart is with you.”<sup>2</sup> In the diagram, solidarity is followed by the terms allyship, co-conspirator, and co-liberation. Each term implies an increasing response to anti-Black racism from individuals who are not Black, culminating with co-liberation which Petty describes thus: “I don’t need Black people to lead me in order to challenge white supremacy (...) It is not possible for me to be fully human as long as Black people are dehumanized.”<sup>3</sup> Thus defined, co-liberation entails a mutual obligation, bringing this term in alignment with Bayertz’s second definition of solidarity, in which common ground (here, anti-racism) entails a normative level of obligation—it compels us to act.

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1 Kurt Bayertz, “Four Uses of ‘Solidarity’” in Kurt Bayertz, ed. *Solidarity* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 2.

2 Tawana Petty, *Shifting the Culture of Anti-racist Organizing*. Presentation slide, unpublished.

3 Tawana Petty, *Shifting the Culture of Anti-racist Organizing*. Presentation slide, unpublished.

This second definition is closer to the use of the term in the context of 1970s politics in Latin America, when solidarity necessarily entailed an obligation to act, to engage and to bring about change. Marxist pedagogue Paulo Freire was an important referent in the way the term was used. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire examines the Hegelian master/slave dialectic and argues that the oppressor is also immersed in a struggle for liberation, as oppression dehumanizes everyone. In order to free themselves, the oppressor must overcome the contradiction through solidarity: “true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these ‘beings for another.’”<sup>4</sup> For Freire, the oppressor’s path towards liberation is to join forces with the oppressed.

This centering of solidarity had an important role in the context of human rights violations during the Chilean dictatorship. Writing in 1975 in response to these aggressions, Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez and his vicars co-authored a pastoral letter in which they underlined the connection between solidarity and justice: “The duty of solidarity is not exhausted with the simple sharing with those in need. The fight for justice is also an authentic form of solidarity love.”<sup>5</sup> In Latin America, the notion of solidarity was held up by political activists, the Catholic left, and exiled communities worldwide in the push against the right-wing dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s. These totalitarian states challenged the notion of action through overpowering demonstrations of violence, imprisoning and disappearing large segments of their population. In response, activists from radical leftist parties and the Catholic Church collaborated across their differences, providing physical and financial support to individuals persecuted by the dictatorship and their families. Here, solidarity implied reclaiming of human bodies from a necropolitical state intent on murdering its population.

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4 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (The Continuum International Publishing Group, 1970), 49.

5 Mons. Raúl Silva Henríquez and vicars, “Carta pastoral de la solidaridad: tuve hambre y me disteis de comer,” in Cristián Precht, *En la huella del Buen Samaritano: breve historia de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (Editorial Tiberiades, 1998), 92–113.

This emphasis on human rights and human bodies is complicated in the context of decolonization, which entails actions reacting against land occupation and the transformation of landscapes into extractive territories. Summing up the ambivalence prompted by the term solidarity, Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández points to another dual nature of the term: its evocation in the context of political projects committed to decolonization, and the scepticism it prompts when used to obscure the dynamics colonization.<sup>6</sup> Once again, we have a dual definition in which the more evocative term can be used as a palliative that forecloses further action. Thinking about solidarity in the context of decolonization, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue “Solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict.”<sup>7</sup> Because these grievances and conflicts are rooted in the occupation of land, thinking about solidarity in spatial terms is key in mobilizing this notion towards projects of decolonization.

Thus, I propose that we consider spatial solidarity as a component of spatial justice. Spatial solidarity understands space as a shared environment that produces duties and obligations; it prompts us to inform ourselves about spatial injustices beyond those that affect us and compels us to act upon these injustices and join the fight towards spatial justice for all.

Speaking up in solidarity with Palestine, Sara Ahmed has argued for “the sound of solidarity” as the sound of refusal, a scream that compels us all to raise in protest.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, spatial solidarity prompts us to join forces across differences in order to fight against all systems of oppression, starting with the most vulnerable groups. In the words of the Combahee River Collective, “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would

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6 Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, “Decolonization and the pedagogy of solidarity,” in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (2012): 41–67.

7 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor” in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (2012), 3.

8 Sara Ahmed, “The Sound of Solidarity” in *feministkilljoys* (July 25, 2025), <https://feministkilljoys.substack.com/p/the-sound-of-solidarity> (accessed August 1, 2025).

necessitate the destruction of all systems of oppression.”<sup>9</sup> When systems of oppression take the form of spatial occupation, spatial solidarity compels us to reject notions of space as an object of consumption, extraction, or commercial exchange, or as a tool of oppression, displacement, or torture. Rather, spatial solidarity opens up space as an opportunity for reciprocity, connection, and collective action.

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<sup>9</sup> Combahee River Collective, *The Combahee River Collective Statement* (April 1977), 7.

# **SOVEREIGNTY**

**ANWAR JABER**  
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# NAVIGATING PALESTINIAN SOVEREIGNTY

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS OF A PALESTINIAN SCHOLAR WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

The concept of sovereignty frequently appears in the discussions of the Palestinian context, and its scope expands and shrinks based on geopolitical conditions and the disciplines that investigate it. For this piece, I will briefly examine three different forms of sovereignty as they relate to Palestine, territory, and my personal experience. These forms are state sovereignty, popular sovereignty, and indigenous sovereignty. State sovereignty is essentially the concept that the state is the supreme power.<sup>1</sup> A state is also defined as a sovereign entity that extends its sovereignty over a defined territory,<sup>2</sup> and one whose sovereignty must be recognized by other states.<sup>3</sup> State sovereignty is thus tied to territorial control, which manifests in different ways through policing and military, and through spatial practices in the form of constructing state institutions and other state-affiliated projects, such as memorials, monuments, and checkpoints on national borders, among many others.<sup>4</sup> That is, states use architecture to claim a territory as their own, manifesting and displaying their sovereignty to other states and their nations.<sup>5</sup>

During my PhD research, I studied Palestinian statehood by examining state institutions in the city of Ramallah, where architecture became a tool for building a Palestinian state

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1 Stuart Hall, "The State in Question," *In The Idea of the Modern State*, ed. Gregor McLennan, David Held, and Stuart Hall (Open University Press, 1984), 1-28.

2 Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of a Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Polity Press, 1985).

3 Colin Flint and Peter Taylor, *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality*, 5th ed (Prentice-Hall, 2007).

4 Göran Therborn, *Cities of Power : The Urban, The National, The Popular, The Global* (Verso, 2019); Lawrence Vale, *Architecture, Power and National Identity* (Yale University Press, 1992).

5 Therborn, *Cities of Power* ; Lawrence Vale, *Architecture, Power and National Identity*.

through the construction of physical institutions in the city.<sup>6</sup> For Palestinians, however, state sovereignty is a big question in the face of occupation and the absence of an internationally recognized state. The details of why this is the case are beyond the scope of this piece, but it is sufficient to say that the West Bank (where Palestinians are supposed to have some sort of sovereignty and control) is geopolitically divided into areas A, B and C (figure 1). Area A consists of the large Palestinian urban centres and is under Palestinian civil and military control, while Area C is under complete Israeli civil and military control, and Area B is under Palestinian civil control, but Israeli military control.

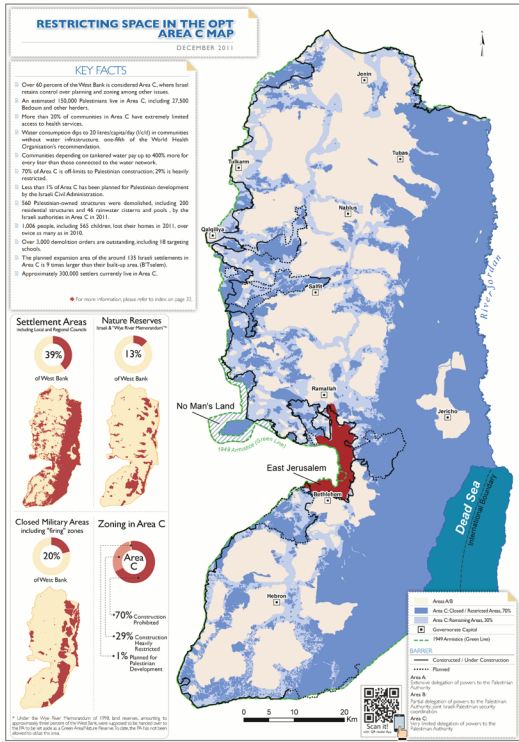


Figure 1: Geopolitical division of the West Bank (OCHA, 2011)

6 Anwar Jaber, "The Paradox of Ramallah: An Investigation into Palestine's Political and National Architecture and Urban Topography Since 1995." PhD Dissertation (University of Cambridge, 2019); Anwar Jaber, "Hiding Behind Colonial Roots: Investigating the Reconstruction of the Palestinian Presidential Headquarters (the Muqata'a) in Ramallah," in *Architectures of Hiding: Crafting Concealment | Omission | Deception | Erasure | Silence*, ed. Rana Abughannam, Emelie Desrochers-Turgeon, Pallavi Swaranjali, and Federica Goffi (Routledge, 2024), 153–64

The Oslo Accords in the early 1990s stipulated these divisions with the hopes that at some point, there would be negotiations to establish a Palestinian state.<sup>7</sup> In reality, however, the peace agreement failed. In addition, Area C, constituting over 70% of the West Bank, is where most illegal Israeli settlements are located. This geopolitical division also comes with a matrix of colonial Israeli control and oppression strategies, shaped in different forms. For example, the Israeli army regularly storms Palestinian communities. It also prohibits Palestinian urban expansion, constructs Israeli checkpoints, builds roads that ignore Palestinian communities and establishes an ID-card system that curtails Palestinian mobility, making them suffer from complications and uncertainty in their daily life.<sup>8</sup>

In such a context, Palestinians, including myself, practice different forms of sovereignty – something that I only realized as I was writing this text. In recent literature, scholars have tried to frame variations of sovereignty in relation to Palestine. For example, Amahl Bishara defines ‘popular sovereignty’ as the “insistent confrontation or quiet acts of caring for community in the face of abandonment. These emergent forms of popular sovereignty challenge the legitimacy of state authorities, create new forms of collectivity, and forge new ideas of how power should function, even though they have not ultimately restructured state power.”<sup>9</sup> Among the examples she gives are hunger strikes of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, street protests, cross-border marches to Palestine and agricultural practices by villagers in

7 Btselem, “What Is Area C?” 2014, [http://www.btselem.org/separation\\_barrier](http://www.btselem.org/separation_barrier); Avi Shlaim, “The Rise and Fall of the Oslo Peace Process,” in *International Relations of the Middle East*, ed. Louise Fawcett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 241–61; Avi Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, Revisions, Refutations* (Verso, 2010).

8 Ariel Handel, “Where, Where to, and When in the Occupied Territories: An Introduction to the Geography of Disaster.” In *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, eds. Adi Ophir, Givoni Michal, and Sari Hanafi (Zone Books, 2009), 179–222; Helga Tawil-Souri, “Qalandia Checkpoint: The Historical Geography of a Non-Place,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 42, Summer (2010): 26–48; Wendy Pullan, “Conflict’s Tools. Borders, Boundaries and Mobility in Jerusalem’s Spatial Structures,” *Mobilities* 8, no. 1 (2013): 125–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2012.750040>; Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land* (Verso, 2007).

9 Amahl Bishara, “Sovereignty and Popular Sovereignty for Palestinians and Beyond,” *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no.3 (2017): 349–58, <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.3.04>.

refugee camps facing the occupation. In all of these, there is a statement to be made by Palestinians that they are not only resisting the occupation but also priding themselves on their *Sumud* (Arabic for steadfastness), claiming their connection to the land through specific practices through their bodies on the land of Palestine. The body-land connection also emerges when viewed through the lens of Indigeneity, where the work of Jamal Nabulsi proves helpful. Nabulsi defines Palestinian Indigeneity as “the embodiment of the land of Palestine,”<sup>10</sup> and Palestinian Indigenous sovereignty as the “embodied claim” to this land both through physical presence and through cultural practices in exile. While state sovereignty is defined as being bounded by a specific space (i.e. through the creation of national borders and a specific square area),<sup>11</sup> I can make the argument that popular and Indigenous sovereignties in Palestine come with more flexibility. This is inspired by the work of Naama Blatman-Thomas and Libby Porter, who theorized the settler-colonial city and argued that there is a difference between indigenous and non-indigenous references to the land, where indigenous references are based on a relationship to the land and are thus more cultural.<sup>12</sup> Based on that, it is fair to say that both popular and Indigenous Palestinian sovereignties, in their claims to the land and challenge of the occupation, are also relational, and that relationship is built on culture, tradition and history deeply rooted in the land of Palestine.

While the above may benefit from more scholarly grounding, I cannot help but think about my own lived experience now. Reflecting on my life growing up as a Palestinian in the land of Palestine and now living abroad, I find myself claiming my Palestinian sovereignty in multiple ways, from pursuing a career in Palestinian urbanism and architecture (with all the risks that come with it!) to navigating personal life decisions.

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10 Jamal Nabulsi. “Reclaiming Palestinian Indigenous Sovereignty.” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 52, no. 2 (2023): 32

11 Flint and Peter Taylor, *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality*, 127.

12 Naama Blatman-Thomas and Libby Porter, “Placing Property: Theorizing the Urban from Settler Colonial Cities.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 43, no. 1 (2019): 30–45, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12666>.

An example of the latter is when I was pregnant during my PhD studies in the UK, where I had to travel to Jerusalem to give birth to my son to abide by the Israeli laws that stipulated that, for my son to get his Israeli residency, as I do, he had to be born in Jerusalem. For Palestinians of East Jerusalem, like myself and my family, who do not have Israeli or Palestinian passports and are treated as ‘permanent residents of the state of Israel’; the Israeli residency in Jerusalem is the only document that allows us to settle in the land of Palestine, and we don’t have any citizenship, making us essentially stateless. I grew up with the mindset that losing this status would be an existential crisis, as it would mean having no country to live in, and thus, this status must be protected and kept at all costs. Giving birth in the UK was thus not an option at all, as that would have meant that my son would have lost his residency in Jerusalem, his homeland. There was no way I could let him lose the only status and paperwork that, at that time, gave him the right to visit and settle in his homeland.

Leaving for my postgraduate studies and later immigrating to Canada may have now jeopardized this status. But now when I look back, it does not make me any less Palestinian. I find myself now, abroad and away from Israeli daily oppression, connecting more to Palestine than ever before, claiming and practicing my own sovereignty through my academic career and by celebrating Palestinian traditions, including food and arts. I am now relearning the traditional Palestinian embroidery known as *tatreez*, famous for its land-inspired motifs and patterns (figure 2). *Tatreez* is especially famous for being embroidered on Palestinian women’s traditional dresses (*thobes*), transforming their bodies into a claim to the Palestinian land and even as an act of resistance.<sup>13</sup> As an Indigenous person from Palestine living now on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples, I find a deep connection with

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13 Rachel Dedman, “The Politicisation of Palestinian Embroidery Since 1948.” In *Dangerous Bodies: New Global Perspectives on Fashion and Transgression*, eds. Royce Mahawatte and Jacki Willson (Springer International Publishing, 2023): 97-116, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06208-76>.

the Indigenous peoples here, especially now in times of war and despair, where this connection becomes even more unique and opens a whole new world of opportunities for learning, collaboration, reflection, and, hopefully, healing.



Figure 2: My attempts to reconnect with traditional Palestinian cross-stitched embroidery (Tatreez). Below is a canvas for experimenting with Palestinian motifs that are all inspired by the land, and above are Tatreez bookmarks that I made using these motifs in collaboration with Learn Palestine initiative (@learn\_palestine on Instagram) to raise funds to help Palestinian kids get medical aid. (author)

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# SPATIAL AGENCY

**REZA NIK**

SHEEEP / BAAA! / SHEEEP*school* / UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

# IT'S THE QUESTIONS (HUH) AND WE'RE SHOUTING IT OUT

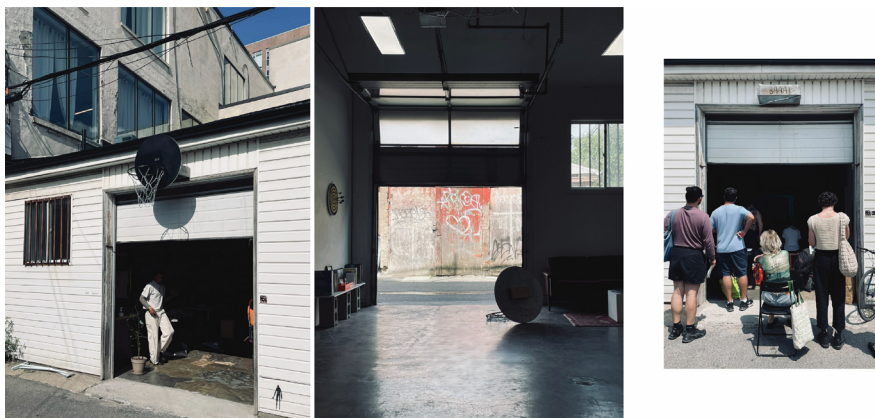


Figure 1: BAAA! (Back Alley for Art & Architecture)

Are questions all we have left?

What are we to do? Can you speak about it? What are you feeling? What are you consuming? Are your colleagues .....? Do you have any allies or comrades you can confide in? at work? at home? at school? How about your neighbours? How about .....?

Where do you feel like you can be yourself?

Can you speak your mind and speak for others who can't speak for themselves? When are you really yourself? Are you even yourself? Are you ever yourself? Where can you be yourself? Can you imagine it? What do the walls look like? Is there a texture you can think of? Can you feel the rugs under your feet? How about the tiles? Are there tiles? Is there a view that grabs your heart? Is there a window? How big is it? How many others are around? How many others can you have around? Is it an enclosed space? Have you been able to invite others into this space? Can you be honest with yourself and others in this space? Are you able to make choices freely? Can you share your thoughts without the fear of being judged?



Figure 2: Poetry Night w/ Sam Sabzevari

Are you being judged?

Are you afraid? Who is afraid?  
What are you afraid of?

Are you being surveilled? Are you being intimidated? Do they harass you? Have they written their “*letters*”? Have you spoken to anyone about it? Have you exposed them? Do you care? Should you care? Do we care?

Who cares?

Why is everything so transactional? Where can we find our people - our crew? Who’s got our back? Who’s got your back? We navigate through all these systems hoping that someone in power would, but do they really? What happens when all our spaces are shut down? Where do we gather? Should we find a back alley to hang out in? Will there be any space for us to have dialogue without repercussions? Do we have to make our own? Maybe? Should we?

Freedom of speech, *schpeeeeschhhh*? Where.....? Are they disappearing? Did they ever exist? Have they already disappeared? What does freedom of speech really mean anymore?



Figure 3: Library at BAAA!

Are we ever free? Who's not free? Can we be free  
without .....?

Yeah I know, it's the questions (huh) - life is so expensive....  
rent, food, groceries, gas..... How can we survive? What if  
they don't renew our contracts? What if they simply choose  
the path of least resistance?

What is resistance?

Who can resist? Who can defend themselves?

Can you defend *yourself*?

Can you resist those who say they are defending  
themselves?

What does resistance look like to you?  
maybe.....

**make** [ ]

We can always – *make space* – collectively – whenever,  
wherever, however

A space where we have agency

Spatial agency gives us power

Spatial agency is power

even when you feel that you've got nothing left but  
questions

*make space*

*hold space*

*offer space*

*BAAA! Is the Back Alley for Art & Architecture located off a laneway in an old loading dock of a former clock factory in Toronto, Canada. It was founded in 2023 with the intention of providing accessible physical space for values-aligned community gatherings. It is also the home of SHEEEPstudio & SHEEEPschool, and powered by SHEEEP ~ a collective at times, stewarded by the community and funded independently. We've held dozens of gatherings and workshops from this space led by emerging artists, educators, thinkers, poets, architects and makers - non-transactional in nature with the intention of following in the footsteps of radical pedagogical approaches and community builders. This piece was informed and inspired by BAAA! and all the community members who have been involved in bringing this vision to life.*

*In solidarity,*

*Palestine will be free.*

# **SURREAL LANDSCAPES**

**YARA SHARIF**

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

# CHECKPOINT ROSE AND THE LOST LANDSCAPE OF GAZA

I didn't know where I was heading with these diaries, nor how they would conclude, until very recently, when I started to feel the loss and grief of forgetting what my Palestine looks like. I started to realize how quickly our Palestinian world shrinks, while that of the Israelis expands.

With my heart burdened by the profound bitterness of losing my family and home in Gaza, I am left with an immense void, an absent landscape that unsettles both my inner and outer worlds. I find myself unable, for now, to narrate the city, the home, or the deeply personal spaces that once anchored my sense of being. My mental map is distorted. Until I am able to speak about Gaza again, my words must take a different path.

In the meantime, I turn to the West Bank, another part of Palestine, where I grew up.

I turn to the journeys I have taken and continue to take across a fractured geography. These journeys, while grounded in my own personal narratives, are inescapably shaped by the broader political condition: a terrain where fragmentation, temporal rupture, and immobility have defined who we are and how we navigate space. These are journeys that attempt to traverse physical distance through acts of survival, and at times also through irony and subversion; journeys that seek to mark and hold onto a surreal and shifting landscape. These journeys - or diaries - not only serve as tools to measure my personal freedom, but also as reflections of our collective entrapment. As the genocide and spaciocide in Gaza unfold before our eyes, I hope these journeys—partial and fragmentary as they are—serve to capture facets of my Palestine. More than mere narratives, I envision them as archival materials that contribute to mapping and understanding the Palestine we inhabit today. I further hope these accounts function as a compass to resist and challenge the imposed fragmentation enforced by settler-colonial power structures, enabling my mental and spatial agency to confront and contest an exhausting and fractured physical landscape.

## **CHECKPOINT ROSE**

### **2001**

“Just bring a plastic bag and I’ll let you in to Jerusalem.”

It all really started there.

I was finally getting ready to celebrate my graduation from Birzeit. Five exhausting years were over. Dalia, my close friend, had a brilliant plan:

“Come with me to Jerusalem for my eye check. You can get your makeup done there by my favourite artist. We’ll make a day of it.”

Dalia is known as the beauty expert in my friend’s circle, with a keen eye for makeup, so I can’t trust anyone but her.

Our ultimate destination was St John Eye Hospital, the specialist centre in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem. This is a lifeline for Palestinians with eye injuries or chronic conditions. But getting there isn’t simple. Jerusalem has been off-limits for us West Bank Palestinians for years.

To pass, you either need a permit. Or luck, and someone willing to look the other way.

Sadly, in Palestine, injuries from bullets, beating and harsh conditions are part of daily life — and yet, eye care is very much a luxury available only to a few.

“Jerusalem? That mystical place beyond the wall? The city of checkpoints, settlements, police, sirens, soldiers, permits, and impossible gates?” I asked.

“No, Yara, the city of history, the Dome of the Rock, the churches, the market, the old city, and the beautiful monuments. Can you be a bit imaginative, please?”

“Dalia, how do you think I’m going to get into Jerusalem? I don’t have a permit. I can’t disguise myself as anything. I ran out of ideas, and I’m definitely not pretending to be that cousin of yours who suddenly appears with a mysterious limp and a dramatic backstory. I’m not willing to jump the wall either, like last time we went to Al Ram. I still feel the bruises from the rusted nails and that broken ladder. It’s impossible.”

The geography of Jerusalem’s neighbourhoods, especially near Ramallah, is complex, with parts of the area inside the Apartheid wall but outside the Israeli municipality. These spilling dead zones, or in-between spaces, have been used by Palestinians as ‘breathing’ spaces to get to the other side.

Keeping these points invisible has given them power — and hence I do not wish to reveal their names, to keep them accessible.

“Don’t worry, this is a VIP route. No jumping, no running, no disguise,” Dalia replied with confidence. “Just plastic bags. Lots of them. Good quality ones. And maybe a towel and some wet wipes. And maybe a spare outfit,” she added with a cheeky smile.

“Wow, Dalia, it feels like I’m going for an operation. You’re off to the hospital, not me.”

“Trust me,” she said. “Just wear comfy shoes and meet me at the vegetable market, 7 a.m.”

“You just said we don’t need to run. Why that early?”

I should have known better. Dalia always had that look in her eye; the one that meant either a brilliant idea or a regrettable one.

I’m obviously insane to listen. Because by 7:30 a.m., we are both jumping out of the car by the Apartheid wall. The air is

thick with dust, traffic fumes, commuters, and the chaotic pulse of people desperate to get to Jerusalem or Ramallah—students, workers, everyone piled up to get there in time.

We walked down a grim, blocked road, the kind of informal road Google Maps would not acknowledge. Well, Google refuses to acknowledge the whole of Palestine, so maybe ignore this comment.

We walked toward what can only be described as a giant pipe.

Yes, it was exactly what you're imagining: a concrete tunnel yawning wide, surrounded by mounds of blue plastic bags scattered around like sad balloons after a very bad party.

A strong smell, people wiping their faces as they exited the 'express tunnel', breathing with relief.

"Dalia. Please. It's my graduation day. You promised a makeup artist. Is this... the plan?" I pointed at the tube.

She just smiled with confidence.

"Trust me."

I trust her.

"All you need now," Dalia said, opening her handbag with pride, "is to wear your plastic bag."

I stared.

"To wear it?"

"Not like a dress," she nodded. "Just the lower part, silly — so your feet don't drown in... you know."

I was furious with Dalia.

I'm meant to spend a quality, relaxing day getting myself ready for my graduation, with a special makeup artist waiting for me in Jerusalem. What do I get? A plastic bag outfit!

"Listen Yara, it's your call. There's a pipe. No one checks it. And it can get you to Jerusalem. If you're not happy, you can go back."

"A muddy tunnel, Dalia."

Tension started to escalate. I really thought she was joking until she started wrapping herself with plastic. We got in and started walking toward the dark tunnel with its damp and fermented odour.

Yes, turns out we were inside a sewage pipe. Apparently, I was smuggling myself into Jerusalem... as a pile of shit, to put on some makeup for my graduation. A wise, elegant decision, no doubt!

And even more ironic, Dalia, who is just recovering from eye surgery that requires a sterile environment, rest, and zero dust, exposes herself to dirt and sewage so she can make it to her doctor's appointment for a checkup.

Inside the tunnel, people move with care. A man holding a newborn in a beautifully woven white blanket, ducking into the pipe like it was the most normal thing in the world. A teenager followed behind, holding a plastic bag stuffed with clothes and tied with shoelaces.

Everyone seemed to be going somewhere important — school outfits, suits, and dresses rushing to be on time. Yes, there were other nutters — not only me and Dalia. So I was a bit more relaxed.

I caught my reflection in the muddy sewage. The transformation was complete: plastic bag tied with a hair tie and taped all the way up to my waist. I had brought the big black kitchen bags just in case, so I didn't shy away from wearing them. I didn't want to ruin my graduation outfit, which was neatly packed for my return journey to Birzeit. Well, in this occasion, fashion must survive the occupation — even if I don't.

“Dalia, are we insane?” I asked as we crouched into the tunnel, and with every step, I thought to myself: it's okay Yara, after all, you are lucky to be celebrating something.

“Dalia, did I ever tell you that I'm pretty sure I'll never get married, or wear a special white dress?” I paused. “So let today be a special day to remember. We graduate once, you know.”

Inside, the smell hit us so hard we felt doped. It smelled like sewage mixed with forgotten fish stew.

We walked slowly to avoid hidden lumps of stone under our feet. The whole journey was slippery — especially with the plastic bags. A few young creative faces had made a business out of this exciting route; they were selling wet wipes for those who couldn't tolerate the splashes of... liquid... on their faces. Silence was sacred. Everyone was focused. At one point, I slipped and grabbed Dalia's shoulder.

“Careful,” she whispered. “Don't fall. That's not mud.”

“Oh really,” I answered with anger.

“And no ambulance can pick you up here,” Dalia continued with confidence. “Remember, we are in no man's land. The Palestinian ambulance can't get here, and if we ever encounter an Israeli car, it would be the police jeep. So please don't fall down.”

Very reassuring indeed.

A few meters later—light—and we found ourselves at the other end of the Apartheid wall, heading toward Shuafat in the heart of Jerusalem. No soldiers, no ambulance, no jeeps. Just the ordinary buzz of vendors selling clothes, falafel, and Jerusalem kaek, the iconic sesame bread you can smell before you see.

“Oh, no zaatar in the bread, please,” Dalia insisted. “Let’s keep our teeth clean for the evening party, in case we don’t get to freshen up.”

Dalia and her thoughtful gesture. Of all things, that’s what really worried her. Not the tunnel, the sewage, or the mysterious return journey.

At least she was certain we would make it back to the party.

I always admired her optimism, even with sewage.

“See? Told you. Welcome to the land of makeup artists, kaek, and intensity,” Dalia clapped her hands.

I do not need to explain the return journey with Dalia having to recover from pupil dilation. We calculated everything and forgot that she would be half unsighted post-hospital visit while navigating her way back through sewage. No. I’ll leave the return to your imagination.

Eventually, we made it to the graduation in time. I had some sort of makeup on—half melted with the heat—giving me that look of a witch.

I couldn’t get myself to fulfil my mother’s dream of wearing a dress—my sacred outfits that would only appear once a year. There was no time to change. So I kept whatever I had on in Jerusalem all the way back through the mud and the mess. Luckily, all was hidden under my graduation gown. At the end of the ceremony, mum comes to greet me and from a distance

she nods—as her usual self—

“Your makeup is not fit for such a special occasion. All the way to Jerusalem for this!”

As she hugged me, she leaned in and whispered:

“What perfume are you wearing? Smells... funny.”

I smiled.

“I can’t remember. Chanel No. 2.”

“Is this some kind of a joke?”

“Sorry Mum, yes—was joking. This is actually called Checkpoint Rose.”



Figure 1: Walking through the Wall. The top 3 are screenshots from Khaled Jarrar's film *Infiltrators* (Jarrar, 2012); the bottom is Dalia at the entrance of the sewage pipe (image courtesy of Dalia Hatuqa)



# TOPOGRAPHY

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# CONTOURS OF POWER AND RESILIENCE

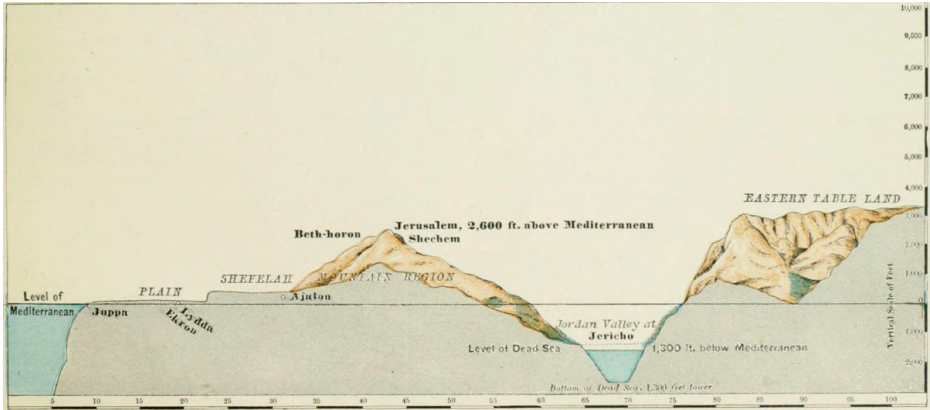


Figure 1: Section of Palestine from East to West. The Rand McNally Bible Atlas (1881)

Topography refers to the arrangement of natural and human-made features on the Earth's surface. This includes landforms such as mountains, valleys, hills, and plains, as well as bodies of water, roads, and communities. Traditionally mapped through elevation lines or relief shading, topography helps describe both the shape and character of a landscape.

More than just a neutral descriptor, topography influences how water flows, where people settle, how vegetation develops, and how infrastructure is constructed. It is both a physical reality and a cultural construct—shaped by history, politics, and land use patterns. In fields like environmental planning, agriculture, and landscape architecture, topography is fundamental to planning and decision-making.

In the Levant, especially in Palestine and across the Eastern Mediterranean, topography is not just physical—it is political, ecological, and cultural. It is a medium through which histories are inscribed, contested, and sustained. It structures who has access to water, arable land, mobility, and power. It embodies a deeper, multilayered significance tied to ongoing struggles for equality, freedom, and spatial justice.

In this region, topography significantly influences ecological and human patterns through sectional relationships. Northwest-facing slopes tend to be greener and wetter, supporting vegetation because of higher rainfall and moisture retention. Conversely, south- and east-facing slopes, exposed to harsher sunlight and drier conditions, are usually more arid, with more drought-resistant vegetation and less intensive agricultural practices.

These microclimates, shaped by elevation, orientation, slope, and aspect, define where terraces are built, where villages are constructed, and where life can be coaxed from stone and soil. Such differences are not merely geographic—they form a quiet, yet powerful, architecture of advantage and vulnerability.



Figure 2: Bayt Duquq: Showing agricultural terraces, villages, the separation wall, and illegal settlements – Occupied West Bank Palestine: Google Earth (2024)

Central to the understanding of topography in the region is the tradition of landscape terracing, a millennia-old agricultural practice that exemplifies the intimate relationship between human culture and physical geography. Terracing, particularly for cultivating olive groves, fruit trees, and grape vineyards, involves an intricate system of stone retaining walls meticulously constructed along slopes. These terraces play vital ecological functions: they prevent erosion, improve soil moisture, and assist in water management essential for agriculture in semi-arid climates. Historically, such anthropogenic modifications to the land have created sustainable and resilient landscapes capable of supporting communities across generations. Without ongoing human maintenance or if abandoned or destroyed, these relationships collapse, leading to significant socio-ecological and environmental degradation.<sup>1</sup>

The cultural significance of terraces in the region is even more undeniable. Beyond agricultural productivity, these topographic terraces symbolize Palestinian identity, heritage, and resistance. In the village of Battir, located near Bethlehem, ancient terracing and irrigation practices date back 4,000 years. These terraces and their associated Roman-era water systems persist as active cultural landscapes that embody nonviolent resistance against Israeli occupation. By maintaining these terraces, the community asserts its historical claim to the land and demonstrates resilience in the face of ongoing violence and displacement. Battir's terraces were recognized by UNESCO in 2014 as a World Heritage Site.<sup>2</sup>

Even more significant sectional relationships arise when mountains, valleys, and plains are considered in conjunction with regional economies, infrastructural routes, irrigation systems, urban centres, and nodes of exchange. Therefore, topography can also act as a tool of injustice and segregation. Control over elevated areas enables powerful entities to dominate upstream water sources, establish military outposts

1 J. R. McNeill, *The Mountains of the Mediterranean World: An Environmental History*. Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

2 Hubert Murray, "Landscape as Resistance in the West Bank," *Places Journal*, June 2021, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.22269/210629>.

or illegal settlements, build roads that divide communities, and erect walls that separate lives, livelihoods, families, and movement. In this way, topography can determine the accessibility and distribution of resources, reinforcing systemic inequalities and spatial disparities exclusion.

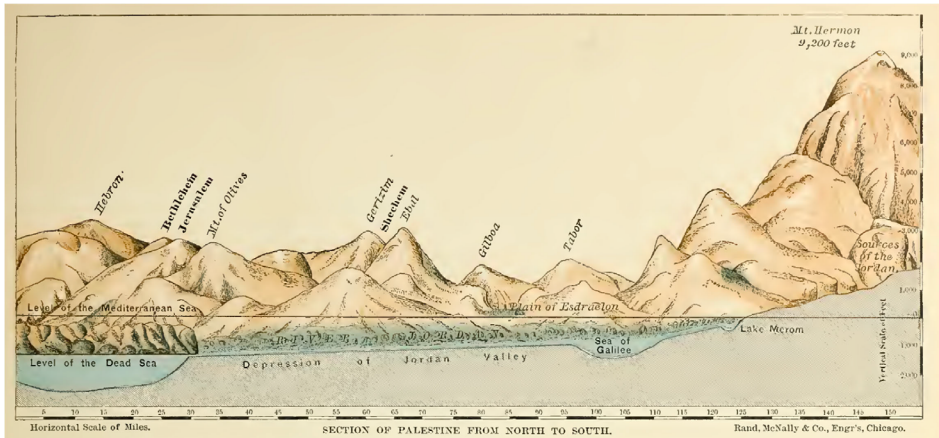


Figure 3: Section of Palestine from North to South. The Rand McNally Bible Atlas (1881)

From a spatial justice perspective, understanding and leveraging topography also provides opportunities to promote resilient regional dynamics. By tapping into natural features like crestlines for rainwater collection, soil management, composting, climate-responsive agriculture, and renewable energy production, a new form of ecologically sustainable urbanisation emerges.

Designing with topographic intent can convert waste into fertile soil, facilitate water collection, and demonstrate how gravity and wastewater management show how built forms can closely blend with landscape conditions. This integrated approach treats the terrain as a form of landscape infrastructure, linking topographic urban morphologies in ways that are more responsive to environmental conditions, from micro-scale architectural details to system-scale collection and management.

The vision that emerges from catalyzing topography in constructive ways offers a framework for (re)building infrastructure that promotes decentralization and self-reliance, providing a holistic understanding of landscape that can sustainably anchor communities in place. In the context of Palestine, topography goes beyond mere physical description, embodying histories of resilience, cultural identity, ecological sustainability, and ongoing struggles for justice.

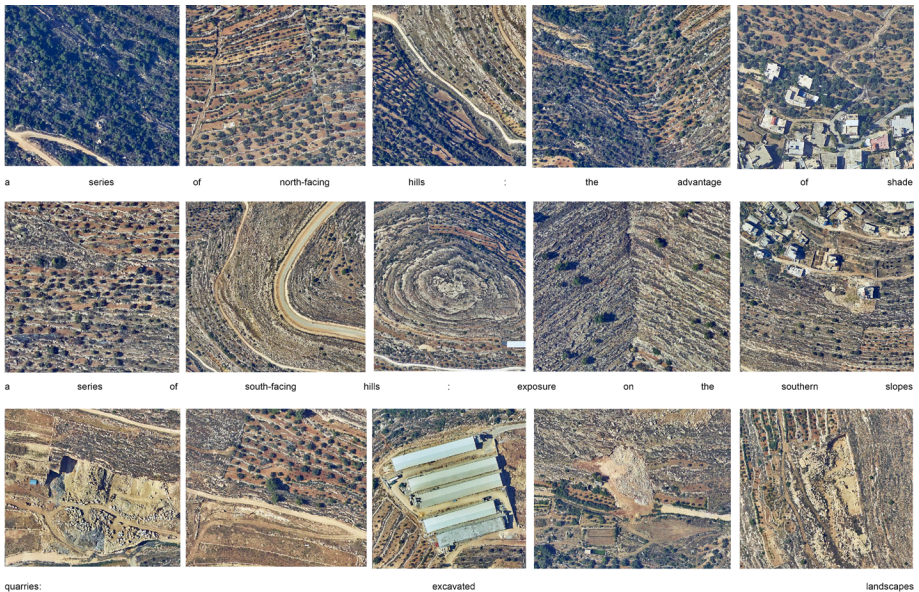


Figure 4: Micro-Climate of Topographic Variation – Source: Allam, Nguyen, Li: KU Leuven Master of Science in Human Settlements, Master of Science in urbanism, landscape and planning: (2025)

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# **URBAN RENEWAL**

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Urban renewal has a reverse image problem. After all, cities are fun, and renewal sounds like part of a wellness practice. But its history is much darker. In the United States, “urban renewal agencies in many cities demolished whole communities inhabited by low income [and racialized] people in order to provide land for the private development of office buildings, sports arenas, hotels, trade centers, and high income luxury dwellings.”<sup>1</sup> (Note that social housing did not make that list.) Urban renewal earned this reputation through the outcomes of a set of U.S. federal policies within the Housing Act of 1949, which was extended and renamed as “urban renewal” in the 1954 revision. Title I in the Act offered funding to cities to reduce the cost of land acquisition and clearance, to attract private redevelopment. This program mobilized a set of long-developing ideologies around housing, cities, race, and property ownership. Scholars have noted that its rough storyline repeated in other places along similar lines (Canada, UK, Germany).<sup>2</sup>

The ideologies behind urban renewal are key to understanding it.<sup>3</sup> It required the normalization of “slum” clearance, which has two parts. One was simple: that erasing the past is not just normal, but healthy. Old neighborhoods with dense housing were thought to foster disease and illness, and required demolition to be anything else.<sup>4</sup> Lester Beall’s posters for the United States Housing Authority (Figure 1), make the case plainly with bold graphics crossing out the old housing to replace it with modern, healthier housing. But deeper than this, I would argue, is a settler colonial project which identified property ownership as sacrosanct and a key

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1 Marc A. Weiss, “The Origins and Legacy of Urban Renewal,” in *Urban and Regional Planning in an Age of Austerity*, ed. Pierre Clavel, John Forester, and William W. Goldsmith (Pergamon Press, 1980).

2 Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin*, Historical Studies of Urban America (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

3 Samuel Zipp, “The Roots and Routes of Urban Renewal,” *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 3 (2013): 366–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144212467306>. Jon Teaford, “Jon Teaford’s Response to ‘The Roots and Routes of Urban Renewal,’” *Journal of Urban History* 40, no. 4 (2014): 636–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144214524351>.

4 Zipp did not discuss settler colonialism, or property rights and financialization that I will discuss below, as I propose.

aspect of power, as well as a racial hierarchy of who was allowed to wield such power; of particular importance was the right to make money through land ownership. The power of the state was applied through eminent domain in order to enact redevelopment. The economic condition of ‘blight,’ as distinct from the social condition of ‘slum,’ focused on the property owners’ rights, and their loss in value, which could be married with the social concerns of ‘slums’ to broaden support for what was essentially an effort to maintain property owners’ wealth.

Figure 1. Poster designed by Lester Beall for the United States Housing Authority that visualizes the project of slum clearance with an “X” drawn across older housing and the hand drawing it illustrating the healthful new housing envisioned to replace it. Lester Beall and United States Housing Authority, 1941. Credit: Lester Beall and United States Housing Authority, 1941.



Importantly, urban renewal drew on the visions of European modernist architects of the early decades of the twentieth century that imagined cities of ample light, air, and green space to support the health of residents, that were full of new towers and modern conveniences and technologies of transportation, efficiently operated for residents’ enjoyment. It especially relied on a vision of modernist housing that imagined healthful dwellings for the working class. By including housing in the vision, it created a bigger tent for housing reformers to

join in efforts to advocate for new policies and expanded state powers of eminent domain.<sup>5</sup> This constructed, positive vision that fit the desires and solved the anxieties of politicians, business leaders, and elites gave them a means to take homes away from people who were poor. It was an excuse to use the expanded powers of eminent domain in ways that had little to do with benefiting the evicted residents and much more to do with clearing a path for land uses that private real estate developers believed would be most profitable.

Urban renewal policies were driven by economic interests, in that they expanded state powers of eminent domain and enabled forms of financialization. For example, around the same time, financial regulations in the U.S. changed to allow life insurance companies to invest their capital in real estate and development, creating a new cache of capital that could be put to redevelopment work. The emphasis on economic interests helps to explain one of the more well-known aspects of urban renewal's history: the gulf between what was promised and what was delivered, all of which was achieved through the expansion of eminent domain. Modern housing for all, particularly for low-income residents, was promised; hotels and conference centres and office buildings were what were built. Activists who fought these policies saw this so clearly that they began referring to it as "Negro removal" in recognition of the racial disparities as Black neighborhoods were demolished to make way for higher-income white residents or largely white-collar office workers in new glass towers. Eminent domain needed little justification for the public good under the rules of urban renewal.

To achieve its ends, urban renewal utilized the skills of architects and designers to promote an ideology and vision of the future that effectively erased the voices of residents and community connections to the past, centralized power in the private market, and marginalized and dehumanized people without power or money. It strengthened and consolidated the

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<sup>5</sup> Lawrence J. Vale, "Public Housing in the United States: Neighborhood Renewal and the Poor," in *Policy, Planning, and People* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 285–306. See especially his discussion here and elsewhere on public housing's role in urban renewal.

powers of the state (eminent domain, slum clearance funding) to enable private real estate interests to make profit with little concern for any public benefit. Understanding these links is key to advancing spatial justice.

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# UTOPIA

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WAI ARCHITECTURE THINK TANK

# UTOPIAN COUNTERCARTOGRAPHY



Figure 1. WAI Architecture Think Tank, *Cities of the Avant-Garde* [A chronolandscape displays 120 Years of Ideal urban thinking], 2008–2023.

We dreamed of utopia and woke up screaming.<sup>1</sup> Nearly all creators of Utopia have resembled the man who has toothache, and therefore thinks happiness consists in not having toothache.<sup>2</sup> Utopia is a state not an artist's colony.<sup>3</sup> Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias

1 Roberto Bolaño, "Déjenlo todo, nuevamente. Primer Manifiesto Infrarrealista," in *Nada utópico nos es ajeno [Manifiestos Infrarrealistas]*, (tsunum, 2013), 62. Translation by the authors.

2 George Orwell, "Can Socialists Be Happy?" in *All Art is Propaganda: Critical Essays*, ed. George Packer (Harcourt, 2008), 209.

3 Rem Koolhaas, "Utopia Station: Around Every Utopia, a garland of barber wired. But every architect carries the Utopian gene..." *Content*, ed. Rem Koolhaas, (Taschen, 2002), 393.

are fundamentally unreal spaces.<sup>4</sup> Ambiguity is the figurative appearance of the dialectic, the law of the dialectic at a standstill. This standstill is Utopia, and the dialectical image therefore a dream-image.<sup>5</sup> Utopia is the phase of theoretical construction, but it is absolutely indissociable from the other planes and can only exist as part of dialectical utopia. It is only through dialectical utopia that we can elaborate, outside and within the present system, an urban thought.<sup>6</sup> In modern times the basic idea of the constructability of the ideal world means that Utopia must be populated with ideal beings who have rid themselves of their faults.<sup>7</sup>

At the very beginning Thomas More designated utopia as a place, an island in the distant South Seas.<sup>8</sup> He called it “Utopia,” a Greek word which means “there is no such place.”<sup>9</sup> It must be admitted, however, that life in More’s Utopia, as in most others, would be intolerably dull. Diversity is essential to happiness, and in Utopia there is hardly any. This is a defect of all planned social systems, actual as well as imaginary.<sup>10</sup> Utopia is thus by definition an amateur activity in which personal opinions take the place of mechanical contraptions and the mind takes its satisfaction in the sheer operations of putting together new models of this or that perfect society.<sup>11</sup> Utopias are much the same as possibilities; that a possibility is not a reality means nothing more than that the circumstances in

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4 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (October 1984) 46–49, originally published as “Des Espace Autres,” (March 1967), translated from the French by Jay Miskowicz.

5 Walter Benjamin, “Paris: Nineteenth Century Capital,” *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 3–26.

6 Jean Baudrillard, “Dialectical Utopia,” in *Utopie: Texts and Projects, 1967–1978*, ed. Craig Buckley and Jean-Louis Violeau, trans. Matthew Griffin (Semiotext(e), 2015), 52–57.

7 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, (Autonomedia, 2004), 161.

8 Ernst Bloch quoted from Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno, Something’s Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing, radio interview, moderated by Horst Krüger, Süddeutscher Rundfunk, 1964.

9 Quevedo, as referenced in Jorge Luis Borges, “Utopia of a Tired Man,” in *The Book of Sand*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (E. P. Dutton, 1977), 89.

10 Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, Book Three: Modern Philosophy, Chapter IV Erasmus and More, (Simon & Schuster, 1945), 522.

11 Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, (Verso, 2005), 35.

which it is for the moment entangled prevent it from being realized—otherwise it would be only an impossibility. If this possibility is disentangled from its restraints and allowed to develop, a utopia arises.<sup>12</sup> Above and beyond this one could perhaps say in general that the fulfillment of utopia consists largely only in a repetition of the continually same “today.”<sup>13</sup>

It is important to attend once again to what is obviously a utopian intent, the question of a borderless world. From its inception “movement” or more precisely “borderlessness” has been central to various utopian traditions. The very concept of utopia, refers to that which has no borders, beginning with the imagination itself. The power of utopianism lies in its ability to instantiate the tension between borderlessness, movement and place, a tension—if we look carefully—that has marked social transformations in the modern era.<sup>14</sup>

Any future endeavor, no matter what kind, is utopian, since there is no complete guarantee that it will turn out as we hope. You will say that this is a conceptual mistake, that it is not utopia. It is a matter of opinion... However, I understand that what others consider utopian is for me something that can become reality. The idea of a “Social and Beneficent Fraternity” was utopian for many. And would you like an idea even easier to put into practice? It was not Anarchy, it was not called Socialism. However, many who saw the equality was its core feared and, opposed it, saying that it was utopian, that it was a form of exploitation. It was communism. It was true love.<sup>15</sup>

Utopian possibilities are inherent in the technical and technological forces of advanced capitalism and socialism: the rational utilization of these forces on a global scale would

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12 Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, (trans. Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995). Original German edition published in 1930.

13 Theodor W. Adorno, “Something’s Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing (1964),” in Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function in Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg, (The MIT Press, 1988).

14 Achille Mbembe, “The Idea of a Borderless World,” *Africa is a Country*, November 11, 2018, <https://africasacountry.com/2018/11/the-idea-of-a-borderless-world>.

15 Luisa Capetillo, “Prefacio a Mi opinión (1910),” *A Nation of Women: An Early Feminist Speaks Out. Mi opinión sobre las libertades de la mujer*, ed. Felix V. Matos Rodriguez, trans. Alan West-Durán, (Arte Public Press, 2004).

terminate poverty and scarcity within a very foreseeable future.<sup>16</sup> In fact, when I think of the fair and sensible arrangements in Utopia, where things are run so efficiently with so few laws, and recognition for individual merit is combined with equal prosperity for all—when I compare Utopia with a great many capitalist countries which are always making new regulations, but could never be called well-regulated, where dozens of laws are passed every day, and yet there are still not enough to ensure that one can either earn, or keep, or safely identify one's so-called private property—or why such an endless succession of never-ending lawsuits?—when I consider all this, I feel much more sympathy with Plato, and much less surprise at his refusal to legislate for a city that rejected egalitarian principles.<sup>17</sup>

How do we draw upon Marcuse's critical theory in our attempt to develop new vocabularies of resistance today, vocabularies that effect a rupture with the equation of affirmative action and "reverse racism," vocabularies that reflect a utopian vision of a society without prisons, at least without the monstrous, corporatized system that we call the prison industrial complex?<sup>18</sup> Experience of the struggle shows how utopian and absurd it is to profess to apply without considering local reality (and especially cultural reality) plans of action developed by other peoples during their liberation struggles and to apply solutions which they found to the problems with which they were or are confronted.<sup>19</sup>

Our century has seen the beginning of the end of the Eurocentric cultural autarchy with the historical emergence of former utopian fictional Others - the Chinese, the Persians, the Blacks, the Mohammedans - from exoticism. In the context of this historical movement another transposition has been made from terrestrial to extra-terrestrial time/space, and fictional Others. If we see SF as the updated pseudo-utopian mode of the

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16 Herbert Marcuse, *An essay on liberation* (Beacon Press, 1969)

17 Thomas More, *Utopia* [1516], ed. George M. Logan, trans. Robert M. Adams (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

18 Angela Y. Davis, "Marcuse's Legacies," in Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader, eds. John Abromeit & William Mark Cobb, (Routledge, 2004), 49-50.

19 Amílcar Cabral, "National Liberation and Culture," *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amílcar Cabral*, (Monthly Review Press, 1973), 53.

global (and increasingly dominant) technocratic bourgeoisie, as the expression of its group fantasy, then one of SF's more troubling aspects - a neo-fascist elitism that re-minds one of Sinapia's, based as it is on the projection of "higher cultures" - becomes theoretically explicable. From Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* to *Star Wars*, SF - like Sinapia - ritually excludes or marginalizes the "Lesser breeds without the law," outside of technological rationality-what Ursula Le Guin has called the social, sexual, and racial aliens. Such SF excludes, in fact, the popular forces who today embody the millenarian heresy of utopian longing, and who are on our world scene the only alternative to the new, non-proprietary technocratic bureaucracy.<sup>20</sup>

The visions were not escapist, but rather part of a growing anticolonial theory and movement. Participants were transported to a forthcoming world where the old ways and dead relatives lived. It was a utopian dream that briefly suspended the nightmare of the "wretched present" by folding the remembered experience of a precolonial freedom into an anti-colonial future.<sup>21</sup>

As Ziegler argues, that vision of utopia has been obscured and has moved even further out of reach because of the radicalization of capitalism in its neofeudalist form along with the emergence of the phenomenon of hyper-violence, which has intensified in recent years.<sup>22</sup> We must therefore admit that the refusal to legitimize murder forces us to reconsider our notion of utopia. In that regard, it seems possible to say the following: utopia is that which is in contradiction with reality. From this point of view, it would be completely utopian to want people to stop killing people. This would be absolute utopia.<sup>23</sup>

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20 SF stands for Science-Fiction. Sylvia Wynter, Review of *A Utopia from the Semi-Periphery: Spain, Modernization, and the Enlightenment*, by Stelio Cro, *Science Fiction Studies* 6, no. 1 (1979): 100–107. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239228>.

21 Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*, (Verso, 2019), 124.

22 Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, (Semiotext(e), 2010), 70.

23 Albert Camus, "November 23, 1946: Neither Victims nor Executioners, *Saving Bodies*," Camus at *Combat: Writing 1944-1947*, ed. Jacqueline Levi-Valensi, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (Princeton University Press, 2006), 261.

Now the nationalist bourgeoisies, who in region after region hasten to make their own fortunes and to set up a national system of exploitation, do their utmost to put obstacles in the path of this “Utopia.”<sup>24</sup> For a society producing under capitalist conditions the commodity has not cheapened. The new machine is *no* improvement for it. The capitalist is, therefore, not interested in introducing it. And since its introduction would make his present, not as yet worn-out, machinery simply worthless, would turn it into scrap-iron, hence would cause a positive loss, he takes good care not to commit this, what is for him a utopian, mistake.<sup>25</sup>

Eduardo Nina Qhispi, linked to the movement of caciques in power (chiefs in power) of the 1920s and 1930s, formulated his utopia of the “renewal of Bolivia” in a context of colonial deafness of the oligarchic elites and of warlike preparations that dismantled the leadership of the communities on the internal front. In this desirable society, mestizos and Indians could live together on equal terms, through the adoption, by the former, of legitimate modes of coexistence based on reciprocity, redistribution, and authority as service.<sup>26</sup> Some feminists have found in the prejudicial past traces of a utopian future, a potential resource for subversion or insurrection that promises to lead to the destruction of the law and the instatement of a new order.<sup>27</sup> Some of these utopian communities sought reparative paths to mend tears in the social fabric. However, as soon as an individual’s ideas became prompts for other members to follow unquestioningly, they could only go wrong.<sup>28</sup>

As was the case for the early theories of Restif de la Bretonne and Parent Duchâtelet regarding the construction of the utopian state-brothel in Europe, Puerto Rico’s policies

24 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, (Grove Press, 2004), 164.

25 Karl Marx, *Capital A Critique of Political Economy Volume III The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole*, Ed. Friedrich Engels (1896), (International Publishers, 1994). 168.

26 Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Ch’ixinakax utxiwa. *Una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos descolonizadores* (Ch’ixinakax utxiwa: *A Reflection on Practices and Discourses of Decolonization*) (Tinta Limón Ediciones, 2010), 53–76.

27 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (Routledge, 1999), 46.

28 Ariella Aisha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, (Verso, 2019), 410.

associated disease, delinquency, and the presence of female sexuality within public spaces.<sup>29</sup> Without implying that black women and men lived in gender utopia, I am suggesting that black sex roles, and particularly the role of men, have been more complex and problematized in black life than is believed.<sup>30</sup>

This essay is an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction. It is also an effort to contribute to socialist-feminist culture and theory in a post-modernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end.<sup>31</sup> Every moral doctrine is a utopia. But this morality would only become a utopia if Relation itself had sunk into an absolute excessiveness of Chaos.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 2. WAI Architecture Think Tank, still from *Blindness* depicting Miniluv, Project 1984, 2013.

29 Paul B Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson, (The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2013), 183-184.

30 bell hooks, "Reconstructing Black Masculinity," *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (South End Press, 1992), 93.

31 Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Socialist Review* 15, no. 2 (1985): 65-108.

32 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 193.

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# VALUE

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# VALUE IS SPATIALLY PRODUCED

## 1) THE LABOR THEORY OF VALUE

Classical economists like Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and their critic Karl Marx, all argued that capitalist value is produced through human labor.<sup>1</sup> From their perspective, this was the innovation of modern capitalism; no longer was value produced by land, through the growth of agricultural products, and measured as a function of crop area as it was during the feudal period. In the emerging capitalist mode of production, the value of a product assembled through the division of labor was measured through the average quantity of human labor-time expended to produce it. In this new theorization of value, the unit of measure flipped from space to time.

The switch of the elementary particle of value from land to labor pointed toward something very important—capitalist waged labor exploited workers through the quantitative difference between the exchange-value and the use-value of their labor-power. Marx understood that value embedded in every commodity had three dimensions: the source of *value*, measured in “socially necessary labor-time”, *exchange-value*, the value at which a commodity traded, and *use-value*, the utility of a commodity to its purchaser.<sup>2</sup> The *exchange-value* of labor—the wage—was pegged to the basic cost of reproducing the worker, but the *use-value* of that labor—the value it in turn produced—was always greater than this. The difference between these two values (only “realized” when a commodity is sold), is what Marx called “surplus value.” Marx believed that labor-power was an entirely unique commodity, because it was able to produce more value than it cost to procure.<sup>3</sup>

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1 See Soren Mau, *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital* (Verso, 2023), 179.

2 For a brilliant reading of this three-dimensional concept of value, see David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (Verso, 2010), 21-23.

3 Or as he describes at length in *Capital Volume I*, the worker is compensated for only a fraction of their labor-time, while the capitalist captures the value of remaining time they work as well, this surplus-time, represents the quantity of surplus value taken from the worker. Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New Left Review, 1976), 341-416.

For Marx, the novelty of capitalist-waged labor is that, through the process of value creation it unleashes, capital appears to accumulate automatically as a kind of perpetual motion machine, accounting for the sudden and accelerated growth of the world-economy under capitalist relations of production, in contrast to the relatively stable and cyclical economic forms that preceded it.<sup>4</sup> It was only through the labor-power unleashed by the wage relationship, that the new “surplus-value” that powers this virtuous cycle could be produced. Of course, Marx saw profits being made in all kinds of business transactions that seemed to operate at some remove from the exploitation of labor, such as banking, landlordism, land speculation, retail, and logistics. He understood all the value circulating there not as new value, but as particular fractions of the surplus value produced by labor-power in production divided up amongst the capitalist class as payment for the “means of labour”(machinery, buildings, infrastructure) or the “objects of labour” (nature and raw materials). The profit, rent, and interest generated by these different parts of the production and circulation process, are all derived from the exploitation of labor-power that grounds surplus-value. For Marx, none of these money-making mechanisms produce new value themselves.<sup>5</sup>

In order to obfuscate Marx’s clear understanding of the exploitation of labor, neo-classical economists argue that value can be better measured through the utility of a commodity to its user, rather than the labor that goes into its fabrication. They shifted the basic unit of value from abstract labor-time (what Marx calls *value*), to *use-value*, or utility measured in utils. However, for most contemporary neo-classical economists, utility itself cannot really be measured, so instead, apparent utility, measured as consumer preference, is usually used as a proxy for use.<sup>6</sup> Through this migration of the source of value

4 For a description of this automatic process, see Beverly Best, *The Automatic Fetish: The Law of Value in Marx’s Capital* (Verso, 2024), 37.

5 Best, *The Automatic Fetish*, 324-325.

6 Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler, *Capital As Power: A Study of Order and Creorder* (Routledge, 2009).

from production to demand, the critical function of Marx's critique of political economy was displaced.

## **2) VALUE APPROPRIATION BEFORE AND ALONGSIDE THE EXPLOITATION OF LABOR**

Marx also recognized that capitalism requires an initial store of value to prime the pump of production. This original value, is produced through extra-capitalist forms of appropriation, distinct from the exploitation of waged labor described above. Historically, he understood this “so-called primitive accumulation” as a product of colonialism, slavery, and the enclosures of common and rotating fields in Europe.<sup>7</sup> Marx knew these practices were ongoing during his lifetime, yet in most of *Capital* he treated them as external to mature capitalism. In 1990, the journal *Midnight Notes*, began to describe the ways in which these appropriative practices, such as the enclosures, continued to be fully active and were even intensified within the neoliberal economy, more than one hundred years after Marx's death.<sup>8</sup>

Two years later in 1992, philosopher Sylvia Wynter, building on the work of philosopher and novelist C. L. R. James, displaced the basic unit of labor from its abstraction in Marx's concept of “abstract labour,” to the labor of a specific subject—an enslaved 25-year-old African man in good health. In the mid-17th Century, during the Portuguese slave trade this laborer was named a “piece”, *peça* in Portuguese, and *pieza* or “*pieza de India*” in Spanish. The *pieza* served as a “general equivalent”, or measure of value, used to standardize the trade of slaves and other commodities. Shipments of enslaved Africans could be described through the number of *pieza*, rather than the number of people, which might be quite different if they were younger or older, or were women and valued as a certain fraction of a *pieza*.<sup>9</sup> Wynter uses the concept

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<sup>7</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 871-940.

<sup>8</sup> Midnight Notes Collective, ed., *Midnight Notes 10: The New Enclosures* (1990).

<sup>9</sup> Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception : The Counterdoctrine of the Jamesian Poiesis,” in C. L. R. James's *Caribbean*, ed. Paul Buhle and Paget Henry (Duke University Press, 1992), 81.

of an enslaved body as currency, to revise Marx's labor theory of value. Cleverly, she begins with Marx's own assertion in *Capital Volume I* that "the veiled slavery of the wage laborers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its pedestal."<sup>10</sup> Her point is that far from an externality or aberration from capitalism, the institution of slavery in fact founds this new capitalist mode of production and acts as the model for capitalist waged labor that Marx saw as the source of all value. Crucially, this model is an intersectional, or what she calls a "pluri-conscious", model for labor under capitalism which connects race, class, gender, age and ability.<sup>11</sup> For Wynter this means that in fact a specific "mode of domination" precedes the mode of production, which itself includes "multiple modes of accumulation."<sup>12</sup> Moreover, not only is the pieza pluri-conscious, she argues that the identity of the pieza changes over time. Across its history, capitalism, from its mercantile, through its industrial, to its consumer forms, has fixed different subjects as its pieza—slave, working class, and consumer. Within each of these moments, the pieza is subject to "a differential ratio of distribution of goods and of rewards", disempowering this identity further and building a "circular logic of exploitation."<sup>13</sup> Through this iterative framework, the original pieza—the young adult African male body—has been most deeply devalued. Marxian theory masks this reality, by decentering primitive accumulation with the hegemony of theories of production, making it impossible to really see the racial dynamics of domination.

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10 Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 925; quoted in Wynter, "Beyond the Categories of the Master", 80.

11 This is an argument Wynter makes again in her essay "1492: A New World View" in *Race, Discourse and the Origin of the Americas*, eds. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), and which was the point of Eric Williams' *Capitalism & Slavery* (University of North Carolina Press, 1944), which found economic evidence for the slave trade's crucial contribution of value for the industrial revolution in Britain.

12 Wynter, "Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception", 64.

13 Wynter, "Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception", 82.

For Wynter, value is “shaped [by] an intricate permutation of color, levels of education, levels of wealth, and levels of ‘culture’”, which she calls “systems of values.”<sup>14</sup>

More than a decade after Wynter and the Midnight Notes Collective, a number of theorists provided their own revisions to Marx’s theory that follow from these. Geographer David Harvey added to his understanding of the circuits of capital, by arguing that under contemporary neoliberalism, primitive accumulation had been renewed as a practice of value appropriation. He renamed this process “accumulation by dispossession” in order to remove the sense that it simply preceded mature capitalism, and to assert it as one of its ongoing processes.<sup>15</sup> Even more recently, World-systems theorist Jason W. Moore, developed an understanding of world ecology that argues cheap or free inputs of nature and labor have been necessary throughout capitalist history, to maintain the standard rate of profit. Moore is systematic in his terminology, reserving the verb *appropriate* for the violent extraction of value from enslaved, indentured, marginalized, racialized, and unpaid labor, or cheap nature from Indigenous peoples, and the verb *exploit* for the creation of surplus value from the difference between the value a worker is paid and the value their labor produces.<sup>16</sup> What these diverse critical frameworks show is that the idea of capitalism as an automatic or perpetual machine of accumulation, has simply never been the case. Instead, capitalism has always worked through both *exploitation*, accumulation of so-called “surplus value” by paying workers less than the use-value of their labor-power, and through the *appropriation* of cheap and free labor and nature external to the wage labor system.

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14 Wynter, “Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception”, 68.

15 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford University Press, 2003),

16 Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (Verso, 2015).

### 3) RE-SPATIALIZING SYSTEMS OF VALUE

Literary theorist Kojin Karatani points out that capitalist exchange always involves an exchange of equal value, unless it occurs between what he calls different “systems of value”, and it is precisely in these exchanges between systems of value that “surplus value” is produced.<sup>17</sup> While Wynter argued that there were many different “systems of value” attached to distinct subject-identities, Karatani uses colonial merchant capitalism as an example of distant spatial locations in which distinct systems of value exist.<sup>18</sup> Karatani doesn’t make much of it, but the connection between these two definitions is clear enough, merchant trade between different systems of value was almost always coincident with trade with people that Europeans racialized. So, in colonial capitalism, there was a clear overlap between spatial and subject-identity differences of value, through which value could be appropriated in a process like arbitrage. Again like Wynter, Karatani argues that Marx’s concept of the mode of production obfuscates the violence inherent in the capitalist system, rather than calling these modes of domination as Wynter does, he argues instead that world history can be read as a progression of evolving “modes of exchange”, arguing that it is precisely in the social act of transaction that relations of power, or as Wynter suggests—relations of domination—appear.<sup>19</sup> What this rethinking does is that it erases the gulf that separates the process of exploitation and appropriation for most Marxist theorists, because both exploitation and appropriation constitute processes of unequal exchange. Karatani spatializes his theory by tying the surplus value produced through exchange between different systems of value to the concept of uneven development.<sup>20</sup>

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17 Kojin Karatani, *The Structure of Word History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange*, trans. Michael K. Bourdaghs (Duke University Press, 2014), 7.

18 Karatani, *The Structure of Word History*: 184.

19 This idea of the mode of exchange seems quite close to Institutional Economist, John Commons’ understanding of the transaction, rather than the commodity as the basic unit of the capitalist system. Like Karatani, Commons sees the transaction as the space of power relations. See, John R. Commons, “Institutional Economics,” *The American Economic Review* 21, no. 4 (1931): 652-653.

20 Kojin Karatani, *The Structure of Word History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange*, trans. Michael K. Bourdaghs (Duke University Press, 2014), 7.

This idea was used by Marx in the Grundrisse, and by early 20th-century followers like Lenin and Trotsky to address differences between countries in the world system.<sup>21</sup> However, starting in the 1970s, geographer David Harvey and his student Neil Smith, began to apply the concept of uneven development to much more local spatial differences within urban space.<sup>22</sup> For Smith, uneven development proceeded through a dialectical process that he named a seesaw of capital. Through the cyclical and crisis prone nature of the capitalist economy, factors of production such as land, labor, and other forms of fixed capital such as machinery and buildings, can be devalued in specific places. In fact, for Smith, “devaluation is place-specific.”<sup>23</sup> Investment is then drawn to those places which have become cheap through devaluation, whose value will eventually rise, and large profits can be made by selling these revalued factors. Smith argues that it is through this dynamic of devaluation and revaluation (though he rarely uses this latter term), that cities and regions, countries, and even the globe are subject to uneven development. David Harvey named this process of reinvestment (the revaluation of devalued space) a “spatial fix”—both a solution and an injection—arguing that by fixing capital in new places, it is made vulnerable to devaluation in the future.<sup>24</sup> Yet the stickiness of space, its physical inertia, is not only a future problem for the mobility of capital, the fixing of differential systems of value is also what allows for class formation, and it is precisely what allows for unequal exchanges between these spatialized systems of value.

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21 See Ian D. Thatcher, “Uneven and Combined Development”, *Revolutionary Russia*, 4:2 (1991): 235-258.

22 David Harvey, “The Spatial Fix—Hegel, Von Thunen, and Marx”, *Antipode* 13:3 (December 1981): 7; Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (The University of Georgia Press, 2008).

23 Smith, *Uneven Development*, 168.

24 Harvey, “The Spatial Fix—Hegel, Von Thunen, and Marx”: 7.

Despite capital's desire to "annihilate space through time", the time and expense required to renovate space is what makes the persistent spatial boundaries between worlds of different value so durable and profitable.<sup>25</sup>

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25 As one example of the way urban space fixes differential value, I have looked carefully at the city of Shenzhen. Inaugurated as a municipality in 1979 and as a Special Economic Zone in 1980, the city has grown from a set of scattered rural villages with a population of 300,000, to China's third largest with over 20 million residents in just over 40 years. Shenzhen grew at the rate it did by creating large differences between spatial systems of value, starting with the exchange across the border with Hong Kong. The city grew through the interactions of three dialectical spatial topologies: the first addresses the region's edges in the interaction between the commodity flows accelerated in and out through the region's vast port system and the enclaves fixed by the multiplication of urban borders, the second focuses on the fabric of the region, through the adjacency between the informality of urban villages and the disciplinarity of work camps and high tech campuses, and the final topology describes the city's network, through its ever expanding urban infrastructures of highways and railways, and the succession of centers of urban development that proliferate at every new node in the system. Each of these topologies: port/border, village/camp(us), infrastructure/centre, acts as an urban machine that fixes enclaves of differential value, while facilitating exchanges between them to produce surplus value. For an early version of this argument see Adrian Blackwell, "Shenzhen—Topology of a Neoliberal City," in *Shaping the City, 2nd Edition: Studies in History, Theory and Urban Design*, ed. Rodolphe El-Khoury and Edward Robbins (Routledge, 2013), 278–311.

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# **WASTELAND**

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# WasteLand

## CODIFICATION AND CAPITALIZATION

Barrenness—the inability to produce or reproduce—defines the legal and cultural understanding of the wasteland. Yet rather than an inherent functional property, barrenness is a *judgment* of failure. Appearing as it does in land classification documents to denote a kind of blankness, the wasteland is only tenuously barren, functionally speaking. In the modern period, European farmers could designate a piece of their property as a wasteland, a categorization that implied that the land was fertile enough but left to lie fallow so that the inefficiencies of surplus production could be circumvented, and revenue increased.<sup>1</sup> In the colonial Indian context, the legal category “wasteland” was codified in the 1878 Forest Act to accelerate the dispossession of land.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, in Kauai, Hawaii, for example, the classification of a “wasteland development property” is based on the understanding that lava flows, pali lands, stream beds, mountain peaks, and other natural places are unsuitable for economic use.<sup>3</sup> In these cases, nature is judged to be a “waste”—useless for the purposes of accumulation. But such a designation is not indefinite. Unproductive scraps of land are frequently reclassified and transformed into value and resources through proper “management.” Barrenness is a construct.

In other cases, wastelands are codified not by legally binding land use policies, but as a result of colonial *aesthetic* judgments and expectations. Too hot, too dry, appearing too non-arable, land is deemed uninhabitable, unsalvageable, and unworthy of care. Think of “the desert.”<sup>4</sup> Or Greenland. Or

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1 Lucius Burckhardt, “Wasteland as Context. Is There Any Such Thing as the Postmodern Landscape?” In *Lucius Burckhardt Writings: Rethinking man-made environments*, eds. Martin Schmitz and Jesko Fezer (De Gruyter, 2016), 254.

2 Judith Whitehead, “John Locke, Accumulation by Dispossession and the Governance of Colonial India,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 42, no. 1 (2012), 1–21.

3 “Wasteland Development Classification Property Assessment,” Department of Finance of the City and County of Honolulu, accessed June 25, 2025. [https://realproperty.honolulu.gov/media/syndx40z/wasteland-development-classification-6\\_17\\_1981.pdf](https://realproperty.honolulu.gov/media/syndx40z/wasteland-development-classification-6_17_1981.pdf).

4 Samia Henni, “Against the Regime of Emptiness,” In *Deserts Are Not Empty*, ed. Samia Henni (Columbia University Press, 2022).

other places where the presence of humans and life has been purposely erased. The settler-colonial logic of improvement and development has spanned a moralized geography of wastelands—both untouched and ruined sites—since the seventeenth century, germinating in a range of value judgments.<sup>5</sup> There are post-industrial and post-capitalistic spaces whose aesthetic vulgarity is leveraged as evidence of unproductivity and moral depravity. Urban wastelands—associated with poor or racialized communities—are frequently cleared. The aesthetic judgment of a place is translated into the imagined valuelessness of people. Here, the designation of land as waste comes from those who have no link to it or have indeed wasted it themselves. There are also sacrifice zones, permanently impaired places where—again—poor and racialized communities coexist with “legitimate” and illegitimate dumping and polluting.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, these particular wastelands, characterized by the aesthetics of toxicity, are still valuable, but the people living and working upon them are deemed not. The wasteland is thus a curious category of settlement, because settlement is only pursued up to a point—non-settler environmental imperialism will suffice.

Wastelands are a problem of capitalization. WasteLand. Capitalization in the sense of, following Max Liboiron, reinscribing the “capital-L” in Land to undo settler colonialism’s anti-relational logic, which reduces small-L land to empty acreage and tramples Indigenous laws.<sup>7</sup> But also capitalization as the process through which something “becomes” capital, meaning the social process through which capitalism’s power dynamics reproduce themselves. To make Land relational, irreducible to property, the categories of use and aesthetics can be rethought as mechanisms of accountability where the effects of “waste” (poverty, illness, treaty rights violation) are recentered in their particularity. The “who” and “where” of waste are brought back together. This is not about the utilitarian

5 Vittoria Di Palma, *Wasteland: A History* (Yale University Press, 2014), esp. 46-52.

6 On impairment and ecology, see Sunaura Taylor, *Disabled Ecologies: Lessons from a wounded desert* (University of California Press, 2024)

7 Max Liboiron, “Land, Nature, Resource, Property,” In *Pollution is Colonialism* (Duke University Press, 2021), 48.

euphemism “brownfield” and its signaling of a redevelopment opportunity or a potential recategorization that is meant to logically regulate the landscape, to substitute “emptiness” for lucrative activities. Sometimes, wasteland parcels can sit semi-dormant, creating what Matthew Gandy calls “unintentional” landscapes, scraps of space which produce new political and ecological possibilities by virtue of their detachment from “pre-existing aesthetic or cultural expectations.”<sup>8</sup> WasteLands can be made just as wastelands are. Remediation can be a legal framework of reparation, from a judgment of failure to a promise of redemption.

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# **WHITE STUDIES**

**CRUZ GARCIA**

WAI ARCHITECTURE THINK TANK



# A WHITE PAPER ON WHITE STUDIES

White Studies analyzes the westernizing conditioning, mediation, and institutionalization of knowledge.

White Studies includes all “cultural” institutions that have been touched (transformed, manipulated, coerced, convinced, lured, seduced, tricked) by the project of Western imperialism and colonialism.

White Studies is the field that focuses on Western-centric epistemologies, practices, and institutions. It studies white supremacy as policy, curriculum, legality, spatiality, and ideology. The urgency of White Studies lies in its potential to critically examine the historical and contemporary structures, practices, forms, and customs that perpetuate racist inequality. By interrogating the ways in which whiteness operates as an invisible norm with real material manifestations, ‘White Studies’ seeks to dismantle the assumption that whiteness is a given, and that its experiences and perspectives are universal, balanced, or neutral.

While acknowledging that race is a social construct with very real material manifestations, White Studies considers whiteness as an omnipresent constraint that conditions power relations at the planetary scale. As a field, White Studies is not about centering whiteness further but rather about deconstructing its dominance, identifying its omnipresence, and rendering visible its overlooked doctrines and dogmas. In its identification of whiteness as a subject of study, this field of inquiry aims to reciprocally create space for all other historically marginalized voices and epistemologies.

In a world where white supremacy, and its byproduct in systemic racism continue to shape access to education, healthcare, housing, employment, and justice, White Studies provides a framework for understanding how these disparities are maintained and how they can be challenged. If Dark Matter and Dark Energy are concepts used to explain the invisible

matter and forces that make up most of the universe, White Studies focuses on the white matter and forces that shape the social, legal, economic, and ecological systems, superstructures, and infrastructures of life on Earth after the great European expansion (the moment in which European powers colonized the *Abya Yala*). White Studies focuses on the “invisible” and “undeclared,” yet omnipresent whiteness of every civilization (violently) affected and (irreversibly) transformed by Western thought.

One of the key contributions of White Studies is its focus on the intersection of race/caste, power, and knowledge production. Western-centric epistemologies have long been positioned as the standard for intellectual rigor, often dismissing, displacing, altering, and erasing other ways of knowing. This has profound implications in many fields including, but not limited to history, literature, science, anthropology, medicine, law, and philosophy, where whiteness is installed at the expense of any non-Eurocentric worldmaking. By critically analyzing the ways in which white supremacy is embedded in academic disciplines, institutions, processes, policies, protocols, and customs, White Studies calls for a reevaluation of what counts as legitimate knowledge and whose voices, memories, accounts, narratives, testimonies, experiences, and ideals are prioritized in scholarly discourse.

White Studies is essential for understanding the planetary dimensions of white supremacy. White Studies understand white supremacy as an oil spill at intergalactic scale. While White Studies calls to analyse, scrutinize, and examine Western contexts, it also demands to take a closer look at the many manifestations of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization, and how they have exported and reinforced white supremacist ideologies worldwide. From the legacies of European colonialism in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas (hardcore colonialism) to the ongoing influence of Western cultural and economic dominance (softcore colonialism), White Studies reveals the interconnectedness of

racial hierarchies across geographies and geopolitical zones of influence. This planetary perspective is crucial for building solidarity among anti-racist and anti-colonialist movements and for addressing the interplanetary structures of racial injustice.

The urgency of White Studies is further underscored by the current political and social climate. The rise or unmasking of far-right movements, the resurgence of overt white nationalism, ongoing genocides backed by the racist rhetoric, logic, and policies of Western powers and the backlash against struggles for anti-racist social justice highlight the need for a deeper understanding of how whiteness functions as a tool of oppression. White Studies proposes to recognize and challenge these dynamics, whether they manifest in clear and violent acts of white supremacy or the more obfuscated forms of institutional and political oppression.

By exposing the mechanisms of white supremacy and challenging the normalization of whiteness, the field of White Studies opens up possibilities for reimagining social, political, and cultural systems. It invites us to envision a world beyond the ecocidal and genocidal grip of Western-centric, capitalist, white supremacy. The ultimate goal of White Studies is eventual redistribution of power in ways that honor the humanity and dignity of all people. In this sense, White Studies is not just an academic endeavor but a vital tool for justice and liberation.

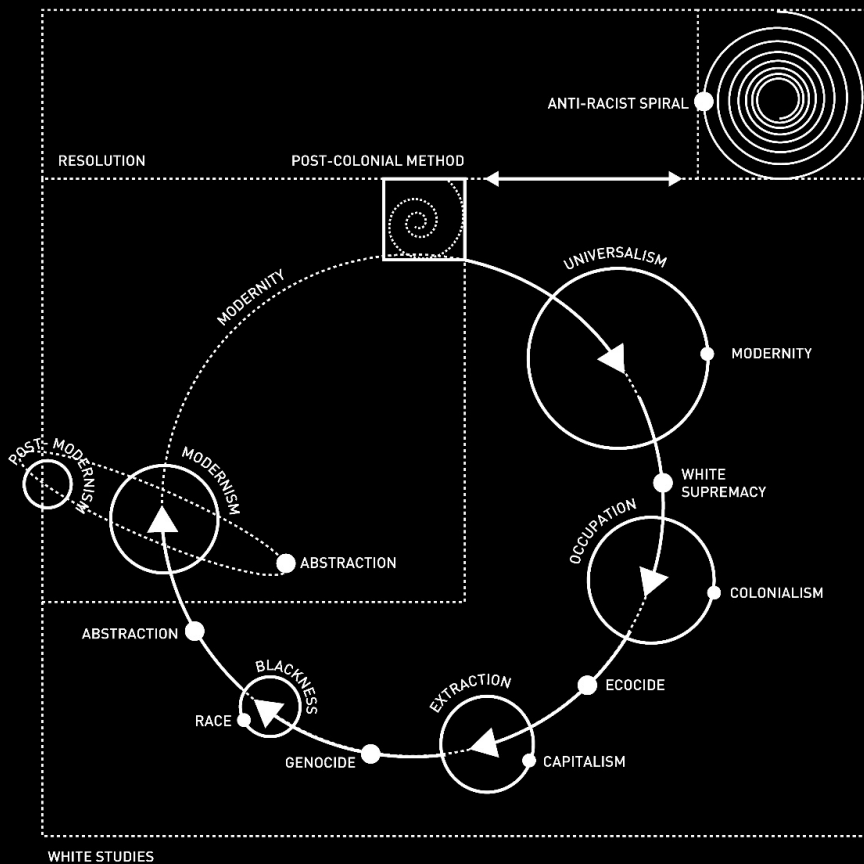


Figure 2. White Studies: Circles of Influence. WAI Think Tank, 2023-25.

## THE NEED FOR A RUBRIC

The construction of “race” has historically been a tool for categorizing and hierarchizing human differences, but it has predominantly focused on defining and marginalizing non-white identities while leaving whiteness unmarked and unexamined. Whiteness operates as the invisible norm against which all other identities are measured, yet it rarely becomes the subject of critical scrutiny in mainstream discourse. This asymmetry is central to understanding how white supremacist hierarchies are maintained and perpetuated. While Blackness, Indigeneity, Arabness, and Orientalness are frequently analyzed as racialized categories, whiteness is treated as the default, universal, and neutral position—a kind of non-racial “zero point” that escapes interrogation. This dynamic reinforces the power of whiteness by rendering it invisible, naturalizing its dominance, and positioning it as the standard for humanity.

The globalization of whiteness as a universal neutral is a phenomenon deeply rooted in colonialism, imperialism, and modernity. Whiteness became synonymous with rationality, progress, and civilization, while non-whiteness has been constructed as primitive, irrational, emotional, animistic, and inferior. It only takes metaphoric language to understand this: everything that is positive, is washed in light, brightness, whiteness; everything negative rests in the dark. This binary is not only symbolic, but a justification for colonial domination, a mechanism for consolidating white supremacy as a planetary legal and material system.

The enforced universalization of whiteness functions in the form of property, global currencies, unlimited access to resources, opportunities, legitimacy, and unabashed violence. Fueled by whiteness, Western institutions enforce Eurocentric fictional constructions of history, beauty standards, and the persistence of racial hierarchies and the corresponding spatial-material manifestations at every scale, from the molecular makeup affected by capitalist industry, to the construction and

destruction of entire geographies, landscapes, and peoples. Even in spaces where whiteness is not the demographic majority, its cultural and ideological influence often remains hegemonic.

## **RECONFIGURING THE UNIVERSITY**

The establishment of White Studies as a central academic discipline demands a radical reconfiguration of the university itself—its structures, hierarchies, and epistemologies. The modern university, as an institution, has been a primary vehicle for the reproduction of Western-centric knowledge, reinforcing white supremacy through its curricula, pedagogies, and institutional norms. That the university, as historically and currently configured, is shaped by the forces of white supremacy has been clearly stated in interviews and lectures by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Achille Mbembe,<sup>1</sup> and in publications by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, la paperson, Roderick A. Ferguson, Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang, and bell hooks just to name a few.<sup>2</sup> Even more revealing of the university's virulent whiteness and supremacist characteristics are the recent crackdowns on anti-colonial students and faculty in campuses around the U.S. by pro-Genocidal, Holocaust apologists, and anti-academic-freedom political factions as they collude with oligarchs, police forces, mainstream media, university-trustees, and administrators. Yet, despite the theoretical framework, and the practical manifestation of universities as white spaces, this text engages with the often-overlooked argument of what does that reconfiguration of the university as a challenge to its white makeup look like.

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1 Achille Mbembe, "Futures of Life and Futures of Reason" (video of lecture, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, April 5, 2017).

2 See, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. (Autonomedia, 2013), la paperson, *A Third University is Possible*, (Minnesota Press, 2017), Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40., bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," in *Displacing Whiteness*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg, (Duke University Press, 1997),

By making White Studies a core field of inquiry, the university would no longer function as an unmarked, supposedly neutral space of «universal» knowledge but would instead be forced to confront its own historical and ongoing complicity in upholding racialized (capitalist, imperialist, colonialist) power structures. Much of what is currently taught across disciplines—philosophy, literature, political theory, law, sciences, and arts—would fall under White Studies, as these fields have largely been shaped by and for the consolidation of Western dominance. This shift would expose how deeply whiteness is embedded in the foundations of academic knowledge, forcing a reckoning with the fact that what has been presented as “objective”, “canonical”, or “seminal” is, in fact, a reflection of a particular racial-supremacist and colonial worldview.

Decentralizing whiteness as the unspoken norm would free the rest of the university to engage in truly pluralistic scholarship, unshackled from the constraints of Eurocentric epistemologies and the tokenization of specified non-white fields. Disciplines could then emerge or expand without the burden of having to legitimize themselves within a framework foundationally designed to exclude, peripheralize, and marginalize them. Indigenous knowledges, anti-racist and anti-colonial thought, non-Western science, methodologies, and philosophies could flourish without being relegated to the margins as “area studies” or “alternative” perspectives. The university would no longer function as an arbiter of what counts as legitimate knowledge but would instead become a space for epistemic plurality and decentralization, where multiple ways of understanding the world and the cosmos coexist without Western-centric protagonism. This transformation would require dismantling the current academic control and reward systems—tenure criteria, citation practices, funding allocations—that privilege Western thought and instead create mechanisms that validate and sustain marginalized epistemologies on their own terms.

The institutional architecture of the university—its admissions policies, faculty hiring, departmental divisions, physical spaces, and relations to land, technology, and labor—would have to be reimagined. The university's historical role as a gatekeeper of elite (white) knowledge would need to be abolished, replaced by structures that actively redistribute access and authority. This means not only diversifying faculty and students but also dismantling the assumption that Western intellectual traditions are the default foundation for all scholarship. Libraries, syllabi, and research methodologies would have to be reconstituted to reflect a world in which whiteness is no longer the invisible center. Such a transformation would not be merely additive—it would require a fundamental rupture with the university as we know it, turning it into an (anti-)institution that no longer serves as an instrument of racial capitalism but instead as a site of radical epistemological and social reorganization.

White Studies would not only create a new academic field but would force the university to confront its own whiteness—to study it, demystify it, and dismantle its ubiquity and omnipresence. Only then can the university, from the Third University to the Undercommons,<sup>3</sup> begin to function as a space of genuine intellectual liberation, where knowledge is no longer bound by the dictates, customs, and assumptions of white supremacy but instead opens onto infinite possibilities of thought, being, and collective futures. The project of White Studies is not an end in itself but a means to an end: the abolition of the university as a colonial institution and its rebirth as a site of radical, pluralistic, and just worldmaking.

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3 Stefano and Moten, *The Undercommons*, la paperson, *A Third University is Possible*

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# **POST REFLECTION**

**MAYA KERFOOT | JOUD SHAWWA | HIBA ZUBAIRI**

“We cannot use the main tool of colonization (education) as a tool for decolonization. Education is, by design, the most effective (but invisible) colonizing tool, which starts with colonizing the mind through official language and academic categories.”<sup>1</sup>

—Munir Fasheh

Like any field, architecture twists and turns over itself, attempting to describe the whole breadth of human experience with the basic tools of floor, wall, and ceiling. Architects feel pride in the bending of language to the narrative of their work, and we must constantly invent language for the many contradictions and injustices of the medium. Too often, this translates into sentences fraught with jargon of our own creation, a language only accessible to other academics. Each word is important—it holds within an entire world of agreements and disagreements, written and erased histories—but used so often, they often develop an alienating patina. It is not only that academia is an ongoing commitment to elitism, but that this language distances us from the real lived experiences and consequences of our built environment’s complicity in inequalities of every kind. In a time where Mohammed El-Kurd criticizes this very distance and the removed, passive stance of academia, expressing how “[a]cademics stand idle. That is, until the dust settles, then they will write books about what should have been. Coin terms and such”,<sup>2</sup> this book is an attempt to rather use education as advocacy. The ‘living’ glossary we have begun to build here is another active step towards not only demystifying the fastidious language of architecture, but also connecting each of the themes to the lives and histories of people. As we began to comb articles for these

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1 Mayssoun Sukarieh, “Decolonizing Education, a View from Palestine: An Interview with Munir Fasheh,” *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 28, no. 2 (2019): 186-99, 188.

2 Mohammed El-Kurd, “The Sniper’s Hands Are Clean of Blood: On Dehumanization,” essay, in *Perfect Victims: And the Politics of Appeal* (Illinois, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2025), 8.

phrases, we were attuned to words which were at first opaque or had been recently redefined by scholars writing on spatial justice. When we describe a body of work as a *counter-archive* or a process as *militarization*, our understanding of these terms are predicated on an understanding of colonial and imperial mechanisms as well as a desire to investigate and challenge them.

While jargon as a socio-educational tool works to isolate individuals, thus making them feel separate and excluded from sources of knowledge, a glossary or definition allows passage through this exclusivity. Often, authority plays a central role in dictating what meanings and definitions are accepted as true. We created this glossary through a network of connections rooted in a shared solidarity for Palestinian liberation. By predicating the meaning of words on our mentors' and peers' reflections and lived experiences, we aim to replace institutional authority with community insight. While architecture may seem to be a discipline where reality moves in a top-down direction, the universality of a built environment and its spatial experience make the tools of the trade valuable in reaching across distances and building solidarity. That is why a glossary rooted in our shared values, experiences, and ideas serves not only as an educational tool to empower others with a vocabulary of resistance but as a meaningful practice of sharing knowledge and building solidarity amongst our community.

At the heart of this endeavour are the Palestinian ways of organizing that endure the disruption of Palestinian life, and centre education. During the first intifada, barriers were in place that resulted in the closing of academic institutions, depriving over three million students of their education.<sup>3</sup> Unused rooms in homes were the classrooms, women and mothers in the village were the teachers. The modes of teaching explored more relational and human pedagogies rooted in community,

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3 "Revolutionary Education for a Revolutionary Phase: The Experience of Popular Education during the Intifada," The Palestinian Museum, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://palmuseum.org/en/museum-from-home/stories-from-palestine/revolutionary-education-revolutionary-phase>.

and alternate ways of learning from each other.<sup>4</sup> The flexibility of setting due to circumstance is something to learn from when questioning what an educational environment could be. What does it mean to live and learn on the land? What can you offer your community, and most importantly what can you learn from your community?

In the current moment, we approach a day that marks two years of incessant bombing of Gaza; of a televised genocide and trying to bear witness to footage shared on social media; of a scholasticide that has left Gaza with no universities standing; of a deliberate targeting of knowledge, learning, and the future generation. Little else seems relevant or meaningful in discussions about community building, spatial justice, sustainability, and social equality. How can we talk about building anything when an entire people, their culture, and architecture are being systematically annihilated? How can we talk about mitigating climate change when Israel has released more than two million tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere over the last two years through its military campaign in Gaza? In the face of such immense destruction and loss of life, Palestinians continue to innovate new ways of resisting, persisting, and living. In the face of our complicity, Palestine teaches us how to break out of systems of violence and exploitation in order to reclaim our humanity.

As students, we are working against colonial apparatus even though we continue to benefit from and be shaped by it through our institutions. Our tuition and our work are subsistence for the continuing legacy of our schools, and we must continually grapple with these tensions. Pursuing and studying architecture across Canada, we must ground ourselves with an awareness of the history of the dispossession of the land we study, live, and design on, and the use of architecture as a tool to express colonial ideologies spatially. Our educations have instilled in us that architecture extends beyond the mere creation of structures, and rather, it is about

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4 Revolutionary Education for a Revolutionary Phase.

shaping experiences and knowledges to create and advocate for spaces that become a manifestation of collectiveness, and care for one another. These timely reflections serve as a mirror of our time, a form of educating ourselves in settings outside of the classroom and the studio environs. In participating in this project, we have been continually awed and honoured by the thought and heart given to the work, and we hope that it continues to be a resource for students entering the field. We are proud as students to present this esteemed body of work from just a few of the scholars and activists who have dedicated their work and their lives to ensuring our collective future. It now lies in our hands, and it is not a burden we take lightly.

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