ROAR

THE CITY RISES

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The City Rises

"Politics, almost by definition, is the active engagement of free citizens in the handling of their municipal affairs and in their defense of its freedom."

MURRAY BOOKCHIN

The Future We Deserve

I am the daughter of two longtime municipalists. My mother, Beatrice Bookchin, ran for city council in Burlington, Vermont 30 years ago, in 1987, on an explicitly municipalist platform of building an ecological city, a moral economy and, above all, citizen assemblies that would contest the power of the nation state. My father is the social theorist and libertarian municipalist, Murray Bookchin.

For many years the left has struggled with the question of how to bring our ideas, of equality, economic justice and human rights, to fruition. And my father's political trajectory is instructive for the argument that I want to make: that municipalism isn't just one of many ways to bring about social change — it is really the only way that we will successfully transform society. As someone who had grown up as a young communist and been deeply educated in Marxist theory, my father became troubled by the economistic, reductionist modes of thinking that had historically permeated the Marxist left. He was searching for a more expansive notion of freedom — not just freedom from economic exploitation, but freedom that encompassed all manner of oppression: race, class, gender, ethnicity.

At the same time, in the early 1960s, it became increasingly clear to him that capitalism was on a collision course with the natural world. Murray believed you could not address environmental problems piecemeal — trying to save redwood forests one day, and opposing a nuclear power plant the next — because ecological stability was under attack by capitalism. That is to say, the profit motive, the grow-or-die ethos of capitalism, was fundamentally at odds with the ecological stability of the planet. So he began to elaborate this idea that he called social ecology, which starts from the premise that all ecological problems are social problems. Murray said that, in order to heal our rapacious relationship to the natural world, we

must fundamentally alter social relations. We have to end not only class oppression, we must also end domination and hierarchy at every level, whether it be the domination of women by men, of lesbians, gays and transgender people by straights, of people of color by whites, or of the young by the old.

So the question for him became: How do we bring a new egalitarian society into being? What type of alternative social organization will create a society in which truly emancipated human beings can flourish — and that will heal our rift with the natural world? The question really is: what is the kind of political organization that can best contest the power of the state? And so, in the late 1960s, Murray began writing about a form of organization that he called libertarian municipalism. He believed that municipalism offered a way out of the deadlock between the Marxist and anarchist traditions. Municipalism rejects seizing state power, which we all know from the experiences of the twentieth century to be a hopeless pursuit, a dead end, because the state — whether capitalist or socialist — with its faceless bureaucracy is never truly responsive to the people. At the same time, activists must acknowledge that we won't achieve social change simply by taking our demands to the street. Large encampments and demonstrations may challenge the authority of the state, but they have not succeeded in usurping it. Those who engage only in a politics of protest or organizing on the margins of society must recognize that there will always be power — it does not simply dissolve. The question is in whose hands this power will reside: in the centralized authority of the state, or on the local level with the people.

It is increasingly clear that we will never achieve the kind of fundamental social change we so desperately need simply by going to the ballot box. Social change won't occur by voting for the candidate who promises us a $15 minimum wage, free education, family leave or offers platitudes about social justice. When we confine ourselves to voting for the lesser of evils, to the bones that social democracy throws our way, we play into and support the very centralized state structure that is designed to keep us down forever. At the same time, though often overlooked by the left, there is a rich history of direct democracy, of radical politics and self-government by citizens: from ancient Athens to the Paris Commune to the anarchist collectives of Spain in 1936, to Chiapas, Mexico, to Barcelona and other Spanish cities and towns in recent years — and now to Rojava, in northern Syria, where the Kurdish people have implemented a profoundly democratic project of self-rule unlike anything ever seen in the Middle East.

A municipalist politics is about much more than bringing a progressive agenda to city hall, important as that may be. Municipalism — or communalism, as my father called it — returns politics to its original definition, as a moral calling based on rationality, community, creativity, free association and freedom. It is a richly articulated vision of a decentralized, assembly-based democracy in which people act together to chart a rational future. At a time when human rights, democracy and the public good are under attack by increasingly nationalistic, authoritarian centralized state governments, municipalism allows us to reclaim the public sphere for the exercise of authentic citizenship and freedom.

Municipalism demands that we return power to ordinary citizens, that we reinvent what it means to do politics and what it means to be a citizen. True politics is the opposite of parliamentary politics. It begins at the base, in local assemblies. It is transparent, with candidates who are 100 percent accountable to their neighborhood organizations, who are delegates rather than wheeling-and-dealing representatives. It celebrates the power of local assemblies to transform, and be transformed by, an increasingly enlightened citizenry. And it is celebratory — in the very act of doing politics we become new human beings, we build an alternative to capitalist modernity. Municipalism asks the questions: What does it mean to be a human being? What does it mean to live in freedom? How do we organize society in ways that foster mutual aid, caring and cooperation? These questions and the politics that follow from them carry an ethical imperative: to live in harmony with the natural world, lest we destroy the very ecological basis for life itself, but also to maximize human freedom and equality.

The great news is that this politics is being articulated more and more vocally in horizontalist movements around the world. In the factory recuperation politics of Argentina, in the water wars of Bolivia, in the neighborhood councils that have arisen in Italy, where the government was useless in assisting municipalities after severe flooding, over and over we see people organizing at the local level to take power, indeed to build a counterpower that increasingly challenges the power and authority of the nation state. These movements are taking the idea of democracy and expressing it to its fullest potential, creating a politics that meets human needs, that fosters sharing and cooperation, mutual aid and solidarity, and that recognizes that women must play a leadership role.

Achieving this means taking our politics into every corner of our neighborhoods, doing what the conservatives around the world have done so

successfully in the last few decades: running candidates at the municipal level. It also means creating a minimum program — such as ending home foreclosures, stopping escalating rents and the destabilization of our neighborhoods through gentrification — but also developing a maximum program in which we re-envision what society could be if we could build a caring economy, harness new technologies and expand the potential of every human being to live in freedom and exercise their civic rights as members of flourishing, truly democratic communities.

As a next step, we must confederate, work across state and national borders in developing programs that will address regional and even international issues. This is an important response to those who say that we won't be able to solve great transnational problems by acting at the local level. In fact, it is precisely at the local level where these problems are being solved day in and day out. Even great issues such as climate change can be managed through the confederation of communities that send delegates to manage regional and global issues. We don't need a centralized state bureaucracy to do this. We need to create lasting political institutions at the local level, not merely through political leaders who articulate a social justice agenda, but through institutions that are directly democratic, egalitarian, transparent, fully accountable, anti-capitalist and ecologically aware and that give voice to the aspirations of the people. It will require time and education and the building of municipal assemblies as a countervailing power to the nation state, but this is our only hope of becoming the new human beings needed to build a new society.

This is our time. Around the world people want not merely to survive but to live. If we are to transition from the death-spiral society that decades of neoliberalism have foisted upon us to a new rational society that delivers on the promise of humankind, we must create a global network of fearless cities, towns and villages. We deserve nothing less.

Debbie Bookchin

*Author and award-winning
investigative journalist.*

roarmag.org

KOBANE GARDENS

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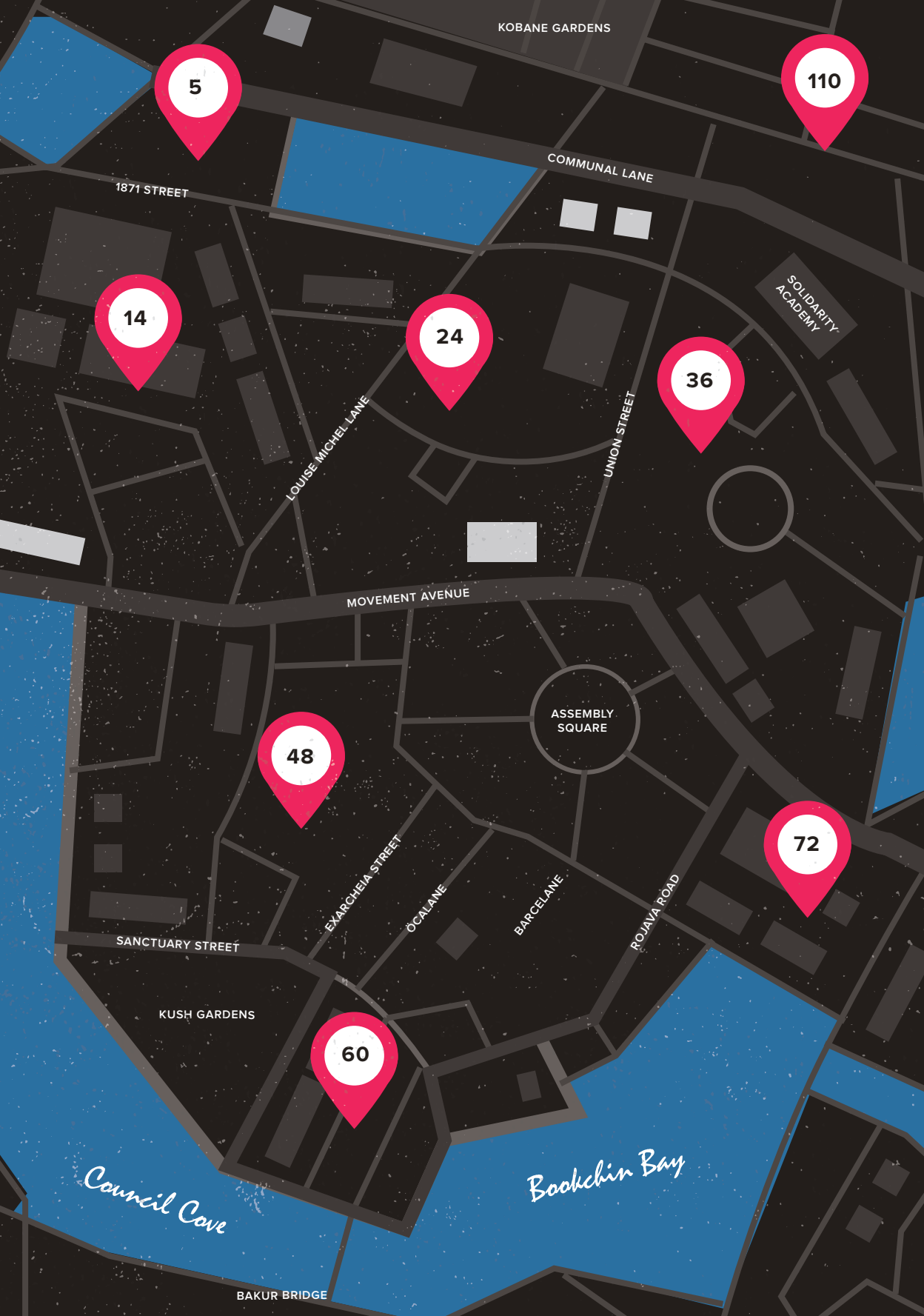
COMMUNAL LANE

1871 STREET

SOLIDARITY ACADEMY

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24

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LOUISE MICHEL LANE

UNION STREET

MOVEMENT AVENUE

ASSEMBLY SQUARE

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EXARCHEIA STREET

ÖCALANE

BARCELANE

ROJAVA ROAD

SANCTUARY STREET

KUSH GARDENS

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Bookchin Bay

BAKUR BRIDGE

Welcome to the
CITY OF THE FUTURE

LIBERTY LIBRARY

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COLLECTIVE CANAL

Eleanor Finley

The New Municipal Movements

Illustration by **David Istvan**

MUCH MORE THAN SIMPLY A STRATEGY FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE, RADICAL MUNICIPALISM IS EMERGING AS A PATH TO SOCIAL FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY BEYOND THE STATE.

Just a short time ago, the idea of the United States electing real estate mogul Donald Trump to the presidency seemed almost unthinkable. Yet now that this impossible proposition has come to pass, a new space has opened for visionary thinking. If electing Donald Trump is indeed possible, what other impossibilities might be realized?

To date, popular opposition to Trump has been expressed largely through mass demonstrations and street protests. On the day of Trump's inauguration, an estimated 2.9 million people marched throughout dozens of US cities. These watershed moments, such as the Women's March or the March for Science, present people with much-needed opportunities to feel catharsis, express solidarity and recognize shared values. Yet, as protests, they are inherently limited. Specifically, they fail to bring about a program for the deep institutional transformation that our society so desperately needs.

Beneath highly visible mobilizations, grassroots and municipal forms of opposition to Trump are also taking shape. Under the banner of "sanctuary cities," community-based organizations, faith groups, legal advocates and workers' centers, engaged citizens have been setting up crisis networks to support immigrant families living under the threat of deportation. These projects, structured largely on a neighborhood-to-neighborhood basis, challenge dominant assumptions about political participation and raise the crucial question of what it really should mean to be a citizen.

Meanwhile, mayors and city officials have surfaced as some of Trump's most vocal opponents. This past June, nearly 300 mayors, including nine of the ten largest cities in America, disobeyed the president's wishes and re-committed to the Paris Climate Accord. Whether these declarations amount to genuine acts of political defiance or merely symbolic gestures by local elites looking to advance their careers is tangential. What matters is that during a period of unprecedented political turmoil people are calling upon local officials to act on behalf of their communities — regardless of citizenship — rather than according to the wishes of a far-right regime. They are looking to their own municipalities as sites of grounded political action and moral authority.

THE MUNICIPALIST ALTERNATIVE

In the midst of this milieu, a small constellation of civic platforms have emerged with the purpose of transforming how US cities and municipalities are actually run. Blurring the lines between social movement and local governance, these municipalist experiments organize on the basis of existing municipalities or districts, demanding socially just and ecological solutions to issues that concern the community as a whole. Yet their common agenda extends far beyond electing progressive parties to local office. Patiently, through a combination of political education, grassroots mobilization and reform, municipalists seek to place decision-making power back in the hands of citizens. Municipalism is not simply a new strategy for local governance, but rather is a path to social freedom and stateless democracy.

The term "municipalism" itself derives from "libertarian municipalism," coined during the 1980s by social theorist and philosopher Murray Bookchin. By claiming the label "libertarian," Bookchin invoked its original meaning from nineteenth-century anarchism. In his view, essential concepts like "liberty" and "freedom" had been wrongly subverted and appropriated by the right wing, and it was

time for leftists to reclaim them. Nonetheless, the label "libertarian" has been dropped by many of the new municipal experiments. Most recently, the Catalan citizen's platform Barcelona en Comú (Barcelona in Common) has popularized municipalism as part of its political project in Catalonia, Spain. Their version of municipalism also ties closely to the theory and praxis of the commons, which they marshal to defend the city against runaway tourism and urban development.

> **"**
> *Municipalism is distinguished by its insistence that the underlying problem with society is our disempowerment.*

Municipalism is distinguished by its insistence that the underlying problem with society is our disempowerment. Capitalism and the state not only cause extraordinary material suffering and inequality, they also rob us of the ability to play a meaningful role in our own lives and communities. By seizing the power to make decisions, they deprive us of our own humanity and sense of purpose — they deprive us of meaning.

The solution, as municipalists see it, is direct democracy. To achieve this, we can cultivate the new society within the shell of the old by eroding the state's popular legitimacy and dissolving its power into face-to-face people's assemblies and confederations. This means

having faith that people are intelligent and want things to change. In Bookchin's words, libertarian municipalism "presupposes a genuine democratic desire by people to arrest the growing powers of the nation state." People can, and ought, to be the experts regarding their own needs.

Not all movements that align with a municipalist program refer to themselves as such. For example, the Kurdish freedom movement advocates a very similar model under the term "democratic confederalism." Bookchin himself later adopted the label "communalism" to highlight the affinity between his views and the 1871 Paris Commune. Virtually every region and culture of the world is fertile with some historical legacy of popular assemblies, tribal democracy or stateless self-governance. The question is how do we revive those legacies and use them to erode the dominance of capitalism and the state over the rest of society.

THE ROLE OF CITIES

Municipalities, towns, villages, city wards and neighborhoods provide the actual physical scale at which such an empowering politics can flourish. Historically, cities have drawn people together, facilitating diversity by encouraging cross-cultural interaction. This inherent feature infuses cities with a humanistic sensibility — and by extension also with radical potential. As Hannah Arendt put it, "politics is based on the fact of human plurality." Cities weave many different kinds of people together into a rich tapestry of everyday life.

Fear and distrust of cities has been a central pillar of Trump's far-right movement. The Trumpists are afraid of immigrants, black people and those who play with gender norms. They fear

elites, political domination and the economic precarity that ruthlessly dazzling cities represent. A whole gamut of caricatures are arranged in one foreboding image of a decadent cosmopolitanism.

These antagonisms are all the worse for the stark inequality found in major metropolitan areas. "Gentrification" comes nowhere close to describing the mass internal displacement taking place throughout the US. In San Francisco, a small, modest home costs about $3.5 to 4 million; simple one-bedroom apartments range from $3,500 to $15,000 per month to rent. Beneath the shimmering towers of tech billionaires, tent villages wedge precariously between the concrete pillars of highway underpasses. Meanwhile, the working poor are banished to isolated suburbs, where there is little street life and often no viable public transportation.

While European movements call for preserving urban residents' "right to the city," in the US we are the position of figuring out how to simply insert ordinary people back within the urban landscape. Capitalism has birthed distorted American cities. Their vast, jutting shapes convey the helplessness and alienation of capitalist social relations. What little livable space does exist in recent years has been gobbled up by real estate and high finance. This distorted rendering of urban life expands ever outward, converting farmland into parking lots, family-owned shops into Walmarts and tight-knit rural communities into dull suburban hinterlands.

Municipalism can combat the tendency for working people in rural areas to distrust cities — and the diverse people who occupy them — by putting power back into the hands of the people. Within cities, municipalists can advance programs to transform their inhumanly scaled physical and material characteristics. A municipalist agenda would ultimately seek to

MURRAY BOOKCHIN

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reclaim urban areas as places where people actually live, not simply go shopping. In rural and suburban contexts, municipalists can offer a vision of decentralization and independence from the state that is void of bigotry and abuse. Rural allegiances to extractive industries can be broken by offering ecological ways of life tied to local, civic decision-making. These are not easy tasks, but they are essential to the holistic social change we so direly need.

ORGANIZING FOR MUNICIPAL POWER

The municipalist movement in the US today is like a seedling. It is small and delicate, fresh and brimming with potential. Although we often look for leftist leadership in big cities like New York City or Chicago, these new municipal leaders are rooted in relatively smaller cities including Jackson, Mississippi and Olympia, Washington. Perhaps this shouldn't surprise us. As big cities are emptied of their original inhabitants and character, small and moderate-sized cities are offering relatively more opportunities for communal interaction and organization.

This summer, I had the opportunity to meet leaders from several municipal projects, including Cooperation Jackson, the Seattle Neighborhood Action Councils (NAC), Portland Assembly, Olympia Assembly and Genese Grill's District City Councilor campaign in Burlington,

Vermont. Consistently, these activists brought sophisticated analysis, raised challenging questions and shared innovative approaches to organizing. But what I found most striking was their ability to articulate utopian ideas with common-sense policies aimed at actually improving people's lives. Their political aspirations are serious and grounded in the belief that popular power really can offer superior solutions to difficult social issues.

In Seattle, the Neighborhood Action Coalition (NAC) formed during the dramatic aftermath of Trump's election. Like many anti-Trump groups, their primary goal is to protect targeted groups against hate crimes and provide immediate services. Yet instead of convening big, amorphous "general assemblies" like Occupy Wall Street, the NAC delineates its chapters according to Seattle's dozen or so city districts. Each neighborhood chapter is empowered to select its own activities and many groups have evolved through door-to-door listening campaigns.

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The NAC is creating new forms of encounter between citizens and city officials. Seattle is currently in the midst of a mayoral election with no running incumbent. The NAC is thus hosting a town-hall series called "Candidate Jeopardy," during which candidates are quizzed on a selection of citizen-authored questions. Like the game show *Jeopardy*, they must select within a range from easy questions to difficult. "Who will pick the low-hanging questions?" reads an event callout in the Seattle Weekly, "Who will pick the hard ones? Will we have a Ken Jennings [a famous Jeopardy contestant] of the 2017 elections? Come find out!"

The NAC may eventually find a friendly face in office. Nikkita Oliver, one of the front-runners, is a Black Lives Matter activist running on a platform of holding local officials accountable to the public. If she wins, Seattle's situation may begin to resemble Barcelona, where radical housing rights activist Ada Colau holds the mayorship.

In Portland, Oregon, the organization Portland Assembly uses a similar "spokes-council" model and enrolls new members to Portland's existing neighborhood associations. They are currently working to create a citywide, pro-homeless coalition; they advocate for radical reformation of the police. This spring, friends of Portland Assembly made newspaper headlines with the project "Portland Anarchist Road Care." Following

Neighborhood Action Coalition

SEATTLE, WA

Neighborhood Action Councils are autonomous communities of resistance, formed to provide immediate services and protection for marginalized communities through localized direct action. They are a way for neighbors to come together, build community, take care of each other's needs, and defend each other's interests. With the threat of an authoritarian regime, NACs provide self-sustaining alternative governance — resisting cuts to services from a corrupt leadership and safeguarding the most essential liberties of individuals.

"A practical, people-powered solution to the many known and imminent threats of a dangerous and authoritarian Trump regime."

SOCIAL SERVICES

★ Defray people's medical costs if they lose their insurance

★ Support people at risk of deportation or religious discrimination by showing up in rapid response to a visit by a persecutor

★ Put together a rideshare program for disabled and/or isolated people

SAFETY PRACTICE

★ Shelter and support undocumented immigrants and others threatened with deportation

★ Demand that businesses have gender-neutral bathrooms

★ Organize support for a local Black Lives Matter demonstration or take action in solidarity with a defense of native lands

a record-breaking winter, activists in familiar "black bloc" attire — with all-black clothes and bandanas covering their mouths — took to the city streets with patch asphalt and fixed potholes. Anarchist road care playfully disrupts the notion that those who advocate for a stateless society are reactive, destructive and impractical. It is also an excellent example of what Kate Shea Baird calls "hard pragmatism" — the use of small gains to demonstrate that real change is truly possible.

Perhaps the largest and most promising municipal movement in the US currently is Cooperation Jackson, a civic initiative based in America's Deep South. In a city where over 85 percent of the population is black while 90 percent of the wealth is held by whites, Cooperation Jackson cultivates popular power through participatory economic development. Over the course of decades, Cooperation Jackson and its predecessors have formed a federation of worker-owned cooperatives and other initiatives for democratic and ecological production. This economic base is then linked to people's assemblies, which broadly determine the project's priorities.

Like Seattle's NAC, Cooperation Jackson engages in local elections and city governance. Jackson, Mississippi's new mayor, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, comes from a family of famous black radicals and has close ties to the movement. Lumumba has endorsed Cooperation Jackson's initiative to build Center for Community Production, a public community center that specializes in 3D printing and digital production.

MUNICIPALISM'S REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL

These are just a few of the municipal experiments taking place throughout the US. Do these initiatives signal the birth of a revolutionary democratic movement? Will they rescue us from the jaws of fascism and realize our potential for a truly multicultural, feminist and ecological society? Perhaps — and we should all hope so. Indeed, something like a new municipal paradigm is taking shape with the recognition that anti-racism, feminist liberation, economic justice and direct democracy are intertwined. Enthusiasm for this paradigm brews at the city level, where diverse peoples are encouraged by their surroundings to hold humanistic views.

However, there are good reasons for municipalists to be wary and cautious. While radical leftists lay the groundwork of grassroots political engagement, liberal and "progressive" reform organizations like MoveOn and Indivisible are poised to absorb and divert this energy back into party politics. Ambiguous terms like "participatory democracy" are effective tools to engage people who are uncomfortable with terms like "radical" or "revolutionary." Yet they can also be easily exploited by institutions like the Democratic Party, who, humiliated and sapped of credibility, now look hungrily upon city and municipal elections.

Thus, engaging with "progressive" movements will no doubt be something of a chimera. On the one hand, they may be important allies in municipal campaigns and points of entry for political newcomers. On the other, they may crash a popular movement. And when these state-centered schemes fail, people will become upset and disillusioned — potentially re-channeling their dissatisfaction to support for the far right.

We do not need, as *The Nation* gleefully calls it, a new age of "big city progressivism." We need a non-hierarchical way of life that confers abundance and freedom to all. For today's municipal movements this means that:

★ **We must valorize the city not as it is, but as it could be.**
We must infuse the idea of citizenship with new meaning and call for radical citizenship based on participation within the municipal community, and not upon a state's bureaucratic approval.

★ **We must resist the temptation to impute our faith in benevolent mayors and other personalities, no matter how charismatic or well-intentioned, unless they seek to dissolve the powers they hold.**
Revolution is patient work. We are all of us unlikely to live to see the revolution we seek. Yet we have more tools at our disposal than we realize. The United States' own mythology is one of decentralization. In his book *The Third Revolution*, Murray Bookchin recounts the waves of popular assemblies that broke loose from their base in rural New England during the American Revolution and swept down to the Southern colonies. The Articles of Confederation and the Bill of Rights were concessions to popular pressure. Confederal thinking persists in the popular imaginations of even some of the most seemingly conservative individuals of our society.

As Ursula K. LeGuin put it: "We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings."

Today, most people believe that nothing can be done about their government. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. The bitter lesson of Trump's victory is that change — be it for better or worse — is the only constant in human affairs. As the science fiction and fantasy author Ursula K. LeGuin so eloquently put it: "We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings." The municipalist movement may be small, but its potential is revolutionary. ★

ELEANOR FINLEY

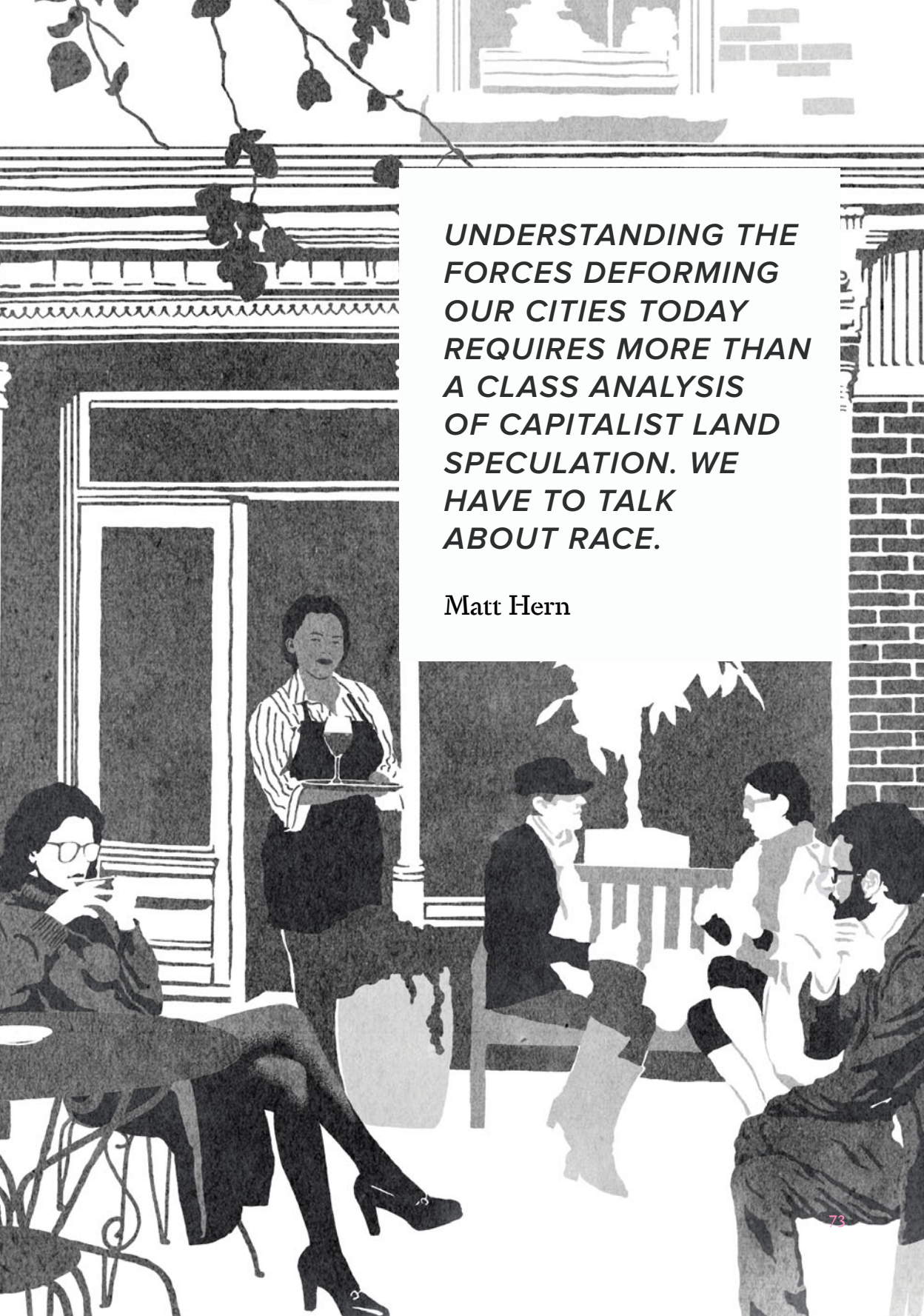*Eleanor Finley is a writer, teacher, activist and municipalist. She is also board member at the Institute for Social Ecology (ISE) and a PhD student in anthropology the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.*

This Land Is Whose Land?

Illustration by **David Istvan**

UNDERSTANDING THE FORCES DEFORMING OUR CITIES TODAY REQUIRES MORE THAN A CLASS ANALYSIS OF CAPITALIST LAND SPECULATION. WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT RACE.

Matt Hern

There is really no way to think about cities today without talking about displacements, and over the past few generations, *gentrification* has emerged as a broadly familiar frame for understanding the explosive changes that are disfiguring cities across the planet.

Gentrification has become so ubiquitous and commonplace that many of us are resigned to capital's inevitable capture of the best parts of every city. We all see the gentrifications around us. We know what it smells like. We instinctually know which neighborhoods are vulnerable. The neoliberal city is a vampiric city and we have all become inured to its feeding habits. But I am convinced that the dominant languages being invoked to theorize gentrification today fall short: they are necessary but not sufficient. Understanding urban displacements today requires a more nuanced engagement with racialized rationalities than is currently circulating in most gentrification literatures.

WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT RACE

In many places, patterns of classic rent-gap gentrification are easily visible: capital and wealthier homebuyers identify profit potential in particular neighborhoods and leverage their privilege to push lower-income residents out. This is what so many people recognize immediately and name as gentrification, and

> " *Cities today are being defined by racialized patterns of displacement and occupation. Tracing those genealogies is essential to fighting back.*

presume to be inexorable: successful, vibrant communities are always vulnerable to predatory capital. But understanding the contours of the forces that are deforming essentially every urban region today requires more than a class analysis of capitalist land speculation. We have to talk about race. And we have to do it in the context ongoing colonial narratives.

Cities today are being defined by racialized patterns of displacement and occupation, and tracing those genealogies is essential to fighting back. To my eyes, most critiques of gentrification paddle along shallowly, unwilling to see contemporary urban patterns as newer renditions of larger historicized rationalities. This tendency has rendered so much anti-gentrification writing and activism susceptible to easy, depoliticized evocations of "the commons," a stance that glosses over the racialized displacement and colonial accumulation that virtually every city is built on.

Today we are witnessing new urban articulations of much older stories of white supremacy. The great cities of the world have always been funded by pillage: built on stolen Indigenous land, funded by the colonial theft of wealth, constructed by slave labor, financed by ongoing speculation and profiteering. Every city in the world is defined by accumulation: the aggregation of wealth and resources in centers of power and control. In the midst of an era of unprecedented urbanization, that accumulation insists on displacement: capital rushes in and the rest of us can get the hell out of the way.

CENTRIFUGAL PERIPHERALIZATION

You know this story. It's so tiresomely familiar. You have seen displacement in every city you've ever been to. You know that gentrification is convulsing every city you care about. You know so many people who have been forced to move, so many neighborhoods that don't feel anything like the places you used to love. But gentrification is taking on another new(ish) vector, and the last decade has seen a new dominant form of racialized displacement emerge: one that might be called peripheralization. Across the planet new patterns of urban restructuring are inscribing themselves with ferocity. It is both evident to the everyday eye and statistically verifiable: urban cores are being acceleratingly dominated by waves of upscale residents and residences, investment properties, spectactularist touristic forays and all the social, cultural and architectural infrastructures that serve them.

In cities from Santiago to Seoul to Sofia and everywhere in between, new urbanist planning and recently carved circuits of capital driven by financialization and servicization are reshaping central districts and premium core neighborhoods, making them more attractive, more liveable and more vibrant. Those armed with financial firepower are being convinced *en masse* to embrace urban cores: agile real estate, developer and marketing interests, and new occupying forms of capital — encouraged and greased by progressive urban planning — are re-occupying cities with startling effects.

In so many cities across the planet there is a stark phenomenon unfolding: a peripheralization that is accelerating and augmenting racialized forms of segregation.

The sheer speed of this urban restructuring is aggressively pushing increasing numbers of less-privileged urban residents to the margins of cities, further and further away from the urban cores, where social marginalization is exacerbated by physical isolation and dispersal. It is not happening, of course, at the same velocity or in the same patterns everywhere — every city evinces its own peculiarities and tendencies — but in so many cities across the planet there is a stark phenomenon unfolding: a peripheralization that is accelerating and augmenting racialized forms of segregation.

This radical reshaping of inner and outer cities has a close relationship with the rapid suburbanization of poverty and thus a commensurate racialization of much of suburbia and the peripheries of urban areas. Speaking of the US, the Black Displacement Project says: "The proportion of the black population living in the biggest city of a given metropolitan area decreased in all twenty of the nation's largest metro areas in the past decade."

It is tempting to think about this as straightforward displacement — that the poverty once emblematic of (and virtually synonymous with) inner cities in many parts of the world is being centrifugally removed and rearranged on the urban edges — to *barrios*, tent cities, slums, shanty towns, *gecekondus*, *favelas*, *chabolas*, squatter villages, *banlieues* — but it's much more complicated than that. Contemporary displacement has to be understood in the context of aggressive neoliberal urban regimes. As manufacturing and industry is downsized, offshored and marginalized, urban cores are now made available to new forms of capital — and residential investment, typically via "condoization" — is by far the most profitable form, with core areas dominated by the wealthy and the low-level workers who serve them, with all the rest spun to the edges.

Saskia Sassen now speaks of "expulsions," which I think is a usefully evocative term. The necessary result of massive accumulation in a small number of hands is that vast numbers of people are being expelled from both the physical and economic centers of wealth and privilege.

THE CASE OF "PORTLANDIA"

Let me give you a very specific example of what I am talking about. Consider Portland, Oregon. You've probably heard of it. Maybe

> *By almost any measure Portland is North America's whitest city of any size, and it doesn't take much investigation to realize that this is no accident: the city has been — and is being — made that way.*

seen the TV show, possibly visited. It's a popular place. Portland enjoys a widespread and enviable reputation among residents, travelers, urbanists and hipsters alike. Once a gritty river city, now it is famous for its bikeability, strong transit system, neighborhood planning, eco-performativity, and energetic food and beer landscape. It consistently draws cultural and political accolades as ostensibly the best-planned city in North America: a jewel in an often-disheartening American urban landscape.

Or you might have thought about Portland after a horrific triple-stabbing and double homicide in May 2107 by an unadorned white-supremacist made headline news across the globe. The shock of that incident was exacerbated by a series of violent Trump-supporting "free-speech" rallies that were met with major

Antifa resistance. Racialized turbulence once again cast an ugly spotlight on what many think of as North America's most tolerant and liberal city.

It was this pleasant reputation that drew me to Portland in the first place. I started taking urbanist students there more than a decade ago and was immediately struck by all the things people talk about when they talk about Portland. Bars, bikes, cheap beer, music, easy transit, great neighborhoods. What's not to like? It was only upon closer inspection that my latent suspicions spilled over into a full-fledged interrogation. On second glance, one of the first things I noticed was that Portland is really, really white. In fact, by almost any measure it is North America's whitest city of any size, and it doesn't take much investigation to realize that

this is no accident: Portland has been — and is being — made that way.

In 1940 Portland was (incredibly) more than 98 percent white, and as more diverse populations filtered in post-WWII, the city aggressively funneled its Black population into one small neighborhood called "Albina," via official and unofficial consortiums of administrative officials, landlords, insurers and appraisers. Black movement out of the neighborhood was severely restricted by a range of compulsions from physical violence to economic disincentives to legal restrictions. At the same time, bankers and realtors enforced segregation fearing a "destruction of value" should Black people start inhabiting other neighborhoods. By 1960 four of five Black Portlanders lived in one 2.5-square mile area of Albina and its four elementary schools were more than 90 percent Black. While Black residents were contained to this one neighborhood, they were habitually denied bank loans for homeownership or repairs via redlining, meaning the neighborhood housing stock fell into significant disrepair. Albina is the result of a classic contain-and-disinvest strategy: an ongoing, systematic withdrawal of public and private capital that led to a slow overall decline of the community.

By the late 1980s, after several generations of *de facto* segregation and a paucity of support, the community was down enough that in a classic rent-gap scenario it was primed for new investment. Albina was perfect for gentrification: lots of cheap housing that had fallen into disrepair but was full of promise, the community looked like a ghetto but was full of "historical charm," and it was just across the river, very close to downtown. Young whites were ready, willing and eager — knowingly and/or ignorantly — to take advantage of the combination of historical segregation, community trauma and ongoing neighborhood disinvestment.

A WHITE LIBERAL PLAYGROUND

In 1993, the City of Portland published an official community plan for Albina calling for extensive neighborhood revitalization. They enacted a series of measures intended to displace existing residents and prime the area for new investments. And it was extraordinarily effective. In 1990, just under three-quarters of Albina residents were Black. By 2010, just 20 years later, the number had fallen to less than 25 percent and by every measure, official and vernacular, has continued to drop sharply and relentlessly since. In a short generation, more than 10,000 Black people have been moved out of Albina. And it wasn't just Black people moving out; it was whites moving in to take their place — very often literally. Within the census tract that roughly corresponds to what most people recognize as Albina, the population of residents who identify as "white-only" has shot up from 23 percent to a hair under 60 percent with commensurately dramatic gains across the economic spectrum. New businesses and community design features have arrived to serve them and property values and rents have spiraled up, with housing prices tripling and sometimes quadrupling (!) between 1990 and 2000 alone.

The Black population that was expelled from Albina overwhelmingly did not move to nicer areas. They were forced to the edges of the city, to the suburban peripheries where affordable housing was available but all the civic amenities Portland is famous for are largely lacking. More than that, Black households did not all reassemble in one area. They were scattered and dispersed, so that now there is no longer a single minority-majority neighborhood left in Portland, quite possibly the only major city in North America that can claim that. The Portland that is famous for its conviviality and

cultural vibrancy is now largely the exclusive realm of well-heeled whites. It's a phenomenon that has to be understood not as an unfortunate set of circumstances, an unforeseen confluence, or some bad luck, but as a deliberate, methodical effort.

Given the larger scope of the state's history, this story can be no surprise. As historian and author Walidah Imarisha puts it: "Oregon has always been a white utopian experiment. These same sentiments of Oregon as a white homeland reverberate today: the idea of Portlandia is as a white liberal playground." The state has a long and sordid history of official prejudice and discrimination towards Black, Jewish and Asian people (too long to fully document here) and of course all of that long racist history has been predicated on Indigenous land theft.

The state of Oregon was notorious for settler brutality toward indigenous residents (even in an era of widespread officially-sanctioned colonial barbarism). In 1850, the Oregon Donation Land Act forcibly removed all Indigenous people and offered their land free to any white settlers, who within seven years had claimed 2.5 million acres of it including all of the current city of Portland (the city was incorporated in 1851). This is the city's foundation.

When that maniac racist murdered people on a train, or when the alt-right aggressively assembles in the heart of the city, many people point to the national Trumpian climate of intolerance that nurtures these kinds of acts. I think this is true in many ways, but there is much more to the story. This one loathsome act, just like the ongoing dispersal of Albina's Black population, must be understood within the context Oregon's continuing history of racism and displacement. Portland is not some sad anomaly. I tell the story of this one city here, much too briefly, not to take gratuitous

PORTLAND IN 1890

THE POPULATION INCLUDED 519 BLACK PEOPLE, LESS THAN 1% OF THE CITY'S TOTAL POPULATION.

BOISE NEIGHBORHOOD IN ALBINA:

1990:
70% BLACK,
23% WHITE

2010:
27% BLACK,
60% WHITE

WOODLAWN NEIGHBORHOOD IN ALBINA

915

840

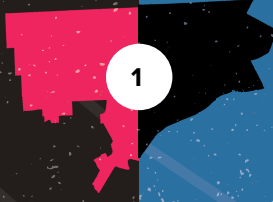BETWEEN 2000 AND 2010, 915 BLACK RESIDENTS MOVED OUT, 840 WHITE RESIDENTS MOVED IN.

DETROIT, MI

BLACK PEOPLE. IN BLACK NEIGHBORHOODS:
57.7%

BLACK POPULATION:
22.4%

1

BLACK POVERTY RATE:
33.3%

WHITE POVERTY RATE:
11.4%

CHICAGO ,IL

BLACK PEOPLE. IN BLACK NEIGHBORHOODS:
50.3%

BLACK POPULATION:
22.4%

2

BLACK POVERTY RATE:
29.4%

WHITE POVERTY RATE:
9.3%

RACIAL SEGREGATION

in US cities

TOP-4 MOST SEGREGATED CITIES

Racial segregation is still an everyday reality in many cities across the US. Major metropolitan areas are home to 28.7 million Black Americans, onearly one-quarter of whom live in segregated neighborhoods with a Black population of 80 percent or higher.

JACKSON, MS

BLACK PEOPLE. IN BLACK NEIGHBORHOODS:
47.7%

BLACK POPULATION:
48.4%

3
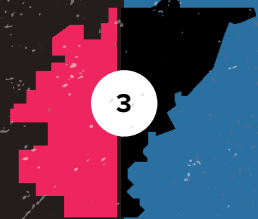
BLACK POVERTY RATE:
29.8%

WHITE POVERTY RATE:
9.9%

MEMPHIS, TN-MS-AR

BLACK PEOPLE. IN BLACK NEIGHBORHOODS:
47.2%

BLACK POPULATION:
45.8%

4
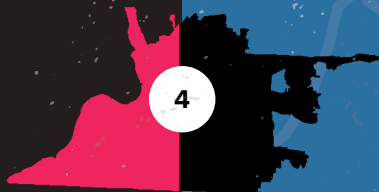
BLACK POVERTY RATE:
28.9%

WHITE POVERTY RATE:
9.7%

BASED ON RESEARCH BY 24/7 WALL ST. / 24WALLST.COM

potshots at an irritatingly-smug place (OK, maybe a little), but because it is representative of what is happening to cities across the globe.

GOLD RUSH

The much-lauded "great global rush to cities" that you have heard so much about — the claim that the world's population is for the first time history more than 50 percent urban — is sort of true, but mostly obscures what is actually going on. This claim is highly dubious and requires an untenable definition of where a city starts and stops. It is true to say that we are in the midst of a ferocious period of urban growth, but the vast majority of that urban population is being located at the peripheries where the amenities that make a place a "city" are substantially lacking. And of course, it always the most marginalized, and typically racialized populations that bear the brunt of this peripheralization.

These reconstituted forms of displacement are not new: they articulate long-held urban segregationist tendencies, but the patterns are new and often surprising. Urban gentrification and displacement today demands an agile and flexible set of resistances that are willing to dig deep and consider the historical foundations that current expulsions rest on. Gentrification is not enough to describe contemporary displacements: we have to understand historical patterns of accumulation and expulsion, and squarely face the thefts — of land, bodies and capital — that have built our cities. This requires a somewhat different set of resistances than is typically invoked today. Here are a couple of entwined ideas I have on what resistance demands:

1. Anti-displacement work has to be very cautious in invoking "the commons" as an all-purpose antidote for the neoliberal city. It is a deceptively malleable term that all-too-often flattens out subjectivities into one beige-colored "commonality," absent difference or history. "The commons" all too often fails claims of justice. Any talk of commonality has to account for incommensurability, for difference, and recognize the layered histories of violence and dispossession that are soaked in any soil. Claiming "commonality" cannot paper over or actively deny historicity. Invoking the commons doesn't wipe the slate clean. We do not all have, nor do we all deserve, equal access to any piece of land. Any claim to or for a commons has to first address expulsions: that is, the commons has to be predicated on rematriation and reparations.

2. All urban activists should reject every shitty argument that tries to pin the blame for unaffordable cities on "foreigners." There is a set of dangerous and cowardly arguments that are circulating, claiming that it is "foreigners" or "offshore money" that is the real cause of the housing crises gripping so many cities. This is absolutely untrue. The problem with our housing markets is that they are markets, turning land and homes into property on which to speculate and profit. The real or imagined ethnic or national background of any particular buyer makes no difference. The causes of our current crises are speculation, profiteering off shelter, governments in default of obligations to ensure affordable rental housing, and policy regimes that consistently privilege the most wealthy among us. Do not invoke veiled xenophobia in the guise of concern for inequality.

3. Creative resistance asks that we question any easy valorizations of home ownership. Turning land into property is at the heart of desultory neoliberal land politics, and widespread home ownership is nothing to wish for. As Matt Desmond has put it, speaking of the US: "The owner-renter divide is as salient as any other in this nation, and this divide is a historical result

of statecraft designed to protect and promote inequality." The dream of a nation of home-owners is a nightmare of deepening cycles of inequality, commodification of every nook and cranny of our lives, and the relentless fetishization of property. Security of tenure can be achieved in all kinds of ways and imaginative policy wedded to aggressive non-market politics can achieve the security and independence that ownership claims while disavowing profiteering from land. The policy instruments are well known and easily understood: Georgist land taxes, co-operative housing, shared and limited equity arrangements, community land trusts, municipally-socialized housing and much else are all policy tools and initiatives that are widely available and widely understood. What is lacking is political will and power.

4. It is vital to respect that every neighborhood has its own unique contours and histories. Take time to understand them and listen carefully to the voices there, even if they are voices you are not familiar or comfortable with. Seek out and listen to elders especially. And even more especially elders whose voices have been marginalized. All too often new arrivals to a place show up with all kinds of ambitious energy and fail to heed the warnings they should have seen all around them. I am absolutely guilty of this: all my fist-in-the air activist pretentions combined with youthful white-boy arrogance has certainly done damage that I had no idea I was doing. When I first arrived in the neighborhood we have rented in for the past 25 years, I was all piss-and-vinegar and ready to organize. I have instigated all kinds of initiatives and projects, large and small in a community I still love, and while many, even most of my efforts have been successful in various ways, many of the repercussions have proven complexly mixed. In the context of capitalist property markets anything that "improves" a neighborhood — makes it funner, funkier, more vibrant, safer, better serviced

— may also make it vulnerable to capital. If our activism and organizing is to be effective long-term and legitimately resist displacement, let's listen carefully to those who are already in place.

5. Most of us, and white people most especially, need to be more alert to our privileges. This, too, of course, is something I have far-too-often been blind to, despite all my pretentious intentions. But do not let self-reflection become self-absorption: paralysis is not useful. Fight through that shit, and keep asking who is speaking for whom, who is not being heard, where your voice resonates. Think hard about when and how you speak, and when and how you listen. Anti-gentrification all too often fails to ask deeper questions about who deserves to be on what land, and on what basis.

6. Paying attention and listening to what is already in place is most critical in the case of settlers. Gentrification and urban displacements are always closely tied to deeper racializations and always bound up with colonial logics — and in our case here in North America — settler-colonial rationalities. Listening to what and who is already here always means listening to Indigenous voices. Find ways to hear Indigenous speakers, activists and scholars. Take time, and then more time, to hear what Indigenous resistances to colonization are saying and learn how your organizing can begin there. Our resistance to gentrification has to be informed by and be a tool to support Indigenous land rematriations and colonial reparations: you cannot have a legitimate resistance to displacement without foregrounding originary land theft.

7. I believe that the political energy to resist displacement has to lie outside the state and the exhaustion of organizing through political parties. Be suspicious of any statist claims, but not dogmatically so. A real diversity of tactics has to enact a flexible series of commitments

that is willing to embrace everything from direct action to conventional political organizing. Do not get bound up in tiresome state vs. non-state posturing. Fidelity to place and neighbors — human and other-than — requires an agile and imaginative politics that is willing to try, and fail, and try again. The contours of effective resistance are always shifting: so be flexible in response, and do not fear trying anything.

The dream of a nation of homeowners is a nightmare of deepening cycles of inequality, commodification of every nook and cranny of our lives, and the relentless fetishization of property.

8. And finally, I'd suggest that the best resistances to displacement require simultaneous criticality and construction. There has to be a constant push-pull relationship to organizing, and the answers to predatory capitalist property relations cannot be simple nostalgia. Fighting back against displacement is bound up with thinking and constructing real alternatives. To my mind, those alternatives always return to non-market relationships with land — and those exist, have existed, and can surely exist again in every corner of the planet. Domination — delivered via colonial and/or capitalist rationalities — is not fate, but it is on us to articulate and build something else. Thinking and working outside the market is both really hard, and not at all. ★

MATT HERN

Matt Hern *lives and works in East Vancouver, Coast Salish Territories, with his partner and daughters. He has co-founded and directed many community projects and institutions including the Purple Thistle Centre, Car-Free Vancouver Day, Groundswell: Grassroots Economic Alternatives, and he is currently the co-director of 2+10 Industries.*

LATIN AMERICA'S NEW PARADIGM OF URBAN PLANNING SHOWS HOW EVEN BENIGN STATE INTERVENTIONS CAN MULTIPLY VIOLENCE AND REPRODUCE EXISTING RELATIONS OF URBAN INEQUALITY.

Tucker Landesman

Pacifying the Neighborhood

A contemporary parable among Brazilian urban planners when discussing the self-built settlements known as *favelas* is the account of the radical English architect John Turner's visit to Rio de Janeiro in the 1960s. After touring both *favelas*, considered slums blighting the urban landscape, and sprawling public housing complexes built on the city's peripheries by the military junta government and encouraged by the US foreign aid agency, he purportedly proclaimed: "you've shown me problems that are solutions and solutions that are problems." At the crux of his critique is the state's obsession with stamping out the informality of the working poor through eviction, demolition and out-of-sight substandard public housing.

For their part, residents fiercely contested eviction and fought to stay put. While many communities successfully resisted, hundreds of thousands of *favela* residents were forced from their homes during the twentieth century. However, without viable public housing policies for the working poor — many urban elites insisted that the poor belonged in the rural countryside — families continued to build their own homes and communities on unused land. By the beginning of the current century there were roughly 1,000 *favelas* in the city. And while Rio de Janeiro may be an extreme example, its urban history is similar to many of Latin America's metropolises.

Illustration by **Kaan Bağcı**

A NEW APPROACH TO URBAN PLANNING

Until relatively recently, the status quo in the cities of the Global South vacillated between neglect and persecution of the poor. In the past decade, however, we have seen a paradigm shift in urban policy, and cities in Brazil, Colombia and elsewhere are pioneering new approaches to urban planning and governance that recognize self-built settlements as legitimate, consolidated neighborhoods requiring intensive and sustained state intervention.

Whereas previous "best practices" models often spoke of *slum upgrading*, the new approach is often referred to as *slum integration*. These aggressively liberal campaigns have presented new challenges to resident activists and those advocating for the right to the city. Whereas in the past, liberals and leftists were united in denouncing the anti-poor policies of neglect, now they are confronted with far more complex strategies of state colonialization of *favela* space, quick-to-shoot militarized police, intensified bio-political projects and free-market land policies.

> **"**
>
> *The current paradigm of slum integration brews something of a paradox: while it responds to certain basic needs and rights, it is difficult if not impossible for governments to provide more public services without extending repressive forms of state power along with them.*

The current paradigm of slum integration thus brews something of a paradox for those organizing, researching or advocating from the left, because while it responds to certain basic needs and resident rights, it is difficult if not impossible for governments to provide more public services without extending repressive forms of state power along with them. Cities such as Rio de Janeiro and Medellín, in Colombia, have been held up for pioneering "slum integration" in highly inequitable, violently segregated cities. But critical research — including my own, based in Rio — has documented how even benign public interventions can reproduce hegemonic socio-spatial power dynamics. This is most evident in Rio de Janeiro when examining the novel policing strategy the government rolled out in order to establish a territorial "monopoly of violence." The program once heralded as groundbreaking by the news media, a global model by organizations such as the UN and World Bank, and a necessary advance by progressive urban security "experts" and academics is now on the brink of total failure.

Based on trials in Rio de Janeiro, determining whether to offer tacit or explicit support for state programs into under-served housing settlements, observers should consider whether the interventions support or repress residents' freedom of assembly and strengthen or undercut communities' popular sovereignty. In Rio de Janeiro, there were early signs that the policing strategy sought to curtail and regulate the freedom of assembly rather than protect residents' constitutional rights. Before shoring up any liberal consensus for state action, critical voices should insist on demilitarization of police power and an end to the war on drugs. In many cases, collectives of residents are already indicating the path forward — subverting hegemonic politics and exploring radical autonomy. Those of us interested in building better cities and working towards the right to the city should explore ways of scaling up successful initiatives.

THE "PROBLEM" OF URBAN INFORMALITY

Latin American cities, like most of the Global South, are home to sprawling housing settlements referred to as "slums," informal settlements or self-built neighborhoods. Long a subject of bane for local elites, slum housing or squatter settlements became a global issue relatively recently, when the UN, the World Bank and other international organizations gave urbanists and development experts a platform to declare a worldwide housing emergency. In 2003, UN-Habitat released *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlement*s, in which they constructed a universal category of housing as a growing threat to security, health and wellbeing.

In both vernacular, political and much of academic discourse, such settlements are also commonly constructed as spaces from which the state is absent. Abandoned or forsaken by the state, *favelas*, *barrios populares* and *villas miserables* are considered lawless or operating under parallel systems of criminal governance. Whereas historically these areas were constructed as problems due to their backwardness and squalor, we see a shift in recent history so that the problem is now their *informality*: the lack of planning, infrastructure, governance and guaranteed public services — that is to say, the lack of a state-imposed and state-maintained order.

Many cities with sprawling self-built settlements experience a concomitant crisis of public security. Gang crime and drug trafficking as well as petty theft and violent assaults are widely associated with *favelas* in the media. Despite the fact that poorer urban residents experience violence at disproportionate rates, fear of crime among middle- and upper-income residents plays a significant role in how cities are made to look and feel. In Brazil, the situation has become so severe that sociologists speak of "violent sociability" as a principal social order and urban scholars have documented how fear comes to dominate urban planning and architecture. These urban processes work to further "otherize" *favelas* as wholly separate from the "formal" city, thereby intensifying socio-spatial segregation and inequality.

When the status quo becomes politically untenable — that is to say, middle-class voters and wealthy power brokers form a consensus that *something must be done* — we see two broad responses by the state, one old and the other progressively innovative. The first is a turn to classic slum extermination campaigns through inhumane eviction-demolitions and half-hearted resettlement programs offering generally low-quality mass housing blocks far from city centers. The second approach, cele-

> *Whereas historically slums were constructed as problems due to their backwardness and squalor, now the "problem" is their informality: the lack of planning, infrastructure, governance and public services — that is to say, the lack of a state-imposed order.*

brated in Latin America, most notably in Brazil and Colombia, takes aim at informality itself, conceived here as the lack of state regulation and monopoly of violence. Going beyond the former best practice model of "slum upgrading," focusing on improvements to the physical infrastructure (roads, sanitation, geo-risk analysis, public leisure space), a paradigm of "*favela* integration" rolls out the state through urban planning, governance, public security, private-sector investment, local entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility and collective community action.

In Medellín, the strategy is named "social urbanism" and has much in common with Rio de Janeiro's *favela* integration: investments in large-scale transport infrastructure like cable-cars and escalators, the placement of public offices such as health, education and welfare services within the communities, spectacular public works such as libraries and parks aiming to improve public perception and attract local and foreign tourism, and incentives for community participation through cultural projects and democratic local decision making. Underpinning it all are novel public security strategies inspired by "community policing." In Rio de Janeiro, this program is known as *favela* pacification and aimed at reclaiming territory from drug-trafficking gangs, installing permanent police stations and posts throughout the *favelas* and establishing the rule of law while gaining the support of residents. Consolidating a state monopoly of violence was considered a necessary condition for sustained investment in the *favelas*.

But despite the progress achieved by such liberal governance and infrastructure campaigns, residents in Rio de Janeiro are indignant that the programs purporting to integrate the *favelas* have failed to deliver on basic promises. Many of the campaigns supporting cultural innovation and incentivizing political participation were toned down or defunded altogether. A major corruption probe revealed that the spectacular infrastructure projects were elaborate fronts for political money laundering, and the running of the libraries and gondolas were promptly privatized and then abandoned in the wake of a state-funding crisis. Moreover, gains in the reduction of violence were short-lived. The Police Pacification Program fractured shortly before the 2016 Summer Olympics and went into a tailspin quickly thereafter.

Favela residents feel the sting of state failure most acutely since many are still struggling for the basic conditions of a dignified life. Any détente that existed between rival gangs, paramilitary police mafias (known as the militia) and the state policing apparatus has fallen apart as gangs again stake territorial claims throughout the city and police officers supposedly trained to respect human rights slip back into a war-on-drugs mentality and practice: racial profiling, illegal search and seizure, threats against community activists, assassination plots, murder and cover-ups. Whereas prior to pacification gangs generally had close ties to the communities in which they operated, the police created an opportunity for new gangs (including from different cities) to expand territorially if they are willing to battle (or bribe) the police. A friend who lives in a once-gentrifying *favela* in Copacabana darkly joked that he overheard some of the invading gang members complain about their long commute from the far north of the city. In such cases, criminal factions may feel less responsible to residents and are quick to escalate suspicions and mistrust with violence.

A CONTROVERSY AMONG THE LEFT

In recent years, a major debate has emerged among the leftist intelligentsia — academics, architect-urbanists, journalists and influential community leaders — as to what extent the left should support or struggle against the integration of self-built settlements into the "formal city" and normative structures of governance. One the one hand, few would argue against interventions providing roads, sanitation, healthcare and education, which are rights demanded by residents themselves. On the other hand, these improvements are often predicated on the extension of a state monopoly of violence that is achieved through a dramatic intensification of militarized policing. In Rio, for instance, when the Police Pacification Program was rolled out, a political line was drawn in the sand and critical scholars were pressured to take a position: either cautiously accept the program as progress that needs continued reform, or condemn the militarization of *favela* space by a police system steeped in a history of revanchist, racist violence and shaped by the war-on-drugs mentality for the past three decades.

> " *Improvements in the provision of public services are often predicated on the extension of a state monopoly of violence that is achieved through a dramatic intensification of militarized policing.*

Those voices that opposed the pacification plan were painted as impractical radicals insensitive to the lived experience of *favela* residents and out of touch with popular demands to expel gangs and impose the rule of law. There were a few high-profile advocates and activists who managed to carve out a space between enthusiastic support and outright condemnation. They echoed calls for improved public security — tacitly supporting a state monopoly of violence — but criticized the concept of security through police-centered strategies, arguing that the only sustainable solution would include local populations in the oversight of police, health, education and urban planning interventions.

Many public security experts working in Brazil and observing from abroad enthusiastically welcomed the pacification interventions. They parroted the rhetoric of the state "liberating" the *favelas* from drug gangs and formed a pivotal part of the consensus that "something drastic must be done" in order to integrate the favelas into society. To some extent, their position that external interventions are complicated by gang ter-

ritorialization is substantiated since projects often require clandestine negotiations through community leaders. There is also anecdotal evidence that substantial bribes were paid to gang bosses to allow flagship public works in the run-up to the sporting mega-events. And there have been discrete cases of violence against laborers working on infrastructure interventions in the *favelas*.

Despite the complexity of political alliances and security policy that resulted in the *favela* pacification program in Rio, or the similar policing strategy rolled out in Medellín, the argument that such programs represent progress and therefore must be supported by critical scholars and advocates is fundamentally flawed. For one, the state's claim to a monopoly of violence in the *favelas* is contested not only by heavily armed drug-trafficking gangs and politically sanctioned paramilitary mafias, but also by the fact that police officers are historically the principal perpetrators of violence against civilians living in *favelas*. Decades of research into public security and the war on drugs have labelled the police "violence multipliers," such that their tactics systematically increase drug crime and violence.

In June of this year, one of the controversies involving the Rio de Janeiro police corporation was a widely-practiced scheme in which officers would kidnap low-level drug-trafficking gang members for ransom paid by gang leaders. In one instance, police responded to the gang's insistence that they didn't have the cash to pay by telling them to go out and rob it. To cover up their work, offending police officers boost their drug-arrest statistics by falsely accusing poor drug-users of being narcotics dealers.

Moreover, the claim made by both state and civil-society actors that innovative policing "liberates" the neighborhoods and delivers long-withheld rights of citizenship is contradicted by police practices that suspend or limit those very civil liberties they supposedly guarantee. Here Judith Butler's recent work in political philosophy on freedom of assembly is particularly illuminating. In short, Butler asserts that freedom of assembly is a fundamental precursor to democratic politics and therefore exists independently from specific rights granted by the state. This assertion is made plain when a state prohibits assemblies that call its sovereign legitimacy into question or when the people cannot assemble without fear of state intervention and police brutality. In the case of "pacification" strategies that claim to deliver and protect the citizenship of *favela* residents, systematic tactics that monitor, regulate and limit the activities of residents (like stop-and-search, control of public gatherings for festivals or parties, illegal entrance to homes and seizure of personal property) contradict not only the mission of democratic governance but also threaten the legitimacy of the state itself. As Butler writes:

> " *As long as the state controls the very conditions of freedom of assembly, popular sovereignty becomes an instrument of state sovereignty, and the legitimating conditions of the state are lost at the same time that the freedom of assembly has been robbed of both its critical and its democratic functions.*

One of the controversies surrounding the police pacification in Rio de Janeiro was the official banning of funk dance parties — a genre of music originating from the *favelas* blending hip-hop and bass-heavy electronic music — for their supposed historical connection to drug gangs and anti-police sentiment. While a clear violation of residents' civil rights, this move was codified by municipal law giving local police commanders authority to approve or

prohibit cultural and political activities within the borders of "pacified" *favelas*. Clearly the people's sovereign ability to assemble is preempted by the very strategy the state claims to guarantee rights and citizenship. As Butler notes, this contradiction undermines the legitimacy of the state itself as its territorial right to a monopoly of violence in the *favelas* is at the cost of democratic principles.

A WAY FORWARD

The main mistake of progressives and formerly leftist scholars who supported "pacification" was in either ignoring the above contradiction or accepting the — hopefully momentary — suspension of freedom of assembly as the cost of "peace." Regardless, trusting the police to abandon a war-on-drugs mentality without any tangible change of policy or law now seems naïve at best. Critical scholars and progressives working on government politics and policy should insist that the only way forward in the *favelas* is to end the war on drugs. Rather than supporting severe campaigns to establish a state monopoly of violence, we should incorporate the demilitarization of police and the decriminalization of narcotics as necessary conditions for sustainable success. Additionally — indeed, most obviously — we should follow the lead of organized resistance within the *favelas*.

We could consider those engaged in subversive struggles in two broad categories. First are those engaging with the state to improve the material conditions of *favela* neighborhoods through democratic governance. The abovementioned liberal consensus that *favelas* are constitutive of the legitimate city added credence to campaigns calling for public interventions beyond basic urbanization — paved roads, street lighting, trash collection,

postal addresses and public squares — but also locating education and health centers and additional public offices that historically have only been offered in "formal city" neighborhoods. In the later decades of the twentieth century, many community organizations and NGOs emerged leading such a charge and their influence is noticeable in the discourse of current public policy.

Because many of such organizations work with local politicians and rely on public funds to run community programs, they are vulnerable to criticisms of state co-optation and liberal "NGOization" of community organizing. While there are large and small NGOs worthy of such criticism, especially in regards to their enthusiastic support of the militarization of *favela* space through the pacification programme, wholesale dismissal of such groups is unjustified. A more generous, nuanced analysis recognizes a Gramscian strategy to occupy spaces of power and destabilize center-periphery spatial power dynamics in the city. Many of these groups are led by what we might consider the old guard of activists who came of age under military dictatorship and conceive of liberation through wielding or manipulating state power to serve working populations and the dispossessed.

A second category of subversive struggle has gained much ground in the twenty-first century. A generation of youthful activists are pioneering new relations of power independent of bourgeois institutions. Disenchanted with the state, these strategies are diverse but often employ technologies of infrastructure (both digital and physical) that strengthen community and build local solutions independent of state institutions and partisan politics. As such there are many parallels to anarchist, autonomist and black feminist thought. While these struggles take a decidedly different path,

they are not wholly divorced from the organizations of the old guard. Many of the youths stepping up as leaders today are products of established community organizations and projects and find mentorship, resources and alliances with influential NGOs.

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> *The inclusion of social movements in the formulation of urban planning can help ensure that public interventions respond to residents' rights and needs without extending repressive police power and reproducing existing relations of urban inequality.*

Small groups of activists have amplified voices by forming media collectives and news outlets devoted to local stories, covering state program failures and documenting police abuse. Using amateur and semi-professional equipment and employing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsAPP group messaging and online news platforms, these initiatives confront the media blackout on the daily lives of *favela* residents in conflict zones as well as driving stories about art, culture and ingenuity of local residents. Further along the road of autonomous strategies are initiatives that

respond to decades of neglectful public investment: libraries and community spaces maintained by local residents, small-scale urban farms, local alternative currencies and self-contained bio-waste treatment and recycling systems.

In addition to building consensus to end the drug war and demilitarize the police, critical scholars and urban planning experts should work to broaden the reach of these autonomous projects. Despite some success, activists and NGOs have encountered difficulty in scaling up such initiatives, and it would be naïve to suggest that micro-interventions could substitute for large-scale public investment. The Brazilian scholar Marcelo Lopez de Souza has offered a valuable framework for *autonomist planning* that may provide a roadmap for progressive urbanists and scholars. The inclusion of social movements in the formulation of urban planning and of residents in budgetary decision-making are two examples from Brazil that address the paradox mentioned at the opening of this essay — how public interventions may guarantee urban services and protect residents' rights without extending repressive police power and reproducing existing relations of urban inequality. ★

TUCKER LANDESMAN

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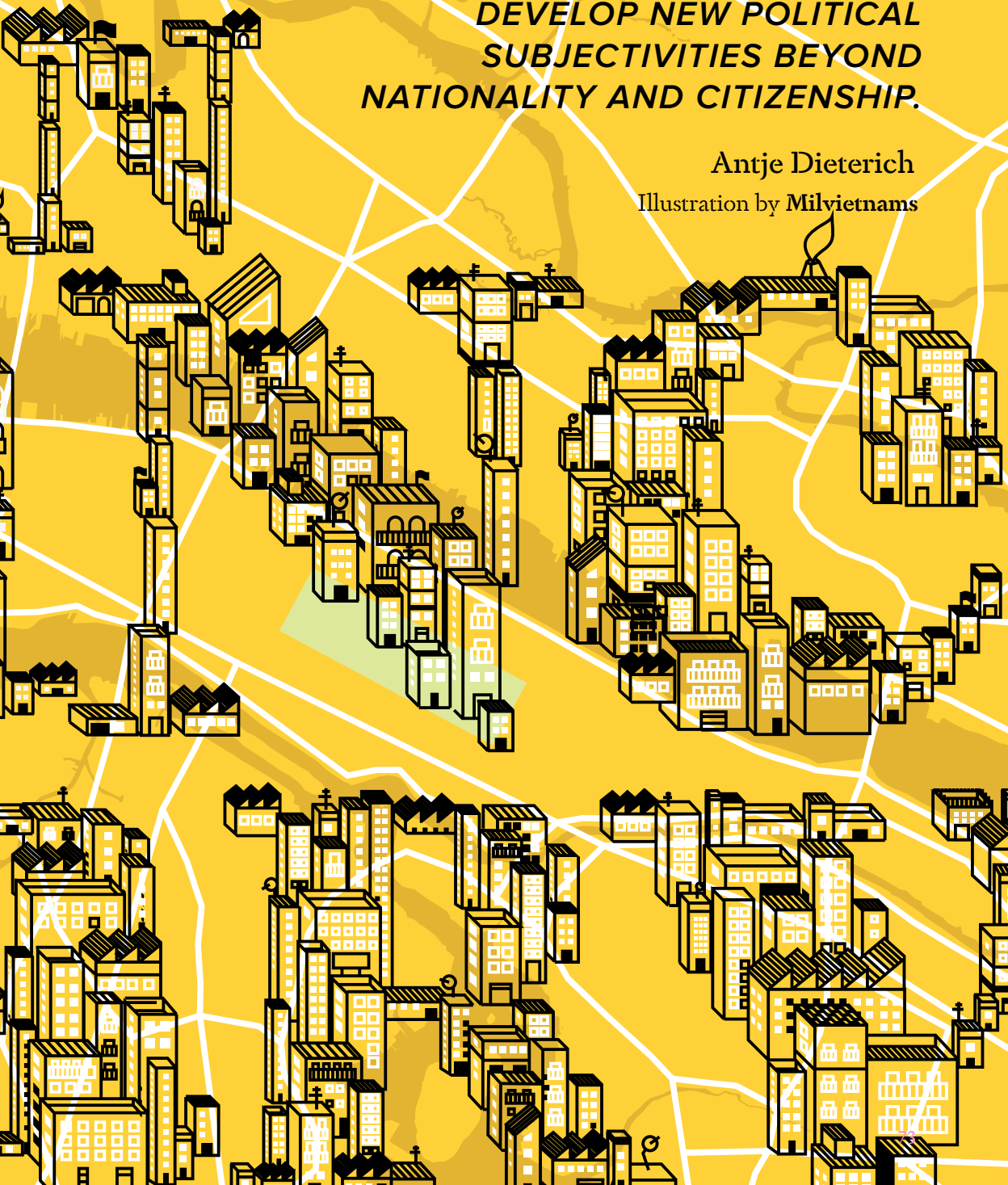
The Promise of Solidarity Cities

AS THE SITES OF A SHARED LIVED EXPERIENCE, CITIES OFFER A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP NEW POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITIES BEYOND NATIONALITY AND CITIZENSHIP.

Antje Dieterich

Illustration by **Milvietnams**

Sanctuary cities, solidarity cities, fearless cities, rebel cities — in recent years, we have witnessed the emergence of a new cycle of struggles around the theme of urban space in various parts of the Global North. For those in the United States, it is almost impossible not to have heard of sanctuary cities (where municipal authorities refuse full compliance with national immigration laws to offer limited shelter and public services to undocumented migrants and refugees), or at least of Donald Trump's threats to end federal funding for them. In Canada, the cities of London and Montreal recently declared themselves sanctuary cities as a direct reaction to Trump's xenophobic anti-immigration discourse.

The idea of the sanctuary city also extends to Europe, where it is attracting increasing attention from journalists and researchers alike. These developments clearly show how the notion of the sanctuary city has gained political salience over the last years, constituting a growing threat to the neoliberal and conservative order of things across the globe. It is this radical potential of sanctuary cities that motivated us to adopt the concept here in Berlin, trying to improve urban living conditions while simultaneously working on the further development of the political concept itself. The notion of the sanctuary city is flexible, depending on the needs and orientations of the communities pushing for it, which

sometimes leaves it vulnerable to cooptation or sheer meaninglessness. But aside from the legitimate critiques and questions that can be raised, the potential of sanctuary cities to offer new organizational structures is promising enough to warrant a closer look.

PROTECTION, SERVICE AND HOSPITALITY

If there is one common denominator behind the different municipalities that claim the mantle of sanctuary city, it is to make urban spaces safely accessible, independent of formal residency status. Beyond that, the shared attributes are very limited. In North America, for instance, some cities focus on ending the collaboration between federal deportation agencies and the local police. Others focus on municipal policies that allow "access without fear," so that undocumented migrants can access medical, educational and other social services without having to fear that the respective service providers will inform deportation agencies. Others still just seem to claim the title to signal that the city ambiguously aims for a non-racist living environment.

> " *If there is one common denominator behind the different municipalities that claim the mantle of sanctuary city, it is to make urban spaces safely accessible, independent of formal residency status.*

These differences are mirrored in the identities and strategies of the actors fighting to make their city a sanctuary city. In some places, the main protagonists are strong grassroots movements, pushing the city's government to imple-

ment protective legislations. The No One Is Illegal campaign in Toronto is one such example. In other places, the city's government declares the city a *de facto* sanctuary city without further legal changes. National City, California is an example of this approach. In others still, grassroots movements fight for a sanctuary city based on informal support structures, with the city's government actively opposing their efforts. Miami, Florida is currently an example of this type of case.

To understand the many differences and similarities, a short overview of the history and context of the concept of the sanctuary city is therefore helpful. The term sanctuary city can be found over many centuries, crossing state lines and religious divides and standing for some kind of protection within the city walls — often protection from oppression or persecution. The modern concept, however, was developed in the US as a reaction to increasingly restrictive migration policies and a rapid retreat of the social state. When the sanctuary movement first surged in the 1980s, explicitly left-wing political projects like the Black Panthers faced waves of violent police repression. This created a political vacuum that churches with left leanings could exploit, due the kind of discursive and legal protections they enjoy. So, when growing numbers of refugees began to arrive in the US as a result of the civil wars in Central America, these churches formed a sanctuary movement.

In the early years of the movement, religious communities simply offered first aid — shelter, food and the like. But with both faith-based community-building and the illegalization of migration on the rise, the step to provide further protection to migrant communities was not too far off. Throughout the 1990s the notion gradually developed into a more explicitly political concept, with different actors no longer just requesting shelter but increasingly claiming a right to full participation in the everyday life of the city.

SANCTUARY CITIES IN EUROPE

In 2005, the political — rather than religious — concept made its way to Anglophone Europe, with an alliance of grassroots movements in Ireland and the UK pushing for collective urban hospitality for refugees, starting with the City of Sanctuary organization founded in Sheffield that year. By 2007, the activist platform had managed to implement the first legal changes in Sheffield and beyond.

In the next years, the concept spread to the European continent, where a variety of factors were radically changing the political landscape. For starters, the Arab Spring opened Europe's external borders to refugees and migrants from different African states, enabling large migration flows that had previously been held back by agreements between the EU and local dictators. At the same time, the countries where most refugees arrived — Greece, Italy and Spain — were hit particularly hard by the consequences of the global financial crisis. Due to the so-called Dublin Regulation, an EU law that regulates member-state responsibilities for asylum seekers, these countries were pretty much left to deal with the sudden increase in arrivals by themselves, even as they were forced to implement rigorous austerity programs, stripping their population of much-needed social security and public services.

These conditions in turn led to the development of different mutual aid projects and solidarity campaigns. Athens is known for its solidarity clinics, Barcelona developed solidarity housing projects, and Naples institutionalizes the cooperation with social movements

1980s

SANCTUARY MOVEMENT, US

In response to strict immigration regulations that made it difficult for Central Americans fleeing civil war at home to claim asylum in the US, the Sanctuary Movement was founded to provide these refugees with shelter, safe-havens and legal aid in one of the many affiliated congregations across the country.

1,000,000

CENTRAL AMERICANS ENTERED THE US SEEKING ASYLUM BETWEEN 1980-1991

150

CONGREGATIONS OPENLY DEFIED THE GOVERNMENT IN THE 1980S, PROVIDING AID AND SHELTER TO SALVADORIAN AND GUATEMALAN REFUGEE FAMILIES

440

SANCTUARY CITIES IN THE US BY 1987

FROM SANCTUARIES TO REBEL CITIES

2005

CITIES OF SANCTUARY, UK AND IRELAND

The City of Sanctuary movement began in 2005 in Sheffield, UK and has since developed into a national network of local organizations, councils, faith groups, etc. to build a culture of hospitality for people seeking sanctuary in the UK. The goal is to create a network of towns and cities throughout the country which are proud to be places of safety for people seeking sanctuary and helping them become part of local communities.

90
INITIATIVES WERE SUPPORTED BY CITIES OF SANCTUARY ACROSS THE UK AND IRELAND

84
CURRENT NUMBER OF CITY OF SANCTUARY GROUPS

118,995
ESTIMATED NUMBER OF REFUGEES LIVING IN THE UK, OR 0,18% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION IN 2017.

2010s

SANCTUARY-REBEL CITIES ALLIANCE, EU AND THE US

The combined effect of the financial crisis of 2007-8 and the major influx of refugees into Europe following the Arab Spring and Syrian civil war starting in 2011, was that the plight of the refugees became intermingled with that of other victimized and marginalized groups in Europe's urban centers. A new wave of grassroots initiatives aimed at empowering local governance structures recognizes the joint struggle of all those excluded by mainstream politics. The aggressive deportation policies of both the Obama and Trump administrations have given Sanctuary Cities a key role in the migrant solidarity movement in the US.

75%
OF EUROPEANS LIVE IN URBAN CENTERS

1,000,000
REFUGEES ENTERED EU IN 2015 ALONE

200
STATE AND LOCAL JURISDICTIONS DID NOT HONOR REQUESTS FROM ICE TO DETAIN INDIVIDUALS IN THE US IN 2015

— to name but a few. Throughout this process, the term sanctuary was sometimes replaced with the more fitting term solidarity. As in the US, the composition of social forces behind these different sanctuary and solidarity cities varies widely. The mayor of Naples, for instance, seeks to enable a diversity of solidarity initiatives, the anarchist movement in Athens runs self-managed squats, and different social movement organizations in Barcelona are participating in the local government.

In all of these cities, however, new initiatives emerged that did not focus purely on undocumented people, but on all people who are excluded from the everyday life of the city. It is this imaginary of solidarity that is currently also animating our municipal project in Berlin.

CONDITIONS IN GERMANY: BETWEEN IMAGE AND REALITY

Living an illegalized life in Germany is very hard, if not impossible, to accomplish. Legal and historical developments created a particular terrain for refugees and, with it, for solidarity city initiatives. Spoiler alert: Germany has a history of xenophobia. "Not to be a land of immigration" was, for the longest time, part of the country's national identity — also after the war. Even when programs were developed to attract foreign workers, needed for the rapidly growing industry of the 1950s and 1960s, these workers were defined as "guest workers" (in the West) or "contractors" (in the East) who were expected to leave after their work in Germany was completed. As a result, both German states followed exceedingly strict policies of segregation and ghettoization.

> *Living an illegalized life in Germany is very hard, if not impossible, to accomplish. Legal and historical developments created a particular terrain for refugees and, with it, for solidarity city initiatives.*

The anti-immigration state discourse is reflected in legal conditions that are relevant for the solidarity city concept. It starts with Germany's blood-bond citizenship, as opposed to the soil-bond citizenship of the United States, that makes it very hard for people to leave the precarious status of illegality through a safety net built by families. Another obstacle is the asylum legislation. Although the right is established in

the constitution, it is nearly impossible to be granted asylum in today's Germany. Since the early 1990s, any person who entered a "safe third country" before reaching Germany will be deported back to that state. What this means in practice is that, if you did not manage to get a direct flight from your respective homeland in crisis to Germany, including all the required papers, stamps and visa, the German state will do everything in its power to prevent you from establishing an existence here. And the state's tools are simple: it refuses to provide work permits, limits freedom of movement to a single municipality (sometimes a state), blocks access to education, and provides only very limited and defective shelter, often in isolated large camps.

The combination of the long-standing segregation between migrant and non-migrant communities and the extreme restrictions faced by asylum-seekers and refugees in everyday life creates extreme obstacles to successful self-organization. And yet despite these challenges, refugees began to massively self-organize around 2013 (although there had been various attempts before that time, they mostly did not reach the same level of success). One of the most important steps in 2013 was to move from the remote camps provided by the state into the city centers. Churches, squares, parks, monuments and abandoned school buildings became the spaces where asylum-seekers and refugees established a new social visibility. From there, the struggle grew exponentially: by 2015, as millions of refugees and undocumented migrants arrived on Europe's shores, every city in the country had some kind of welcoming initiative. The emergency shelters closed their doors to volunteers as there were just too many. On the night of September 4, these solidarity efforts went viral when Angela Merkel and her Austrian counterpart let trains full of refugees pass the borders from Hungary for one day.

So, all's well that ends well, then? Hardly. While the pictures of welcoming Germans looked good on camera, the reality was quite different. Every small concession that refugees and undocumented people — along with their supporters — obtained was answered with a hard backlash: less than three weeks after Merkel supposedly opened the borders, the federal government implemented another set of cutbacks on the right to asylum, leading to mass deportations of ethnic minorities to the newly defined "safe states" of Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo, where many had suffered from violent oppression.

There are countless examples for such back-and-forths. In January 2015, limitations on the freedom of movement were abolished, only to be re-introduced in November, this time with the possibility to immediately deport people who leave their designated municipality more than once. Similar developments took place over the past two years, with changes in allowances, access to education, special protection for unaccompanied minors, and so on. The latest reform from May 2017 introduces massive invasions into the privacy of refugees (such as random cellphone searches), increased "detention pending deportation" and ankle monitors. These legal changes are small steps in a long and ongoing process towards the total abolition of the right to asylum in Germany. Despite huge waves of support and sympathy from society, the actual legal conditions for the vast majority of refugees have dramatically worsened over the last years.

SOLIDARITY CITY BERLIN

It has become clear, then, that even mass mobilizations in solidarity with refugees were not enough to get us anywhere. The state has adapted to our tactics: demonstrations were

simply allowed to move peacefully through the city, slowing down traffic here and there, but not leading to any real political change. The squatting of an old school building provoked a short, extreme reaction, but when the state realized that eviction was not a feasible option it changed its strategy, waiting the squatters out until public attention passed on.

With a federal government that had time on its side, and successfully developed a façade of "caring" about refugees, we, too, needed a new idea, a new discourse, a new strategic response. With cities in Southern Europe struggling for solidarity in times of extreme austerity, and with North American movements working on strategies to protect their undocumented community members, we had good examples for the development of a new battle plan; one that focuses on the right to move, live, learn or work in our city. We "simply" had to adapt these ideas to our local conditions.

We quickly discovered that, within our city and our everyday lives produced in it, we are able to find answers to very general political questions, such as the issue of political subjectivity under the conditions of social fragmentation produced by neoliberalism. The subjectivity we aim to mobilize is simply our neighbors — people who live in the same urban space. We don't have to construct a shared history, because we define our "we" through our shared everyday space. Some

definitions change with this new strategy, first of all the divisions between refugees, undocumented people and citizens. With the changes in asylum legislation, it is only a matter of time until many refugees become illegalized — but beyond that, we share many problems experienced in our everyday lives relating to the consequence of austerity, gentrification or even changes in labor laws.

With this less strict separation of actors comes the understanding that deportations, as executions of German national asylum legislation, are just part of the wider problem that we identify as European neoliberalism. With its need for surplus labor it leads to the erosion of the social state, workers' protections and affordable housing, forces people to move from the South to the North, and leaves us all to fight over the bread crumbs. In short: among our neighbors, we can find a variety of oppressed groups that quite often share very similar experiences of everyday life in the city.

What we needed for this idea to become a useful strategy was a formalized space to develop more concrete ideas. With the help of comrades from No One Is Illegal in Toronto we created this space through the formation of an alliance. Its member organizations, largely consisting of refugees and undocumented people, remained focused on questions around a precarious residency status — not because we think that residency is the only problem people face, but

> "
> *The subjectivity we aim to mobilize is simply our neighbors — people who live in the same urban space. We don't have to construct a shared history, because we define our "we" through our shared everyday space.*

Solidarity City Berlin

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL

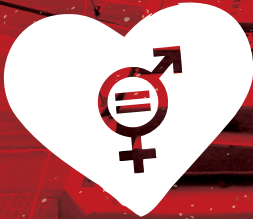**HEALTH**

LABOR RIGHTS

EDUCATION

ACCESS TO CITY ADMINISTRATION SERVICES

HOUSING

ELECTORAL RIGHTS (IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS)

EQUAL LEGAL TREATMENT AND PROTECTION FROM RACIST AND SEXIST VIOLENCE

Making Berlin a Solidarity City means securing access to city services for people with restricted or undocumented legal statuses. SCB is an organization of migrants, refugees, or undocumented people, groups that are already providing services for people in precarious situations, and additional/other allies.

SOLIDARITY-CITY-BERLIN.ORG

because it is a factor that makes many other fights harder. In debates and inquiries, we began to identify that the most important fields for the undocumented and refugees in our alliance could be divided into five fields: health, education, work, housing and protection from and by the law.

> **"**
>
> *Among our neighbors, we can find a variety of oppressed groups that quite often share very similar experiences of everyday life in the city.*

We then decided to develop policy proposals for each of these issue areas, answering the questions: "What are the concrete problems?" and "What would concrete solutions for these problems in Berlin look like?" Answering these questions involved doing research and it also meant looking for small, possible reforms. Beginning with the issue area of health, we have so far reached a pretty clear understanding of the possibilities to provide healthcare coverage for everyone in Berlin, including some clear and simple outlines for a potential system to be put in place.

A MODEL OF URBAN SELF-GOVERNANCE

By producing concrete proposals, we are able to approach political decision-makers and force them to position themselves around our key demand. "No borders, no nations?" All

for it. But the mayor of Berlin isn't, and most people have no way to imagine a world without nations. Denying children the ability to receive healthcare, on the other hand, is much harder to sell to your electorate. With the understanding that our community consists of all our neighbors, we then make this unifying idea a guideline for further research. We try to develop policy proposals that, first, do not allow for a separation based on residency status, and second, serve as stepping stones to make the voice of social movements heard, in order to better protect ourselves from the backlashes that have tainted past successes.

For health, this involves demanding universal coverage for people without insurance, whether they are undocumented, come from another European state, or have just fallen through the cracks of the system for whatever reason. It also means that we want to participate in a newly developed institution, like an advisory board composed of neighbors and social actors. This allows us to consolidate our achievements in healthcare provision but also to slowly co-construct a more participatory form of urban self-governance. If local institutions become more and more democratically controlled, this in return allows for further social mobilization and the participation of larger groups of people in local politics. Our horizon for Berlin would therefore be to develop a complex of participatory institutions that allow us to learn, live and work in our future sanctuary.

With similar problems all over Europe and beyond, parallel ideas developed. Terms such as *cities of change, rebel cities* or *solidarity cities* stand for different attempts to connect cities with similar imaginations of a radical urban future. Instead of running against slow and powerful federal governments or trying to change the neoliberal base of the European

Union, the idea is to create something like a confederation of cities, pushing for change outside or rather parallel to larger governmental structures. Such attempts have an extensive history in Europe, where cities have long been the place of liberation, sanctuary, and yes, citizenship. If we take into account the fact that 70-75 percent of the European population lives in urban spaces, it is not too hard to imagine that important changes will be effected by this key demographic. Cities, to us, are the first step — or a parallel move, rather — in a broader conquest of democracy that can eventually begin to erode the nation state and the European Union as we know it.

> *Cities, to us, are the first step in a broader conquest of democracy that can eventually begin to erode the nation state and the European Union as we know it.*

Sounds more like a dream of the future? Absolutely, but it is a dream worth fighting for — and one that can be divided into small, feasible steps. Perhaps we shouldn't even call it a dream, but rather a political horizon we can work towards together. With such a shared horizon in our minds we can — and should — begin to coordinate our different efforts, contextualize the local fights we win and put these small victories to work within our larger frame. ★
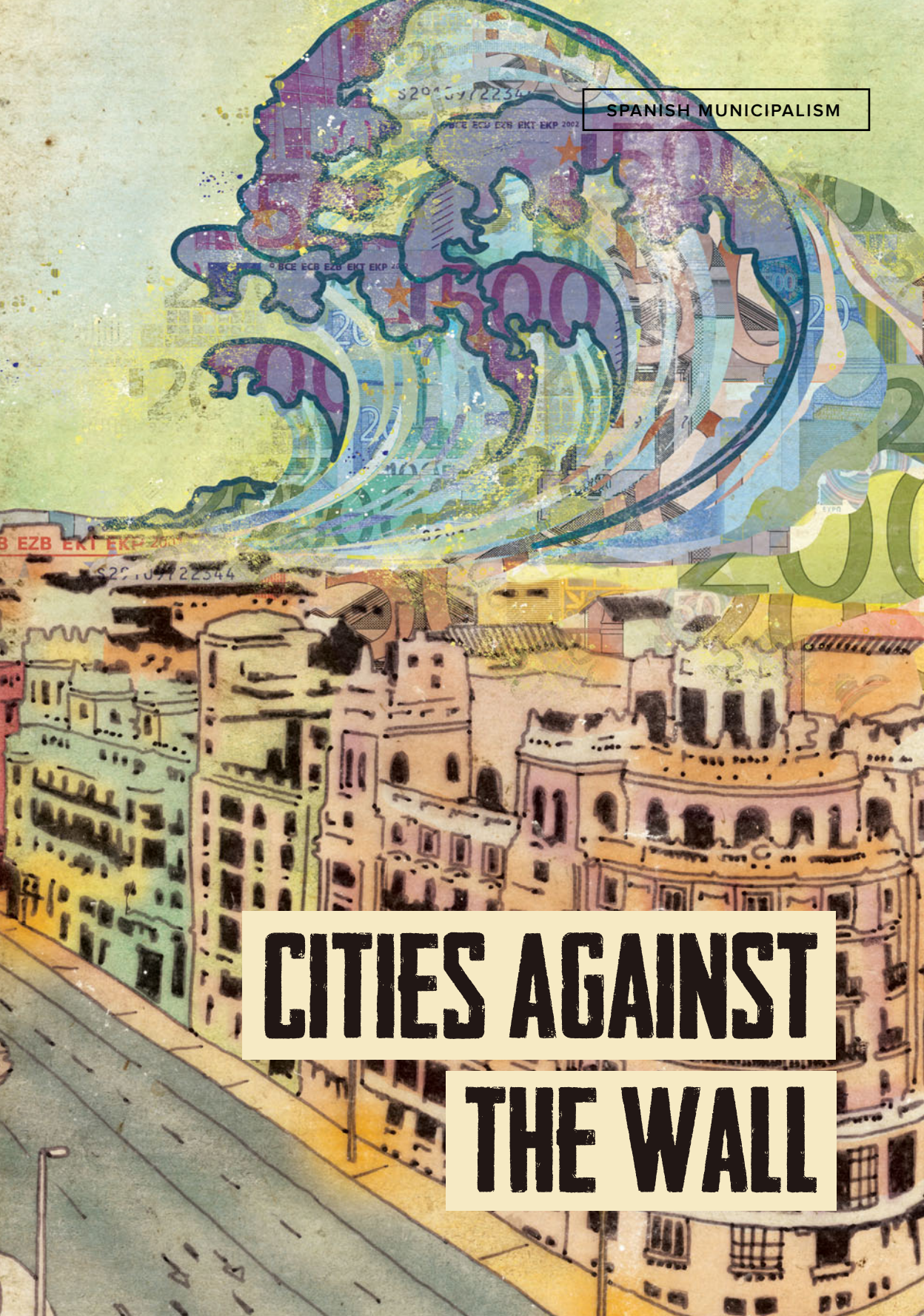
ANTJE DIETERICH

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TWO YEARS INTO ITS GOVERNING MANDATE, HOW IS SPAIN'S MUNICI-PALIST MOVEMENT FIGHTING BACK AGAINST THE IMPOSITIONS OF GLOBAL CAPITAL?

Carlos Delclós

Illustration by
Luis Alves
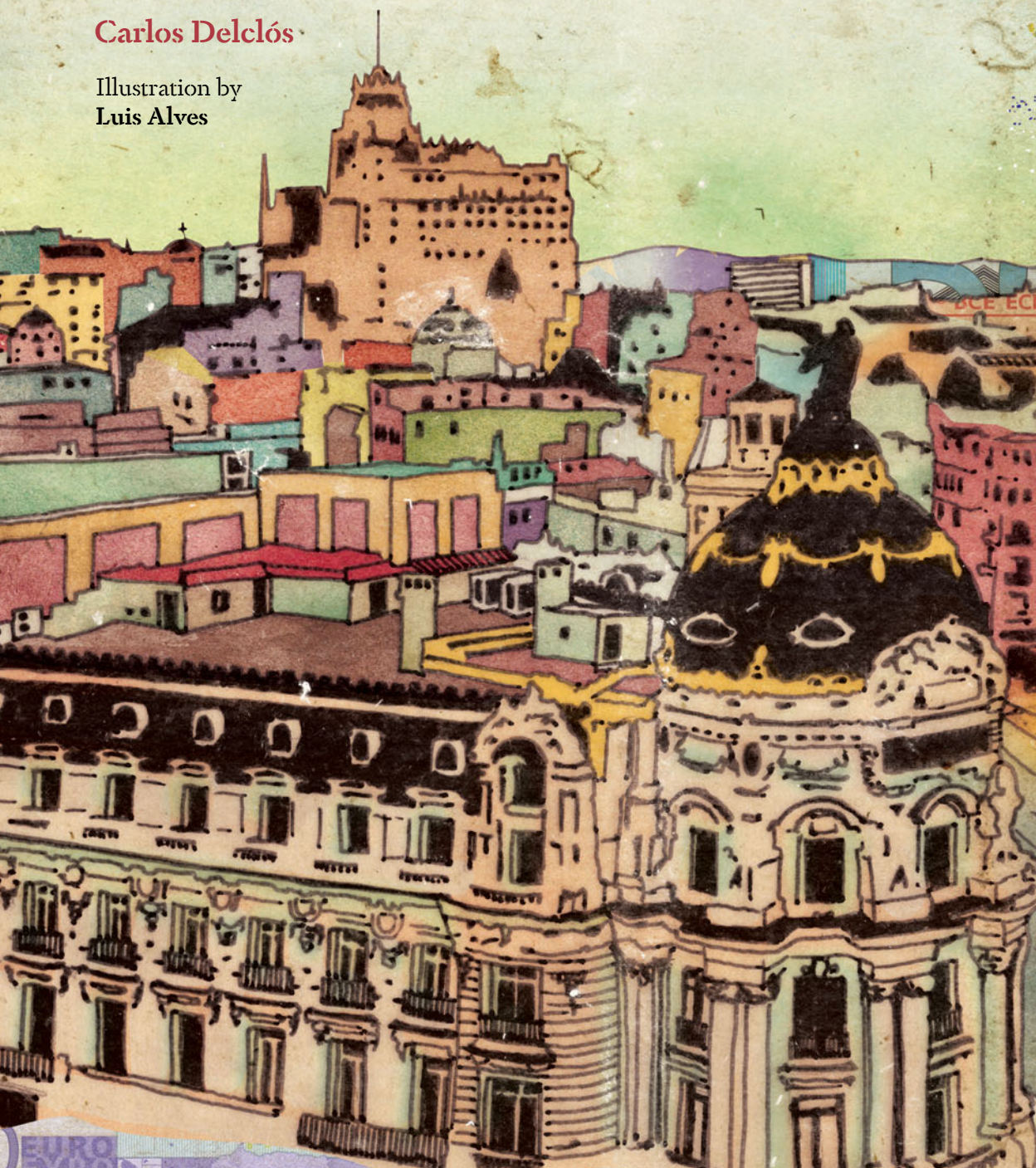
CITIES AGAINST THE WALL

By now, the story is well-known in left-wing circles. Two years ago, a handful of civic platforms won municipal elections in most of Spain's major cities, including Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Cádiz and Santiago, among others. Spearheaded by prominent figures from the local social movements, they joined Podemos and various left-wing parties in campaigns that promised nothing short of a democratic revolution. In the aftermath of a brutal economic crash and an outbreak of corruption scandals, they would respond to the profound crisis of legitimacy affecting the Spanish state with a program of radical municipalism, channeling the bottom-up politics of the *indignados* movement that won hearts and minds in 2011.

Having reached the halfway point of their first mandate, it seems like a good time to ask whether and how the jump from the streets to the institutions has helped advance the demands of the social movements from which these candidacies derived their legitimacy. Have the possibilities for emancipatory systemic change grown and multiplied in this time? Or has neoliberal institutionality converted and absorbed an entire generation of its opponents into its structure? These are complex questions. To begin to answer them, we might first consider the scale of the challenges facing these cities in the current stage of global capitalism. We'll focus first on the signature issue on which many of the activists who became politicians built their legitimacy: the right to decent housing.

THE GREAT WALL OF MONEY

Walking around Sants or similar working-class neighborhoods in Barcelona, you're likely to see several flyers offering to buy apartments. Some are handwritten, others are printed out in Arial or Comic Sans fonts. They contain little information besides a first name and a phone number. Some are simply anonymous. But though their appearances may vary, they tend to lead to the same phone numbers.

An investigative report by the autonomous weekly *La Directa* revealed that these flyers can be traced back to a handful of companies that have been buying up entire residential blocks, often with renters still living in them. They then persuade tenants to leave their homes, renovate the building and either sell it or rent the flats out at higher prices. How the companies persuade tenants to leave varies. They might offer cash, drastically raise rent or simply refuse to renew a rental contract. When tenants resist, they hire companies like Desokupa ("Unsquat") to forcefully remove them, providing gainful employment to beefy fascists and often breaking the law in the process.

This practice tends to be depicted in the media as a local problem in which a handful of unscrupulous businesses exploit loopholes and legal grey areas to turn a profit. But it goes far beyond Barcelona. Companies like these are the shock troops of a massive rent bubble that is affecting all of Spain's major cities. According to leading Spanish property website *Idealista*, rental prices increased across the country by 15.9 percent in 2016 alone, with year-over-year growth rates approaching 20 percent during the first trimester of 2017 in places like Barcelona, San Sebastian and the Canary and Balearic Islands. At the neighborhood level, the numbers are simply staggering. In places like the Sant Martí and Sant Andreu districts of Barcelona, rental prices have increased by over 30 percent relative to the same time last year.

Few can deal with such sharp increases. As a result, longtime residents are being displaced from their neighborhoods by what real estate services firm Cushman & Wakefield has dubbed

"The Great Wall of Money," a massive pot of capital for global real estate investment worth about $435 billion. As former UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing Raquel Rolnik describes it, the Great Wall of Money is a floating cloud of finance capital seeking to materialize in a way that evokes colonization. "I deliberately use the term 'colonization' because it involves territorial occupation and cultural domination," she explains in a recent lecture at the Center for Contemporary Culture of Barcelona. "This colonization has just one objective: to extract rent by opening up new frontiers that are capable of generating interest for finance capital."

> **The Great Wall of Money is a floating cloud of finance capital seeking to materialize in a way that evokes colonization. This colonization has just one objective: to extract rent by opening up new frontiers that are capable of generating interest for finance capital.**

While the use of colonization as a metaphor is problematic for its erasure of slavery and genocidal violence, what is certain is that governments thirsting for foreign investment are competing to land this capital in their countries despite its distinct lack of interest in the lives of residents. In Spain's case, the country recently attracted the Wall of Money by becoming an emerging market for real estate investment trusts, or REITs. These are companies owning income-generating real estate that can be either residential or commercial. The vast majority of that income must be derived from rent and paid out to shareholders as dividends.

REITs were introduced as a legal form in Spain in 2009 under a Socialist Party government. Initially, they were unsuccessful due to a corporate tax rate of 19 percent. But in 2012, Mariano Rajoy's right-wing government exempted REITs from this tax. It was after this reform took effect that rental prices took off across the country. Alongside developments like the rise of rent-extracting platforms such as Airbnb — which blur the line between residential and commercial properties or formal and informal economies — the central government's measure breathed new life into the very sector that provoked Spain's economic crisis in the first place. The work of managing its most dire effects was left to the municipal governments.

CORNERED BY THE STATE AND THE MARKET

It is safe to say that, in Spain, the degree of conflict between city governments and the territory- and rent-seeking finance capital of the

> *Tension between social movements, local representatives and public administration can be used to strengthen resistance against the impositions of higher-level institutions and economic forces.*

Great Wall of Money is at its highest in Barcelona. This is unsurprising, since it is here that both the Spanish housing movement and the municipalist wave were born. Barcelona is also where the link between the movements and the electoral platform is most robust, and the line between activists and representatives is haziest. At the local level, this is common knowledge that can be written off as a talking point. For outside observers, however, it is helpful to consider what this looks like on any ordinary day.

Recently, Barcelona En Comú councilwoman Gala Pin went on the agenda-setting Catalan morning show *Els matins* and confronted the co-founder of MK Premium, the most prominent of the property vultures identified by *La Directa's* investigative report. In a heated exchange, she characterized MK Premium's work as *violencia inmobiliaria,* or "property violence." Her choice of words matched the discourse of the housing platform she helped lead before becoming a representative, the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca, or Mortgage Victims Platform (PAH). As a result of her choice of words, she was accused of demagoguery by the right-wing opposition and sued by MK Premium for slander.

Pin's nods to the housing movement go beyond mere rhetoric. She often uses her large following on social media to make evictions visible and boost efforts to stop them. "Tomorrow we have five evictions," reads a typical post. "Despite our efforts, we need collaboration to stop one. Arc del Teatre Street, 9:30am."

These posts have been criticized in some radical-left circles as either being propagandistic or preemptively deflecting blame for the evictions that do take place under Barcelona En Comú's

watch. Others argue that Pin and other council members using this approach are simply being transparent about the limits of institutional power and calling on people to overcome them when this is unjust. What is clear is that the approach is effective. The resulting mobilizations have stopped numerous evictions, and even more have been stopped by the network of housing offices that the city government revamped to mediate between tenants and landlords.

This is just one example of how tension between social movements, local representatives and public administration can be used to strengthen resistance against the impositions of higher-level institutions and economic forces. And Barcelona is not the only city where the municipal government has become more porous to pressure from below. Manuela Carmena's Ahora Madrid, for instance, have opened the city's participation system up to citizen-initiated proposals and, like other cities, allocated a portion of the city coffers to participatory budgeting. In Valencia, where progressive green coalition Compromís governs with the support of Valencia En Comú and the Spanish Socialist Party, the city is undertaking a massive shift towards a pedestrian and bike-centered model of sustainable urban mobility. And in Zaragoza, grid electricity is now 100 percent renewable and energy spending has been reduced by nearly 15 percent.

> *"*
> *The success of the municipal platforms is fragile against the power of the state and the whims of the market. Cornered by these looming threats, cities cannot afford to limit their efforts to holding the fort — they must also push back.*

All of these cities have disproven the European Union's "no alternative" dogma about austerity by increasing social spending and expanding the public housing stock while maintaining balanced budgets and, in some cases, even reducing deficits. They are also pressuring the central government to take in more refugees, and some are defying Rajoy's racist 2012 healthcare reform by providing universal healthcare regardless of one's documentation status. In Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia, city governments have repeatedly expressed their desire to close immigrant detention centers, citing human rights violations and taking symbolic and legal actions against them as a result.

These are by no means revolutionary measures. Taken together, they amount to a straightforward social-democratic program combined with green urbanism and participatory governance. But in Europe's current

political climate, polarized as it is by neoliberal technocracy and the ultra-nationalist far right, this is nothing to sneeze at. What makes their defense of the most basic social advances of the last several decades all the more noteworthy is that it has been carried out by minority governments in a highly fragmented political system.

But this success is fragile against the power of the state and the whims of the market. To impose austerity on cities with left-wing governments, the central government merely has to enforce the legislation it passed in 2013 to dramatically reduce municipal autonomy. Treasury Minister Cristobal Montoro has already made his intent to do so abundantly clear. Meanwhile, the rent bubble continues to expand, pushing residents out of their homes and further from the urban center. Cornered by these looming threats, cities cannot afford to limit their efforts to holding the fort — they must also push back.

A DYNAMIC OF CONFLICT AND COMPLICITY

In early June 2017, several neighborhood marches converged at the Plaça Universitat in the center of Barcelona. From there, a crowd of three thousand people ambled through Sant Antoni, Poble Sec and the Raval, three of the areas targeted by the Great Wall of Money. At several points, they stopped in front of specific housing blocks where tenants were resisting the efforts of speculators to kick them out. When they reached the end of their route, protesters cracked open a block of ten flats that had been abandoned for eight years and squatted it.

The march was the latest action in a growing cycle of struggles against the new property bubble. Organized by a platform called Barcelona No Està en Venda ("Barcelona Is Not For Sale"), it brought together several neighborhood assemblies that have sprung up in the last two years to fight displacement by illegal tourist flats and rising rent. It also included the Sindicat de Llogaters, a local Renters' Union that took shape in early 2017, as well as the anarcho-syndicalist CGT union, the Barcelona Federation of Neighborhood Associations, the Neighborhood Assemblies for Sustainable Tourism and the PAH.

Actions like these set the agenda of public debate, forcing governments and political parties to demonstrate their priorities. In this particular case, it wrested the microphone away from the establishment press, which had hoped to frame recent conflicts between the City of Barcelona, Airbnb and the tourism lobby as one of "touristophobia," to borrow the term introduced by *El País*. Instead of complying with an anti-tourist framework — which has racist, classist and xenophobic undertones — the social movements have centered conflict on the property bubble and gentrification. For the most part, Barcelona En Comú have adopted this framing, albeit in confrontation with some sectors of the movement regarding how to target speculators.

This dynamic of conflict and complicity between movements and left-wing parties is particularly visible in Barcelona because the city's long history of bottom-up organizing has produced a thick social fabric. During the institutional turn that gave way to Barcelona En Comú, the biggest risk was that the transfer of notable activists from the streets to the institutions would produce something like a "brain drain," gutting and weakening the social movements. But a look at the social conflicts that have taken place since that turn reveals a somewhat different scenario.

Barcelona En Comú has been relatively effective in translating the demands of the social movements that its individual members came from into public policy proposals. They have been

1.5%

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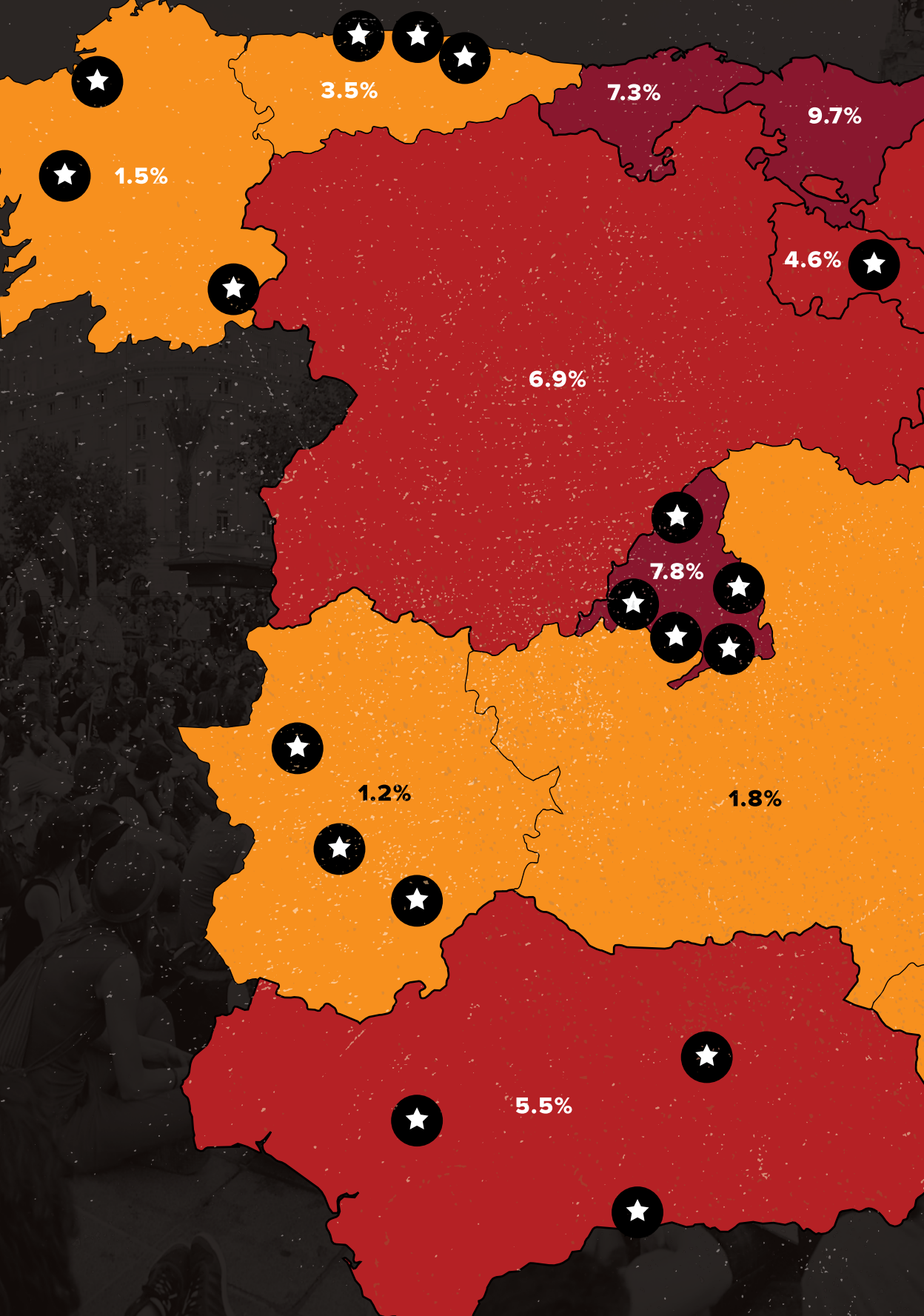
★ MUNICIPALITIES WITH RISING CITIZEN PLATFORMS

% VARIATION IN HOUSE PRICES MARCH 2016 – MARCH 2017

5.1%

4.7%

27%

CATALONIA

BARCELONA
24,7%

9.7%

2.9%
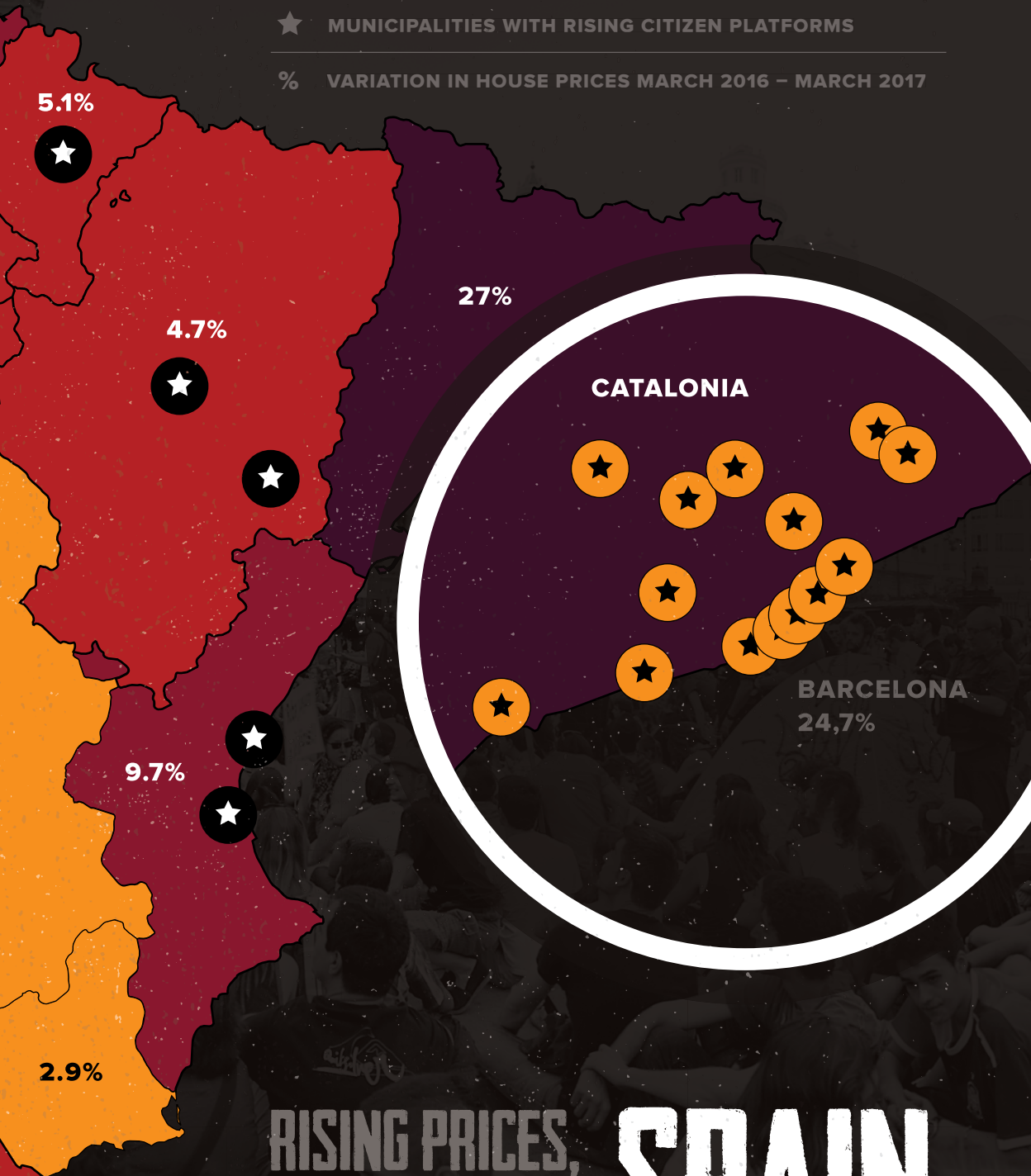
RISING PRICES,
RISING MOVEMENTS SPAIN

less effective in dealing with the demands of movements they had little experience with previously, such as the city's street vendors and public transport workers. As a result, these movements have emerged as protagonists in the city's current structure of social antagonism. How the tensions they produce are resolved remains to be seen.

In Madrid, however, there is far less complicity between the social movements and the municipal platform, and far more confrontation. Though its system of primaries was more open than Barcelona En Comú's, the confluence of organizations that gave way to Ahora Madrid is much more fractured. Moreover, their consensus candidate, current mayor and former judge Manuela Carmena, comes from a much more institutional background than those leading municipalist platforms in other cities.

The difference shows. Carmena has bucked the party's program on several occasions, using the cult of personality around her and Spain's "presidentialist" model of municipal governance to isolate herself from criticism by the more radical organizations integrated into Ahora Madrid, such as Ganemos and the Anticapitalistas wing of Podemos. The most disturbing symptom of this divide is the fact that El Patio Maravillas, the squat where Ahora Madrid was conceived, is set to become a block of tourist flats. Here, the gap between the movement and the institution broke ground for the Wall of Money.

MUNICIPALISM WITH A PURPOSE

For Spain's municipalist platforms, the problem is that municipalism on its own is not an ideology. It is a form of governance. It can just as well be capitalist or communist, totalitarian or libertarian, nationalist or internationalist. Left open, it is just a brand to fill with capital or an excuse to transfer blame to other instantiations of administrative power. Moreover, an overly simplistic understanding of municipalism risks steamrolling over the conflicts between differing types of municipalities and the power imbalances produced by decades of urbanization and globalization. This is particularly relevant when we consider the profound cultural and political cleavage that has emerged in the Global North as a result of urban extractivism, which pits progressive growing cities against nativist depopulating villages.

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> *To avoid being subsumed by the institutional logic of control and predictability, it is not enough for the municipal platforms to take on the demands of the movements that put them in power. They must instead nurture all of the movements growing in the cracks of the institutional architecture they've inherited, as it is precisely these cracks that the Wall of Money seeks to fill with concrete.*

To break with the narrow limits and toxic relationships of the neoliberal status quo and avoid becoming a mere vehicle for the reproduction of administrative and territorial self-interest, an emancipatory municipalism requires a horizon to walk towards. This is precisely what social movements provide. In every injustice that they denounce lies a way the world should be and a set of values and practices suppressed by the current social order. From a leftist perspective, these are none other than mutual aid and solidarity.

Materializing values as practices is a cultural and ideological task more than it is a technical one. The logic of governance, in contrast, is mostly technical. As such, it is centered on control and predictability. To avoid being subsumed by that logic of control and predictability, it is not enough for the new representatives to take on the demands of the movements that put them in power. They must instead nurture all of the movements growing in the cracks of the institutional architecture they've inherited, as it is precisely these cracks that the Wall of Money seeks to fill with concrete.

The beauty of the Spanish municipal platforms' electoral victories two years ago was that their very existence was not predicted by the technical logic of governance. This is why municipal gatekeepers view them as a democratic error. What they have now is an opportunity to dismantle that architecture and open it up to the people, movements and memories that have been repressed, erased, exploited or ignored until now. Going forward, their challenge will be to create more uncertainty for speculators and less for those who hope to inhabit the city. ★

CARLOS DELCLÓS

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Theodoros Karyotis

The Right to the City in an Age of

IN GREECE, RESISTANCE TO AUSTERITY COMPRISES A MOSAIC OF STRUGGLES FOR A RIGHT TO THE CITY, CONCEIVED AS THE COLLECTIVE SELF-DETERMINATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE.

AUSTERITY

URBAN STRUGGLES IN GREECE

Illustration by **Ioannis Ikonomakis**

When talking about Greece and "the crisis," it is easy to fall in the trap of "Greek exceptionalism." After all, it is through essentializing orientalist narratives that austerity and structural adjustment have been justified: the Greeks are corrupt, lazy and crisis-prone, and they should be adapted and civilized for their own good. There is a flipside to the orientalist gaze, however, which ascribes extraordinary qualities to the other: the Greeks have a surplus of collective spirit, revolutionary zeal or

solidarity, which makes them more likely to organize and resist.

Both these narratives prevent us from seeing that the conditions that brought about the "Greek crisis" are prevalent in many parts of the world, that capital is moving towards policies of exclusion and dispossession even in the capitalist center, and that resistance is not the prerogative of southern peoples, but will soon be the only reasonable response even in the north. In fact, the "Greek crisis"

is neither "Greek" — since it is only a symptom of the shift of global capitalism towards a new regime of accumulation based on shock and dispossession — nor is it a "crisis" in the sense of an extraordinary event. Instead, it represents a new normality that threatens to shake the very foundations of social coexistence. Nevertheless, Greece has been a privileged spot for observing how this global paradigm shift plays out within the boundaries of a single nation-state.

To understand the inner workings of the "accumulation by dispossession" regime, we would have to focus our analysis not only on macroeconomics, negotiations, elections, referendums, protests and other spectacular events, but also — and especially — on the micro-level of everyday life in the city. The urban space is always a crystallization of broader relations of power; it is constantly formed and reformed by political and economic powers to ensure the control of the populations inhabiting it, facilitate their exploitation or exclusion, and constrain their possibilities of empowerment. The urban space, however, can also become a place of coexistence — a place where social bonds and communities are formed, where commons emerge. Ultimately, it can become a place of resistance and self-determination, a place of inclusion; inclusion not only in the sense of formal rights granted by an instance of power, but in the sense of full participation of all different identities and subjects in political, economic and social life.

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Land grabbing, useless infrastructure works, gentrification and urban renewal, commodification of basic human needs such as housing, food, water and healthcare, evictions and displacement, xenophobia, militarization and increased surveillance are central elements of the policies of dispossession, implemented within the urban space at the expense of the popular classes. Resistance to these policies comprise a mosaic of struggles for a "right to the city," conceived not as a guarantee of individual resources or opportunities, but as an affirmation of the collective self-determination of everyday life.

THE CONTENTIOUS POLITICS OF URBAN SPACE IN GREECE

To make sense of the urban struggles that have proliferated in Greece since 2008, we should understand the process of formation of Greece's cities in the second half of the twentieth century. Greek cities burgeoned in the 1950s when rapid industrialisation combined with the destruction and animosity left behind by the Civil War (1946-1949) drove rural populations to the urban centers. Lax planning laws, along with a legal arrangement that allowed small property owners to erect high-rise buildings — ultimately at the benefit of constructors and their political patrons — are factors that determine the urban landscape to this day.

These developments represented an initial process of enclosure that eroded traditional communities, commodified housing and promoted a peculiar form of "isolation among the crowd of others." City centers and popular neighborhoods are to this day characterized by high population density, narrow streets and a lack of open spaces and public facilities. In the "feel-good" decades of the 1990s and 2000s, a debt-fueled "affluence" drove the middle classes towards the suburbs. Meanwhile, gentrification efforts were underway, culminating in the "construction frenzy" of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, when extensive urban renewal projects created more opportunities for accumulation for elites, while promoting displacement, exclusion, repression and surveillance for the urban poor.

Struggles for reclaiming the urban space took place prominently in December 2008, when the cold-blooded murder of a teenager by the police sparked a month-long revolt which spread like a wildfire throughout the country. High-school and university students, immigrants and the disenfranchised urban youth took the streets protesting the urban alienation, exploitation and exclusion that hid underneath the façade of prosperity. The different identities of the participants were fused in a collective "anonymous" subject that began, as the revolt progressed, to actively transform the city through decentralized — often symbolic — acts of re-appropriation of urban space, such as occupations of public buildings, barricades, marches, impromptu dance and theater actions in the streets, the interruption of official events and disruption of traffic and commercial activity. A distinctive feature was the absolute lack of formal demands; the protesters were not fighting for rights or reforms, but for the opportunity to live with dignity and self-determination, to connect their desires with reality.

While this was a landmark event, we should beware not to idealize the December revolt. Despite the fusion of identities, the violent and spectacular nature of the protests privileged one specific form of identity — young, fearless, able-bodied males — and prevented the creation of spaces of inclusion for people of other social categories — families, the middle-aged, immigrant women — who may have had as much of a reason to be angry.

Nevertheless, the collective "scream" of December 2008 was a wake-up call for a dormant and complacent society, and it has left a legacy of social cooperation and a redefined public sphere. Thousands of collectives were born, from political groups to art ensembles to grassroots trade unions. A whole new generation of politicized youth was schooled in horizontalism, solidarity and direct action tactics, and new spatial practices were adopted by social movements, culminating in the propagation of self-managed squats and social centers to all corners of the country.

Navarinou Park, for instance, is part of the legacy of December. Only a few months after the revolt, an abandoned parking lot was dug up in Athenian neighborhood of Exarcheia to be transformed into a park, self-managed by neighbors and collectives and available for cultural and social events. Despite attempts at eviction, the park retains its character to this day. Even if the vocabulary of the commons was not widespread at that moment, Navarinou represented an early instance of the substitution of "public" space with "common" space; of rigid, aseptic space that serves as a neutral ground between isolated individuals with organic space where individuals can connect and intertwine their desires in the context of the community, where they can negotiate the terms of their co-existence. This kind of urban commoning, previously confined to the spaces of the libertarian movement, would go on to become a blueprint for urban struggles in the following years.

The "debt crisis" that erupted in 2010 only served to intensify existing social antagonisms, and consequently exacerbated conflicts over urban space. While elites and the mass media were trying to drag the population into a collective guilt trip over "living beyond their means," a massive operation of social engineering was set in motion, designed to dispossess and exclude the bulk of the population. All state assets and infrastructure went up for grabs to the highest bidder; the wages, pensions, labor rights and welfare arrangements of the popular classes were slashed overnight; a recessionary spiral would destroy the country's productive backbone and create unemployment and misery; unjust regressive taxation and rising household debt offered the coup de grâce. Dispossession policies revolving around the workplace were met with resistance against the devaluation of labor power, but the paradigmatic conflicts of the crisis era take place in the urban space.

> *The idea that the neoliberal state is an agent of "rationalization" that combats submerged and informal practices is discredited. Rather, the state has the power to decide which informal practices will be tolerated or even promoted and which ones will be persecuted.*

SPATIAL CONTROL BY PROXY

The spatial narrative of the neoliberal state always involves a "backwards" population which should be "ushered into the civilized world." The state poses as a force of "rationalization," which extends its control over the city and combats "submerged" and "informal" practices in order to bring the totality of the population under the rule of law. The reality, however, is quite different. In a context of injustice and popular anger brought about by neoliberal restructuring, the role of the state is to contain resistances, enforce the ongoing processes of exclusion and maintain social peace by any means. Interestingly, while the Greek state employed many "formal" repressive practices — increased surveillance, judicial persecution of social struggles — it largely resorted to "informal" avenues. Examples include brutal crowd control techniques, systematic framing, beating and torture of activists by the forces of order and, most prominently, new techniques of spatial control by proxy.

One such technique is the collusion of the police with the neo-Nazi party of Golden Dawn to overtly "besiege" the city. Golden Dawn first emerged in the public spotlight when they hijacked a "citizens' committee" in the working-class central Athenian neighborhood of Ayios Panteleimonas, using it as a vehicle to impose an "ethnic cleansing." Immigrants were violently attacked and expelled from the area by violent mobs, solidarity marches protesting the siege were teargassed by riot police, even the playground in the central square was locked and guarded so it was not used by immigrant families.

As we are presently witnessing throughout the Global North, perceived threats to a society's stability may activate reactionary and xenophobic reflexes. Through carrot-and-stick tactics, Golden Dawn took advantage of the collapse of the two-party system that had predominated since the 1974 transition to democracy. On the one hand, it cultivated a "Robin Hood" image by organizing food hand-outs and blood donations "for Greeks only" — a perverted and exclusionary kind of "commoning." On the other hand, it began a reign of terror, with neo-Nazi death squads patrolling the streets in many neighborhoods and attacking anyone looking "undesirable" — anyone looking like an immigrant, a homosexual, a transsexual, a radical and so on — with the blessing or the direct participation of the police. The xenophobic campaign lasted several years, and it left hundreds of victims. It was only after the murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas and the subsequent intensification of decentralized antifa tactics by social movements that the streets could be reclaimed. Under popular pressure, the state decided to "put a leash" on its erstwhile allies.

A similar kind of "spatial control by proxy" has been implemented in the case of Exarcheia for a long time now. The police actively pushes organized drug-dealing gangs towards the area, long an urban stronghold of the anarchist movement, in an effort to erode the radical collectives and communities that populate it. As a result, heroin trade runs rampant, anti-social behaviors are frequent and ruthless mafias rule their "territory" with an iron fist. Recently, anarchist groups decided to take matters into their own hands and push the gangs out of Exarcheia by organizing self-defense militias to patrol the neighborhood. While it is too early to say whether it has been successful, this is an immensely complex endeavor, as the direct

LAIKI AGORA, EXARCHEIA
BABIS KAVVADIAS / FLICKR

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ORGANIZING AGAINST AUSTERITY

LOCAL COMMUNITY SELF-DEFENSE INITIATIVES IN GREECE

- ★ **COMMUNITY-RUN VEGETABLE GARDENS IN THE CITY**

- ★ **"ANTI-HARATSI" NEIGHBORHOOD COMMITTEES**

- ★ **THE POTATO MOVEMENT AND GUERILLA FARMERS' MARKETS**

- ★ **SELF-MANAGED SOLIDARITY CLINICS**

- ★ **CONSUMER COOPERATIVES FOR FOOD AUTONOMY**

- ★ **SOLIDARITY KITCHENS OFFERING FREE OR LOW-COST FOOD**

questioning of the state's monopoly of violence raises thorny questions related to the social legitimation of the militias, collective responsibility and reasonable use of force.

In the light of the above examples, the idea that the neoliberal state is an agent of "rationalization" that combats submerged and informal practices is discredited. Rather, the state has the power to decide which informal practices will be tolerated or even promoted and which ones will be persecuted, according to its current tactics.

CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE OF STRUGGLES

As the crisis deepened, a moment that defined grassroots politics in Greece was the occupation of the squares by the "indignants" from May 2011 onwards, at the same time as the Spanish 15M movement. A multitude of individuals with different origins and agendas — according to some statistics, one out of four Greeks — participated in the occupations and assemblies. This diversity was certainly an advantage, as it enabled osmosis between different groups and individuals and the emergence of innovative initiatives and practices. Nevertheless, the — minoritarian — presence of nationalist discourses and the absence of "class" as an analytical framework drove some radical activists away from the squares.

Despite any discrepancies and the admitted difficulty of the indignants to self-identify as a "movement," the influence of the squares regarding spatial practices and the production of the urban commons has been crucial. In the wake of the squares, a multitude of local neighborhood assemblies emerged. Their priorities were no longer to influence developments on the central political stage, but to self-organize

and defend against the impending attack on popular living standards — to promote self-sufficiency and the resilience for local communities, filling the gaps left behind by the retreating welfare state, and to combat poverty and unemployment through the promotion of solidarity endeavors.

> " *In the wake of the movement of the squares, a multitude of local neighborhood assemblies emerged. Their priorities were no longer to influence developments on the central political stage, but to self-organize and defend against the impending attack on popular living standards.*

In the context of urban commoning promoted by neighborhood assemblies, occupation practices acquired legitimacy and became widespread. It was no longer just youthful protesters who occupied public spaces to turn them into commons, but mixed collectives of young and old, men and women, families and individuals, immigrants and natives. These practices are exemplified by the occupation of urban land to turn into self-managed, community-run vegetable gardens. Such is the case, for

example of PERKA ("Peri-urban Farming") in Thessaloniki and the Self-Managed Urban Gardens of Elliniko in Athens, on the grounds of an abandoned military base and the former Athens airport respectively. According to the terms of the memorandum of understanding between the Greek government and the Troika of foreign lenders, both sites are earmarked to be privatized and developed into luxury housing and commercial infrastructure. In both cases, broad citizens' movements demand their conversion into metropolitan parks with public facilities instead.

Local community self-defense initiatives multiplied when the government imposed a regressive land ownership tax — mockingly called *haratsi*, for its reminiscence of a despised Ottoman poll tax — arbitrarily charged through the electricity bill. Homeowners who failed to pay the tax were having their power cut off; that was quite common in a country where wages had been slashed and one third of the workforce was out of a job. This sadistic measure would have created a situation verging on humanitarian catastrophe, were it not for the self-organized "anti-*haratsi*" neighborhood committees, which would be on call to extra-legally reconnect the power for families that could not afford the tax.

Food provision was another important area of self-defense. In the previous decade, food distribution had been captured by oligopolistic, price-fixing middlemen, who made everyday staples unaffordable for the popular classes, while squeezing the profit margin of food producers. The movement to cut out the middlemen started with truckloads of potatoes arriving in central city squares to be sold directly to end consumers. The "potato movement" soon evolved into a decentralized "guerrilla farmers' market" movement, which occupied urban land without permits, trying to bring

together farmers and consumers despite the threat of eviction, arrests and confrontation with entrenched interests.

The creation of "urban commons" extended to healthcare, with the creation of an extended network of self-managed solidarity clinics; alternative currencies, notably TEM in Volos, Syntagma Time Bank in Athens, Koino in Thessaloniki and two dozen more; consumer cooperatives, such as Bios Coop in Thessaloniki, which unites more than 450 families in reclaiming their food autonomy; solidarity kitchens, which offer free or very low-cost food, encouraging punters to get involved in cooking and food distribution; and a multitude of egalitarian workers' cooperatives, mainly concentrated in the services sector, such as those belonging to the Athens Network of Worker Cooperatives.

WHAT KIND OF "RIGHT TO THE CITY"?

In a country as puritan and religious as Greece, the importance of "visibility" events like the Gay Pride March or the Naked Bike Ride in reclaiming public space for the full spectrum of identities and alternative practices cannot be overstated. Indeed, these events regularly become sites of confrontation with the Orthodox Church or the extreme right. These events, however, face an additional risk: to the extent that they promote an individualistic conception of the "right to the city" and fail to adopt an intersectional view of social oppression, they may involuntarily turn themselves into a "niche market" in the context of urban renewal, under which diversity is prized as long as the overriding social principle remains that of market exchange. Indeed, "diversity", "creativity" and "innovation" are the core concepts of gentrification processes that are underway in

most European cities. These exclusionary processes presuppose an individualized consumer of rights, rather than active collectives that affirm their right to self-determine everyday life in the city.

To address all these oppressions at once, Radical Pride, an "alternative" gay pride event that preserved its autonomy from public institutions and corporate sponsors, was organized in Thessaloniki this year. Radical Pride offered a rich framework to understand how gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age or ability intersect in the production of oppression and exclusion. It thus sought to affirm collective action and connect the struggle of the LGBTQ movement with other urban struggles.

As far as urban mobilization goes, however, it has to be stressed that not all bottom-up processes are inclusionary in nature. Notoriously, the foremost task of so-called "residents' committees" is to increase land value, as members have a personal interest in the appreciation of their properties. More often than not, this includes efforts to keep "undesirables" out of the neighborhood. It is not a surprise, then, that residents' committees are frequently taken over by fascist elements. In fact, exclusion and fascism are the ugly underbelly of shiny urban renewal projects and the construction of "model cities."

Indeed, in the recent conflict around refugees, xenophobic "residents' committees" have played a dubious role by protesting their inclusion in social life. Likewise, the state treats the plight of refugees as an issue of public order and tries to keep them isolated in deplorable conditions in camps, away from urban centers. As a response, solidarity movements have patiently set up solidarity structures to include refugees in the social life of the city. The pinnacle of these efforts are the self-managed occu-

CITY PLAZA
REFUGEE
ACCOMMO-
DATION AND
SOLIDARITY

20 FILOXENIO
PROSFIGON
REFUGEE
SQUAT

POLITECHNIO
UNIVERSITY
SQUAT

As social spending has been cut, urban movements have stepped into the breach to promote self-sufficiency and the resilience of local communities through various solidarity initiatives, especially in the anarchist neighborhood of Exarcheia.

AUTONOMOUS ATHENS

NOTARA 26
REFUGEE SQUAT

GARE
SQUAT

WOMEN ONLY
STREFI SQUAT

STEKI
METANASTON

DERVINION
SOCIAL CENTRE

K-VOX

NOSOTROS

EXARCHEIA

SELF-MANAGED
NAVARINOU
PARK

pied refugee shelters that have been created in Athens, Thessaloniki and other cities — several of which were evicted by the police last year.

WHAT ABOUT SYSTEMIC CHANGE?

By 2013, the construction of Syriza's hegemonic project was advancing at full steam. Hardly any movement remained unaffected by the party's desire to pose as the political expression of anti-austerity struggles and monopolize the concept of solidarity. Today we are experiencing the end-result of this process: policies of dispossession are intensified under a nominally left-wing government, while resistances have been neutralized, and "social peace" — much desired by international and local elites — has been secured. This defeat, however, is not the work of Syriza alone but also demonstrates the internal limitations of the movement. While in Spain, for instance, the desire of people for institutional change was largely channeled to the local level and towards coalitions hegemonized by the movements themselves, in Greece, the dual influence of, on the one hand, the anarchist movement, which is hostile to any kind of involvement with the institutions, and, on the other hand, a rigid parliamentary and extra-parliamentary left, which in its statist mindset fails to perceive the importance of local participatory forms of government, prevented the emergence of independent municipalist initiatives.

In 2014, municipalist observatory dimotopia.gr (now defunct) identified 17 independent municipalist formations that had direct democracy as a central element of their program. A couple of years later, few had managed to gain representation. Many secured the support of Syriza; this gave them an electoral push, at the expense of gradually being taken over by professional politicians and losing their grass-

roots character. One such case is the formation "Resistance with the Citizens" in the Athenian municipality of Chalandri. After spending a long time as a minority opposition party, it conquered the mayorship in 2015. Two years later, many of its long-time members resigned, denouncing the new mayor for transgressing the foundational principles of the formation and aligning himself with the government's austerity policies.

It is very early to say whether the municipalist movement in Spain has had any significant influence on institutional politics — strong debate and criticism has been generated on this question within the movement itself. We can, however, argue that in Greece, the deficit of grassroots political coordination — electoral or otherwise — facilitated the continuation of austerity policies. While the suspicion of great parts of the movements towards electoral politics is understandable, in no case should this be translated into reluctance to organize, cooperate, compromise, scale up, reach out to society, participate energetically in the public dialogue. There is no merit in partiality, marginality or ideological purity.

The first few years of the crisis brought a profound delegitimation of the political system and its satellites — political parties, trade unions, the mass media — as well as the dissolution of identities formed around social status, work or consumption. This produced not only depression and resignation, but also an explosion in grassroots mobilization that affected the lives of many and created structures, collectives and practices to reclaim the city for a diversity of subjects. At the peak of these mobilizations, there was widespread optimism that the mere accumulation of urban commons would be enough to radically change the urban landscape and create a social counterpower sufficient to effectively challenge the processes of dispossession.

In the following phase, grassroots movements were faced with the inevitable question of political coordination and institutional change, and were called to position themselves with respect to the hegemonic project developed by Syriza. Some identified with the project and were assimilated by it; others adopted a cautious but pragmatic position, trying to negotiate political benefits without compromising their identity; others still denounced Syriza's project and distanced themselves from it, but without producing an alternative form of political coordination. This was a time of intense conflict and debate.

In the present phase, hopes of institutional change have been dashed, grassroots movements have lost their mass character, and remaining collectives have entered a process of reflection and redefinition of strategy.

In the present phase, hopes of institutional change have been dashed, grassroots movements have lost their mass character, and remaining collectives have entered a process of reflection and redefinition of strategy. One key point to highlight in such reflections is the importance of grassroots urban struggles during the crisis, taking into account not only the external threats they face — repression and co-optation — but also their internal limitations: their contradictory nature, their ideological divergences, their difficulty in finding a common vocabulary, in coordinating and in forming a coherent political subject. These shortcomings, however, should not be perceived as a failure, as the cycle of dissent and subordination is never a zero-sum game. There is an "overflow" that persists and forms the substrate of the following cycle of mobilization. This overflow includes ideas, practices, values and possibilities of action that did not exist just a decade ago, in addition to a new voice in the public discourse, which prioritizes social cooperation and self-determination. ★

THEODOROS KARYOTIS

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THE KURDISH EXPERIMENT IN
RADICAL MUNICIPALISM OBLIGES
US TO RETHINK THE ISSUE OF
STATE VIOLENCE AND HOW NEW
WORLDS CAN BE CREATED AS
WELL AS DEFENDED.

DEMOCRATIC AUTONOMY IN KURDISTAN

Nazan Üstündağ

Illustration by **Istvan David**

In recent years, following the collapse of the peace process between the Turkish state and the Kurdish freedom movement, the struggle for autonomy in the towns and cities of northern Kurdistan, or Bakur, has undergone a significant shift from a non-violent re-organization of social and political life to a militant self-defense movement. The declaration of round-the-clock curfews in the summer of 2016 left many Kurdish cities under a *de facto* military siege, setting the scene for an urban war. Local youth dug trenches and built barricades to protect their neighborhoods and their democratic autonomous initiatives from police raids. While the guerrillas who had until then stayed up in the mountains came down to support the youth, Turkey's special forces tore apart towns and cities and razed entire neighborhoods to the ground. According to a UN report, at least 2,000 people died during these clashes.

The devastation of the war was not just material, however. The fact that Turkish special forces burnt civilians alive, stripped people naked, did not allow the bodies of those killed to be buried, and widely circulated images of mutilated dead bodies and cut-off limbs to celebrate their victory via social media, made a lasting mark on Kurdish people. Today, the experiment with democratic autonomy in urban Kurdistan has come to an end as thousands are imprisoned, organizations closed down, elected officials removed from office and towns and cities occupied by heavily armed security forces.

FROM ANTI-COLONIALISM TO DEMOCRATIC AUTONOMY

The idea of democratic autonomy developed in Kurdistan during the late 2000s, in the context of an armed struggle against Turkish oc-cupation and colonization. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth,* Frantz Fanon argues that colonization is violence. The defining characteristic of a colonial regime is that its violence destroys nature, people and culture without ever needing to build consent. Many Western liberal legal regimes were formed within a framework of colonization. Such regimes protect the state's monopoly of violence against colonized communities as well as the right of the state to exert violence against its "others." By alluding to the imagined threat posed by the "other" to resort to violence to defend itself, liberal law transforms this possibility into an issue of security and thereby legitimizes and legalizes its own organized violence.

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> *The idea of democratic autonomy developed in Kurdistan during the late 2000s, in the context of an armed struggle against Turkish occupation and colonization.*

As the only internationally recognized discourse for the oppressed, claims of human rights violations are in turn burdened with the responsibility of producing evidence that the state has transgressed its legal and legitimate use of monopolized violence. Also, in order to sustain their legitimacy, human rights institutions are obliged to unquestionably condemn the violence used by actors other than the state and hence further contribute to the normaliza-

tion of the state's monopoly on violence. Fanon invites those who struggle against colonization to create a world different from the one Western liberal law institutes.

Postcolonial writers who follow in Fanon's footsteps criticize the nation states that emerged after the anti-colonial struggles. They point out that nationalism has created a new hegemony in these states, shifting power from colonial elites to national elites and acting as a means by which colonized peoples enter the stage of global capitalism as workers and capitalists. In this process, peasants, women and the poor — who actively participated in the anti-colonial struggle — are sent back home, and the means to govern, produce, reproduce and defend themselves are confiscated from them by the newly independent state apparatus. They are then transformed into citizen-subjects capable of operating within and subjecting themselves to the social, economic and legal context shaped by a global capitalist reality.

In Kurdistan, the idea of democratic autonomy emerged as a response to this colonial and postcolonial experience. The Kurdish freedom movement can be understood as a movement that seeks to reclaim the means of self-governance, self-production, self-creation and self-defense from the Turkish state and the ruling elites of Kurdistan. Democratic autonomy invites people to transgress social relations and loyalties that have long been imposed on them. It promotes spaces where forms of representation and belonging can multiply to resist the homogenizing effect of the nation state, of the nuclear family, of capital and of positivist science.

Autonomy is not a turn inwards, nor does it denote independence from external relations. To the contrary: autonomy involves an engagement with multiple levels of conversation, negotiation and exchange. It suggests horizontality in place of the verticality instituted by the nation state and capital. Whereas capital seeks to secure geographies for accumulation, whereas the state system tries to homogenize social identities, and whereas the modern legal system attempts to monopolize the law and the legitimate use of force, democratic autonomy opens these up to a future of indeterminacy and possibility.

For the Kurdish freedom movement and its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, democratic autonomy is therefore a political form in which Kurds, Turks and other people in the Middle East can pursue empowerment and liberation and can struggle against nationalism, patriarchy and capitalism without recourse to the state-form. As such, the movement argues that the pursuit of democratic autonomy can serve as a means of peace-making in the wider region.

AUTONOMY AND THE PEACE PROCESS

Social scientists have long debated why post-conflict societies — from Ireland to South Africa — often face the disempowerment of emancipatory social forces. Some believe this to be a result of the fact that national regimes and peace processes have often been formulated by global capitalist actors whose primary goal is to secure capital accumulation, consolidate the nation state and invalidate ideologies alternative to neoliberalism.

Having learned from the negative experiences of the past, latecomers to the conflict resolution process like the PKK and the FARC therefore argue that the peace process should be seen as a social and political struggle more than a diplomatic endeavor — as a means rather than an end in itself. Society must exercise its self-

defense and increase its capacity for freedom *during* the peace process. In other words, the spaces that open up during peace negotiations and peace struggles have to be seized upon as spaces for exercising freedom *here and now*. Only a society that can defend and govern itself can achieve peace without losing its potential for radical social transformation and its capacity to build alternative worlds.

This explains why the Kurdish freedom movement in Turkey has created various local, national and international institutions, brought various sections of the Kurdish and Turkish public together and formed new alliances during the peace process. It aimed to expand the space of negotiation by including new actors in the process through the many conferences it held and the three political parties it created. Meanwhile, Abdullah Öcalan, as the key negotiator of the Kurds, used the "negotiating table" as a platform to formulate a legal framework for the struggle for liberation.

The Turkish government, however, had other expectations of the peace process. It aimed at increasing its regional power by declaring itself as the representative of Kurds and Turks alike. Its objective was the disempowerment of the Kurdish freedom movement's discursive, representational and operational capacity. It hoped to secure Kurdish territories for the investment of capital, and to consolidate state power by promoting a collective Islamic identity that unite the varying historical trajectories of Kurds and Turks alike. In 2015, two years after it began, the Turkish government gave up the peace process and resorted once more to military means to deal with the "Kurdish question" — a decision that appears to have been motivated at least part by the fact that Kurdish groups were much more effective at using the peace process as a way to address various oppositional groups inside Turkey and bring them together against the policies of Erdoğan's AKP government.

MAN LOOKS AT DESTROYED SCHOOL BUILDING IN IDLIB, TURKEY.
UYGAR ÖNDER ŞIMŞEK / MOKU

FROM MODEL TO MOVEMENT

While Öcalan introduced the concept of democratic autonomy to the vocabulary and discourse of the Kurdish freedom movement in the early 2000s, it only became a subject of debate, criticism and elaboration for a wider public beyond the movement's cadres after the launching of a key meeting in Diyarbakır in 2010, when Kurdish activists invited Turkish journalists and intellectuals to evaluate their proposed solution to the Kurdish question. There, they presented their ideas of democratic autonomy and encountered a fierce opposition — not because the invited journalists and intellectuals were hostile to the recognition of Kurdish identity, but because they deemed this proposal to be utterly unrealistic.

Apart from a reform to the constitution that would exclude any reference to ethnicity, the proposal promoted by the Kurds had little to say about the restructuring of the Turkish state and the correcting of past wrongs. Rather, it included an elaborate model of self-governance and power-sharing where references like "people's parliaments", "communes", "peasants", and "women" expressed a desire to build a radical democracy in the political and economic realm as well as in health, education and other fields.

For the intellectuals of Turkey, who at the time were heavily invested in the fantasy of liberal democracy and the rule of law, the proposal seemed to be distracting energy and attention from "real issues." However, only a few years later, that which was once deemed unrealistic was already being practiced in many cities and towns across Kurdistan. Moreover, and somewhat ironically, the desires that informed the Gezi protests of 2013, when a million people took the streets of Istanbul and cities across

> ## *The original Kurdish proposal for democratic autonomy included an elaborate model of self-governance and power-sharing where references like "people's parliaments", "communes", "peasants", and "women" expressed a desire to build a radical democracy in the political and economic realm as well as in health, education and other fields.*

Turkey, had an undeniable affinity with the demands for democratic autonomy as formulated by the Kurdish opposition.

Democratic autonomy in the Kurdish cities primarily involved the creation of assemblies at the local and regional level. Residential assemblies in neighborhoods, towns and cities would make decisions concerning infrastructure and other important social issues. In the local elections of 2009, the Kurdish opposition gained 97 municipalities and expanded this number to 99 in 2014. Now, however, these new municipal authorities had to respond to the demands of the unofficial people's assemblies, limiting their decision-making capacity and devolving the power of educated, middle-class elites and professionals to everyday people and workers. In addition to the general popular assemblies, there

were also thematic assemblies on health, justice, the economy and education that aimed to democratize social policy and local governance.

While the economy assembly encouraged the formation of cooperatives and held meetings with businessmen, trade organizations and entrepreneurs along with the poor and the unemployed, the assemblies on public health provided free services and educated health workers. Academies opened up around Kurdistan providing ideological formation and skills training for those who participated in the construction of democratic autonomy, while truth and justice assemblies aimed to resolve local disputes to ensure that people in Kurdistan would stop using formal institutions of law and to promote the dissemination and democratization of community justice.

ADVANCES AND CHALLENGES

Between 2009 and 2015, different local, regional and national institutions and organizations — including assemblies, parties and congresses — continued to spread across Kurdistan. The Kurds already had extensive experience in building new models of self-governance as they had developed various organizations throughout the 1990s and 2000s to document human rights violations in the Kurdish regions — including forced displacements, disappearances and extra-judicial killings — and to assist villagers who had come to city centers as a result of the government's evacuation and destruction of their villages. The new forms of democratic autonomy built on these past experiences and were quickly put in place.

The strength of the experiment in democratic autonomy in Kurdistan came from dispute rather than harmony. Democracy was achieved by the fact that jurisdictions overlapped and sovereignties were being erased. It was precisely the social mobility and conflict between local actors generated by the creation of various assemblies, congresses, parties and institutions that caused more and more people to enter into local processes of decision-making and implementation. However, there were also some important problems with the construction and implementation of democratic autonomy in Bakur.

First of all, the model had been delineated in fairly detailed fashion beforehand, first by

> " *The strength of the experiment in democratic autonomy in Kurdistan came from dispute rather than harmony.*

Öcalan and then by the PKK more generally, allowing it to become a means of social engineering. Second, the language of democratic autonomy was foreign to most people, and as such it produced movement elites who were experts in speaking this language at the expense of lay people on whom it imposed an alienating vocabulary. Third, autonomy was often interpreted as *national* autonomy and was understood to be the provision of services by the Kurdish movement rather than the state, without problematizing the wider relationship of "service provision" under capitalism, statism and patriarchy. Finally, certain sections of the population, especially the disadvantaged youth, could not be successfully incorporated into the institutions of democratic autonomy and remained isolated in their own organizations.

At the same time, however, this period was also one in which the Kurds further developed their repertoire of oppositional action. For one, the emergence of an autonomous government within the context of the war against ISIS in Rojava (northern Syria) influenced the struggle in Bakur immensely. In Rojava, the Kurdish freedom movement achieved universal recognition by means of armed struggle, and Kurdish youths learned and disseminated the tactics and strategies of urban warfare there.

Moreover, the peace process and the ceasefire between the Turkish army and the Kurdish forces allowed different people to visit and consult with the guerrillas at the

Principles of Democratic Confederalism

ABDULLAH ÖCALAN

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The right of self-determination of the peoples includes the right to a state of their own. However, the foundation of a state does not increase the freedom of a people. The system of the United Nations that is based on nation-states has remained inefficient. Meanwhile, nation-states have become serious obstacles for any social development. Democratic confederalism is the contrasting paradigm of the oppressed people.

2

Democratic confederalism is a non-state social paradigm. It is not controlled by a state. At the same time, democratic confederalism is the cultural organizational blueprint of a democratic nation.

3

Democratic confederalism is based on grassroots participation. Its decision-making processes lie with the communities. Higher levels only serve the coordination and implementation of the will of the communities that send their delegates to the general assemblies. For limited space of time they are both mouthpiece and executive institutions. However, the basic power of decision rests with the local grassroots institutions.

4

In the Middle East, democracy cannot be imposed by the capitalist system and its imperial powers which only damage democracy. The propagation of grassroots democracy is elementary. It is the only approach that can cope with diverse ethnical groups, religions, and class differences. It also goes together well with the traditional confederate structure of the society.

5

Democratic confederalism in Kurdistan is an anti-nationalist movement as well. It aims at realizing the right of self-defence of the peoples by the advancement of democracy in all parts of Kurdistan without questioning the existing political borders. Its goal is not the foundation of a Kurdish nation-state. The movement intends to establish federal structures in Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq that are open for all Kurds and at the same time form an umbrella confederation for all four parts of Kurdistan.

PHOTO: NEWROZ CELEBRATION IN THE QANDIL MOUNTAINS. NORA MIRALLES / FLICKR

headquarters in the Qandil mountains of northern Iraq. Notably, the visibility and legitimacy that the freedom fighters acquired during the peace process firmly lodged the struggle in the imagination of ordinary Kurds. As opposed to the claustrophobia of urban spaces shaped by colonialism, capitalism and the patriarchal family, as well as the everyday conflicts that the formation of democratic autonomy inevitably entailed, guerrilla warfare represented an escape from family and work, an intimacy with nature, friendship and power. This was especially true for the urban youth. To the extent that they felt excluded from both formal political institutions and spaces of democratic autonomy, they popularized new practices within the cities that mimicked guerrilla warfare and transformed urban spaces into spaces of liberation here and now by means of armed resistance. Starting as self-defense units in neighborhoods fighting against the drug trade, prostitution and theft, these armed squads increasingly turned into urban guerrilla formations protecting neighborhoods from state violence.

Finally, people's relationship to rural areas underwent a major change during this time. Whereas in the previous period people's relationship with the rural areas had been uprooted by the experience of state violence and forced displacement, now urban actors slowly began to reattach themselves to the villages and the mountains. Children, women, men, party members and lay people, educated and non-educated, youngsters and elders walked along long roads into the countryside, resisting security forces and risking their lives together, engaging in multiple horizontal negotiations and conversations among themselves and with the guerrilla and security forces alike.

URBAN WARFARE

In the Kurdish cities, the youth and police often clash, with the former using stones and Molotov cocktails, and the latter rubber bullets, gas bombs and pressurized water. Already in 2013, however, these regular skirmishes had developed into more violent confrontations. While the guerrilla forces and the army maintained their ceasefire, a number of youth were shot during protests in the city. Moreover, those in urban areas also faced long prison sentences whenever the police caught them. Many of the youth were sons and daughters of the displaced, with little prospects in formal education and employment — contributing to an explosive social situation in the cities.

When ISIS attacked Kobani in 2014 and it began to look like the Turkish state was enabling the Kurdish city's siege, the youth took to the streets all over Bakur. That was the first time when the Turkish state realized the size and power of the

> " *The Kurdish experiment with democratic autonomy poses some very important questions for those who want to imagine an alternative future to capitalism, the nation state and the patriarchal family.*

Kurdish youth movement, and the fact that many of these youths were now lightly armed and well organized. After the defeat of ISIS at Kobani, the youth dug trenches in their neighborhoods to stop police raids aimed at arresting them. While the trenches were filled-up at Öcalan's request for de-escalation during the peace process, they were dug out again once the process collapsed.

Towards the end of 2015, Turkish special forces attacked these trenches with overwhelming force and a number of cities remained under siege for several months, while civilians were bombarded by tanks and targeted by snipers. Some of the guerrilla forces from the nearby mountains joined the youth in their campaign of self-defense. In late 2016, however, all rebelling cities were brought back under state control and reoccupied by state forces. Kurdish urban dwellers were able to survive the siege only because they shared food and safe spaces and had already established some basic autonomous health provision. Throughout 2017, in the wake of the failed coup attempt of the previous summer, the Turkish state engaged in a broad crackdown on all of its opponents, arresting Kurdish politicians, activists and youth. Many of the destroyed urban areas were confiscated by the state with the intention of rebuilding the cities in ways that would prevent any future insurgency.

The experiment with democratic autonomy in Kurdish cities and towns might seem like an extreme case in terms of the violence it unleashed from the state. Still, the Kurdish case poses some very important questions for those who want to imagine an alternative future to capitalism, the nation state and the patriarchal family. Although short-lived, the Kurds' experiment with democratic autonomy in Bakur, the various institutions they created and the negotiations they engaged in energized Turkey as a whole. On the other hand, because there was always already the external threat of the state, the internal problems that emerged in the process of self-governance remain undebated. Most importantly, the Kurdish case obliges us to rethink the issue of law and violence and how new worlds can be created as well as defended. ★

NAZAN ÜSTÜNDAĞ

Nazan Üstündağ is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. She is currently working on a book manuscript on the political cosmology of the Kurdish freedom movement and the place of the figure of the woman in this cosmology. She is a founding member of the Peace Parliament and Academics for Peace, as well as a member of Women for Peace.

Municipalism and the Feminization of Politics

Laura Roth and
Kate Shea Baird

Illustration by **Luis Alves**

BESIDE TURNING LOCAL INSTITUTIONS INTO MECHANISMS OF SELF-GOVERNANCE, MUNICIPALISM ALSO HAS THE POTENTIAL TO FEMINIZE POLITICS IN A WAY THAT ACTION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL DOES NOT.

Municipalism is generating increasing interest around the world as a strategy to challenge the neoliberal political and economic order and respond to demands for greater democracy. The citizen platforms that govern the major cities in Spain, in particular, as well as examples like Ciudad Futura in Argentina, the "Indy Towns" in the UK and democratic confederalism in Kurdistan, for all their missteps and limitations, have given us a glimpse of the transformative potential of local action. The recent international municipalist summit "Fearless Cities" in Barcelona, at which over 100 municipalist platforms from every continent were represented, was testament to the growth of this global movement.

Municipalism, as we understand it, is defined by a set of related characteristics. First, by the construction of a distinctive political organization that reflects the diversity of the local political landscape and responds to local issues and circumstances. Second, by open and participatory decision-making processes that harness the collective intelligence of the community. Third, by an organizational structure that is relatively horizontal (for example, based on neighborhood assemblies) and that guides the work of elected representatives. Fourth, by a creative tension between those inside and outside of local institutions: municipalism understands that the capacity for institutional action depends on strong, organized movements in the streets that push elected leaders. For this reason, the movement welcomes pressure from outside the institutions and seeks to open up genuinely democratic decision-making mechanisms within them.

Finally, municipalism seeks a role for local institutions that goes beyond simply that of the lowest rung on the ladder of government — it wants them to become mechanisms of self-governance. Understood in this way, municipalism is not just a thing of big cities. The movement can and does play a significant role in small towns, districts, neighborhoods and rural areas.

We think the municipalist strategy is a powerful one for a number of reasons. Because through small victories it can demonstrate that there are alternatives to the status quo. Because many of the negative consequences of neoliberalism are felt most keenly at the local level, particularly in cities, for example through speculation on housing, the privatization of the commons and political corruption. And because local institutions, being the closest level of government to the people, offer the greatest opportunity to create a participatory democracy that goes beyond voting once every four years. But there is another, different and complementary argument for municipalism: it has the potential to feminize politics in a way that political action at national or transnational level does not.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF WAYS OF DOING

In a previous article for *ROAR Magazine*, we argued that the feminization of politics, beyond its concern for increasing presence of women in decision-making spaces and implementing public policies to promote gender equality, is about changing the way politics is done. This third dimension of feminization aims to shatter masculine patterns that reward behaviors such as competition, urgency, hierarchy and homogeneity, which are less common in — or appealing to — women. Instead, a feminized politics seeks to emphasize the importance of the small, the relational, the everyday, challenging the artificial division between the personal and the political. This is how we can change the underlying dynamics of the system and construct emancipatory alternatives.

BARCELONA EN COMÚ (BARCELONA IN COMMON)

Gala Pin

Gala Pin is a founding member of the citizen municipal platform Barcelona en Comú, which won the city elections in the Catalan capital in 2015. She is currently serving as Councilor for Participation with responsibility for the historical district of Barcelona. Resident in Barcelona since 2003, Pin was previously active in the struggle for the right to housing through the Mortgage Victims Platform (PAH) with mayor Ada Colau. She has worked on issues of internet rights and freedoms and the practice of techno-politics and online democracy since 2009. As city councilor, one of her priorities is tackling the problem of unlicensed tourist apartments and rising rents, which are forcing local residents out of their neighborhoods.

COOPERATION JACKSON
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

Sacajawea "saki" Hall

Sacajawea "saki" Hall is a black feminist activist and one of the founding members of Cooperation Jackson, the platform that helped to get Mayor of Jackson, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, elected in June 2017. The mission of Cooperation Jackson is to advance the development of economic democracy in Jackson, Mississippi by building a solidarity economy anchored by a network of cooperatives and other types of worker-owned and democratically self-managed enterprises. saki co-leads Cooperation Jackson's Land and Housing Initiatives, including the development of a Community Land Trust. She supports Cooperation Jackson's Climate Justice and Just Transition work along with the financial planning for the development of three Worker-Owner Cooperatives.

We don't make this argument from an essentialist perspective. Gender roles are, of course, the product of patriarchy itself. Rather, we see a need for "feminine" values and practices because the predominance of "masculine" styles pushes women, who have not been socialized into using them, out of the center of the political arena. Such a shift in the way politics is done implies attacking patriarchy at its root: through the practices where gender roles themselves are reproduced. What is more, if our goal is to deepen democracy and empower people, promoting "feminine" ways of doing — collaboration, dialogue, horizontality — will help to include all sorts of disadvantaged groups and should be a priority independent of the question of gender.

> **" The feminization of politics, beyond its concern for increasing presence of women in decision-making spaces and implementing public policies to promote gender equality, is about changing the way politics is done.**

The contemporary municipalist movements we most admire all take a distinctive, "feminine" approach to politics. They combine radical goals with concrete action. In this way, municipalism resists becoming a struggle for power at any cost, or falling into the trap of paralyzing ideological purity — two "masculine" tendencies familiar on the traditional left. Municipalism is characterized by a dynamic of learning-by-doing, of trial and error. This is, of course, deeply linked to the nature of many local issues, such as access to housing, water and electricity, transport and waste management, all of which demand immediate and complex responses rather than the abstract debates that so often characterize progressive organizations.

THE FEMININE PROCESS OF CONSTRUCTION AND ORGANIZATION

One of the limits of national political projects is their phobia of internal disagreement, their urge to control the narrative from the top down. This "masculine" dynamic, fruit of the need to put forward a coherent project, can't hope to meet the diverse demands and priorities of the population of any large geographical area. In the end, such projects have a limited ability to garner support because it's impossible for any single political project to be a perfect fit for everyone in a whole country. This is, in part, the cause of the frequent divisions within the left at a national level in many countries.

By contrast, municipalism turns diversity to its advantage: it allows for differences between political projects, according to local contexts. For example, municipal platforms in Spain have different names and include

Amina Gichinga

TAKE BACK THE CITY
LONDON

Amina Gichinga was born and lives in Newham, East London. In 2016 she stood as Take Back the City's candidate for the City and East London Constituency in the Greater London Assembly elections on a crowdsourced manifesto focused on tackling economic, racial and intergenerational inequalities. For the last three years she has been a music leader and community organizer in North Woolwich & Silvertown, working with communities that face the impacts of London City Airport.

Caren Tepp

CIUDAD FUTURA (FUTURE CITY)
ROSARIO

Elected in 2015, Caren Tepp is one of three councilors for the municipalist movement Ciudad Futura (Future City) in Rosario, Argentina. She has been active in movements for citizen organization, the cooperative economy and land rights in Rosario. One of her main lines of work in Ciudad Futura is strengthening its anti-inflation cooperative, *Misión Anti-Inflación.*

different party alliances in each city. Each municipalist platform in Spain also has its own political priorities, for example, defending the right to housing in the face of the tourism lobby in Barcelona. While it remains a challenge, there is far greater capacity to manage and harness political diversity at the local level, where people know one another and share concrete goals.

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Feminizing politics also means introducing horizontal decision-making and new forms of leadership. Yet, however much a regional or national political organization wants to put decision-making in the hands of grassroots activists, it faces a far greater challenge in doing so than a municipal platform would. At the smaller, local scale, neighborhood assemblies can have a direct impact in the decisions of the platform and its elected representatives.

This can be seen in the case of Barcelona en Comú, which has over 1,700 activists working relatively autonomously in neighborhood assemblies, policy groups and committees. While the communication of information between activists, the organizational leadership and the institution remains a great challenge, it is achievable. Indeed, if creating decision-making mechanisms that empower grassroots activists can be done

anywhere at all, it's at the municipal level, where face-to-face interaction is possible.

In terms of leadership, it's noteworthy that it is municipal movements that are pioneering the creation of new, collective models. The Kurdish freedom movement is particularly advanced in this regard — all its leadership positions are shared between men and women (towns even have male and female co-mayors, for example). This both prevents the concentration of executive power in the hands of men and changes the way that executive power is exercised. While this kind of mechanism hasn't been used at an institutional level in many countries, in Spain, Barcelona en Comú has shunned the presidential leadership model of national political parties and created an executive board of eight people and a coordination team of 40, each with a minimum proportion of 50 percent women.

THE FEMININE NARRATIVE

Every political project must appeal to a "we" in order for people to identify with it. In national projects, this "we" usually ends up being the nation, however it is defined. This is problematic because it buys into the frame of the nation state, which has patriarchal, colonial and capitalist origins that we should be questioning rather than reinforcing. The kinds of collective identities that spring from the nation state are, at worst, sexist, xenophobic and classist or, at best, so emptied of content that they end up not appealing to anyone.

With the authoritarian right on the rise around the world, it's now more necessary than ever to seek out alternative collective identities that are powerful, inclusive and offer security in times of uncertainty. Municipalism offers this possibility through the construction of a local "we" that is based on residence and shared concerns rather than legal citizenship or ethnic identity.

Áurea Carolina de Freitas

Áurea Carolina de Freitas is a political scientist specialized in gender and equality whose activism began in the streets, in dialogue with the hip-hop movement and citizen initiatives for human rights. She participates in the municipalist movement *MUITAS pela Cidade que Queremos* and received the most votes of any candidate for Belo Horizonte City Hall in 2016. As councilor, her priorities include strengthening the struggle for the rights of historically marginalized groups, such as women, young people and the black community, defending the right to occupy public space, and promoting citizen participation in politics.

Gültan Kışanak

Gültan Kışanak is a Kurdish journalist and politician from Turkey. In 2007 she succesfully ran as an independent candidate for the Turkish parliament, where she represented the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party. In 2014 she became the first female co-mayor of Diyabakir. In October 2016 she was arrested along with her co-mayor Fırat Anlı by the Turkish authorities on trumped-up charges of being members of the PKK. Their detention moved thousands of Kurds in Diyarbakir to take to the streets in protest. If convicted, Gültan Kışanak could face a 230-year prison sentence.

BEYOND MUNICIPALISM

Of course, municipalism is not an end in itself. It's a means by which to achieve the vital goals we have explored above: fighting for gender justice, harnessing diversity, constructing democratic organizations and collective leadership and stopping the far right. Municipalism shouldn't renounce working at the national or transnational level. In fact, committed municipalists must take on this responsibility, just as the platforms in Spain are doing by standing up to the central government to call for refugee intake, local autonomy to re-municipalize basic services and the closure of immigrant internment centers. This kind of networked collaboration, which is grounded in local movements and new ways of doing, is a good way to start to act at other levels.

It is essential that any new political projects at national or European level are built on solid foundations and rooted in local organizations. It's only at the local level that ways of doing politics can be feminized through everyday life. History shows that national electoral victories of the left have failed to feminize politics, which continues to be dominated by men and their ways of doing. That's why we think that municipalism should be the foundation of any multi-level strategy. Anyone who tries to build a house starting with the roof will end up without a home, without a neighborhood and without people. And without people, revolution is impossible. ★

LAURA ROTH

Laura Roth teaches at Pompeu Fabra University and works for the Participation Area of the Barcelona City Council. She focuses on participatory democracy and its relationship with political culture and with the law. As a member of the International Group of Barcelona en Comú, she also helps build an international municipalist network.

KATE SHEA BAIRD

Kate Shea Baird is based in Barcelona where she works in international advocacy for local governments. She has written on Catalan and Spanish politics for Novara Media, Red Pepper, Open Democracy, Indy Voices, Planeta Futuro, Sentit Critic *and* Media.cat. *Kate has participated in the municipal platform Barcelona en Comú since June 2014.*

Cooperative Economics in the American South

Cooperation Jackson was first developed in 2005 and his since grown into a network of interconnected institutions and cooperatives that together explore the potential of alternative economic models to transform local communities. Cooperation Jackson is the revolutionary brainchild of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and the New Afrikan People's Organization, and is part of these organizations' plans towards a radical transformation not only of the city of Jackson, but the entire state of Mississippi.

The goals of Cooperation Jackson are threefold: to advance the struggle for economic democracy, community ownership and sustainable community development. The cooperation consists of four interconnected and interdependent institutions: an emerging federation of local worker cooperatives, a developing cooperative incubator, a cooperative education and training center (The Lumumba Center for Economic Democracy and Development), and a cooperative bank or financial institution.

The broad mission of Cooperation Jackson is to advance the development of economic democracy in the city through building a solidarity economy anchored by a network of cooperatives and other types of worker-owned and democratically self-managed enterprises.

OPERATION JACKSON

Illustration by **Kaan Bağcı**

Black resistance in Mississippi

Founding of numerous Black rights' organizations under the umbrella of the Civil Rights Movement; from the NAACP to the SNCC.

1960S

Creation of Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), to challenge the Whites-only policy of the Democratic Party in Mississippi. In the early 1970s Black activists managed to gain majority control over the party.

1964

Founding of the Black nationalist Republic of New Afrika (RNA) with the aim to create an independent African-American-majority country in the southeast of the US.

1968

1963

May 28, Woolworth's Sit-in. Student activists trained in nonviolence sit in at Woolworth's lunch counter in downtown Jackson as part of an ongoing campaign to end racial segregation.

1971

1967

Federation of Southern Cooperatives / Land Assistance Fund founded to support the rights of low-income rural workers and Black farm families to land by spearheading the development of agricultural cooperatives and defending the land rights of New Afrikan farmers.

Chowke Lumumba moved to Mississippi to support the attempt of the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika (PG-RNA) to establish its capital in the state of Mississippi. This effort was brutally suppressed by the US government in August 1971, and eleven of its leading actors were taken prisoners. Chokwe became a lawyer to defend the RNA-11.
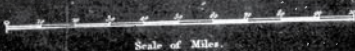
Scale of Miles.

June, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, Lumumba's son, successfully runs for mayor of Jackson and wins the election with 93% of the votes.

2017

Henry Kirksey, a Black political activist was elected by a grassroots convention to run for mayor of Jackson. He lost due to a fragmentation of the Black vote.

1993

June 4, Chokwe Lumumba elected mayor of Jackson, Mississippi.

2013

Development of Jackson-Kush Plan, an initiative to build a base of autonomous power in Mississippi concentrated in Jackson and the eastern Black Belt portions of the state that can serve as a catalyst for the attainment of Black self-determination and the democratic transformation of the economy.

Formation of Jackson Human Rights coalition that helped unseat Mayor Dale Danks, a promoter and defender of police brutality.

LATE 1980'S

2008.
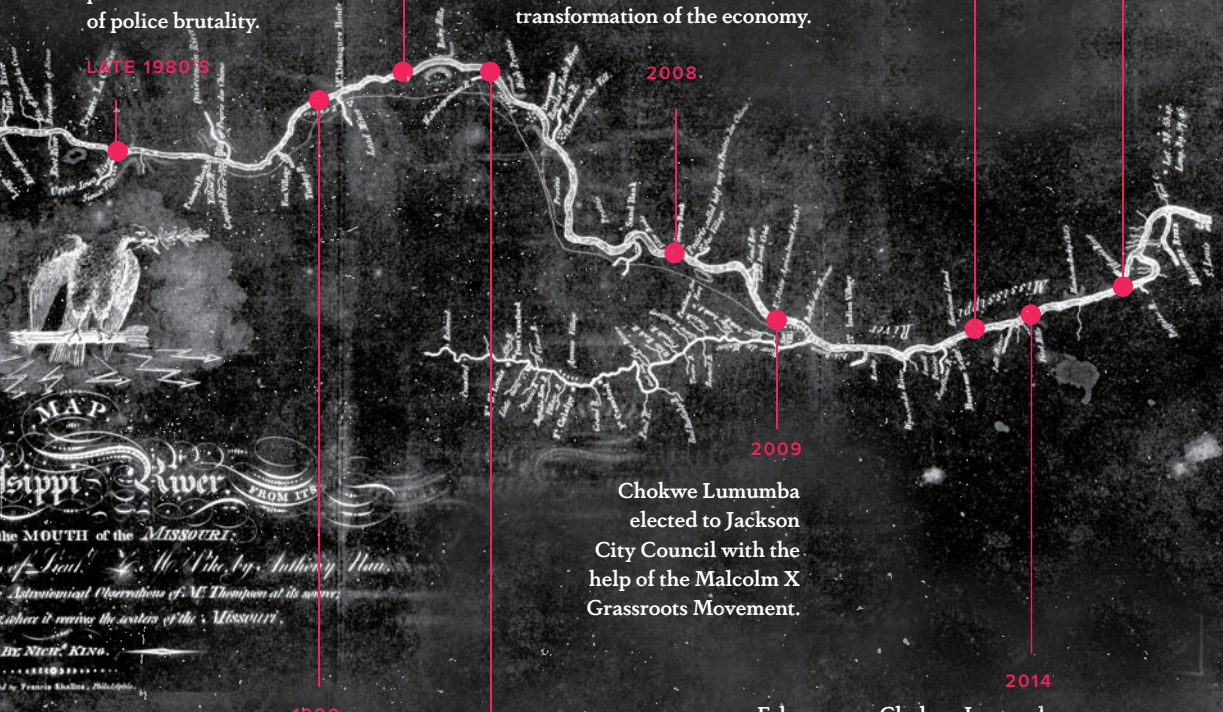
2009

Chokwe Lumumba elected to Jackson City Council with the help of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement.

2014

1990

February 25, Chokwe Lumumba dies as result of aortic aneurysm.

Founding of Malcolm X Grassroots Movement in Jackson, Mississippi.

2005

August – Hurricane Katrina. Jackson People's Assembly founded in the wake of Katrina, as a response to the crisis of displacement and disfranchisement.

JACKSON PLAN

Originally crafted by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, the Jackson Plan is an initiative for economic, political, and cultural self-determination.

The idea was to first build a solid base in Jackson — the state capital and largest city as well as the center of commerce and mass media in Mississippi — which would then enable us to more successfully branch out to the Kush and support allied forces there (hence the more ambitiously named "Jackson-Kush Plan").

There are four interlocking components of the Jackson Plan:

1) Building the People's Assembly;
2) Pursuing Political Office and Creating an Independent Political Vehicle;
3) Building Cooperatives;
4) Training a New Generation of Organizers.

The greatest challenge to the Assembly and its expansion has been the almost non-stop run of electoral campaigns our movement has engaged in since 2009. For considerable periods, significant sections of the Assembly's base have served as the organizing force driving the electoral campaigns.

On more than one occasion the strategic question has been raised: Is the Assembly primarily designed to build "dual power," or is it rather a vehicle meant to nurture and support progressive political candidates? The affirmative answer from the vast majority of the Assembly's base is that it must be a vehicle to exercise political power outside of elected office.

— KALI AKUNO, CASTING SHADOWS (2015)

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