

Fall 2014

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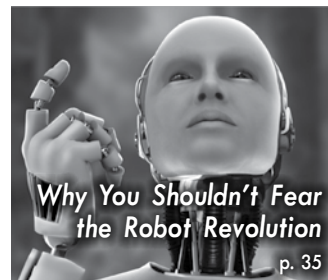
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*CUNY Graduate Center*

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## The Corporate University, Academic Boycotts, and Academic Freedoms Today

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# In Support of Violence

OSCAR GRANT, SEAN BELL, Ezell Ford, Ramarley Graham, Eric Garner, Stephon Watts, Manuel Loggins Jr., Johnnie Kamahi Warren, Raymond Allen, Justin Sipp, Melvin Lawhorn, Bo Morrison, Nehemiah Dillard, Wendell Allen, Kendrec Lavelle McDade, Patrick Dorismond, Orlando Barlow, Ousmane Zongo, Malcolm Ferguson, Timothy Stansbury, Ronald Madison, James Brissette, Aaron Campbell, Steve Eugene Washington, Timothy Russell, Larry Jackson Jr., Jonathan Ferrell, Jordan Baker, and Michael Brown. These are just some of the names of, mostly young, black men (and boys) killed by law enforcement since the dawn of the new millennium. They were all unarmed. The above list does not include the names of black men assaulted and maimed by police, and is simply just scratching the surface of the human toll that state violence has wrought. Additionally, it does not include individuals killed by security guards or vigilantes (a prime example being George Zimmerman's murder of Trayvon Martin). While black men seemingly prove to experience increased instances of police violence, there are no statistics to verify this, police agencies (local, state, and federal) do not generally keep tabs on whom their officers kill, and when they do the numbers are neither thorough nor are they complete. When a cop kills a civilian, even if the civilian did not have a weapon, the trend seems to be that the officer is cleared of any wrong doing, or at the very most is given a paltry sentence, often reduced once the mind of the public is turned elsewhere.

Police killings of unarmed men are not unique to the black demographic. Indeed, extrajudicial murders—what most police killings tend to be—occur across gender and racial lines, though of course Afro-Americans, Latinos, the mentally ill, migrant laborers, and anyone who does not immediately submit to police power and authority seemingly bear the brunt of the violence meted out by police. One needs only conduct a brief Internet search to see videos of police in the United States wantonly killing people whilst in the line of duty.

The 24 November grand jury decision not to indict Darren Wilson over the 9 August fatal shooting of teenager Michael Brown has been met with a mixed consensus amongst people in the United States. On the one hand, there are those who claim that the rule of law has prevailed, and that there is nothing else to do. For others, there is a feeling of indignance that has catapulted people into large, sometimes violent, demonstrations in Ferguson and across the United States. State officials and political pundits have either

vilified the protests or appealed for some semblance of calm in the wake of the grand jury's decision. There is almost no discussion on the anti-democratic nature of the grand jury process, on Jay Nixon preemptively calling a state of emergency, or the role that the police play in this society. The focus, it seems, is on the lack of so-called civility on behalf of some of the protesters. Conservatives often use racialist, if not overtly racist, rhetoric when considering what is happening in Ferguson. Liberals appeal to the protestors to harken to the whitewashed legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. and engage in peaceful demonstrations.

The time for peace has passed, indeed it never existed in this country. It doesn't matter if Brown robbed a convenience store, or even if he assaulted Wilson. What matters is that the case highlights the depths to which the capitalist state and its police forces will protect their own and attempt to stifle any sort of dissent. Imagine if Wilson was the aggressor in the situation—which is more likely than Brown being the aggressor—and Brown defended himself with deadly force, mortally wounding Wilson. Brown would have likely go to prison for life, whereas Wilson has been cleared for what has been deemed a justifiable shooting. And it is justifiable based on how police operate within the United States: with near impunity.

The violence of the police is almost always defensible in the eyes of the ruling elite, as evinced by Barack Obama's platitudes to liberal desires to the rule of law in the aftermath of the grand jury decision. So, why then is the violence of the protestor so reviled? It is confounding that the people seem more concerned about the loss of property than the loss of life in the aftermath of the Ferguson decision. While there are opportunists who have used the protests to their own end, the acts of looting, destruction of property, and violence directed towards state representatives is not only warranted, it is necessary. If people could, they would target the police, but the protesters know that a direct confrontation (with what is now a military force in this country) at this time would likely result in their deaths. The destruction of property in the area is the next best option. And while it is lamentable that some so-called mom-and-pop shops are targeted alongside the larger businesses, it is the truly dispossessed, downtrodden, social ostracized, and oppressed peoples who are engaging in the only viable option to lash out at an increasingly militarized, bureaucratically regimented, and authoritarian society. It is clear that while the murder of Michael Brown was the catalyst for these events, it

is not the cause. The cause is the decades long, the centuries long, daily oppression people experience at the hands of the capitalist state.

Historically, the police, and specifically the policing of minority communities in the United States can be traced to the epoch of chattel slavery. The modern police were developed from, at times directly so, the ranks of slave catchers. The racialized policing and subjugation of Afro-Americans and, later, of Amerindians, European immigrant communities, Latinos and others was born from the desire to maintain a white supremacist state. It does not seem as though much has changed in this regard since the defeat of Radical Reconstruction in 1877. The problem with the protestors' violence in Ferguson is that it is unorganized. If the violence was to be organized, and the protestors armed—more so than the few that sparingly are—then the brunt of social pressures would not be laid onto middling proprietors, but unto those deserving the most virulent response of an enraged populace.

Calls for calm emanating from the upper strata of society are an attempt to mitigate the popular indignation that has long been bubbling under the surface of the society. The violence against property, that is destruction and theft, is only an unorganized form of something with the potential to be far more revolutionary and inspiring. To say that an all-out class war is on the horizon would be hyperbolic at this point, and maybe even myopic, but the undergirding social structures that position disenfranchised and working class peoples well below the dictatorship of capital are being pressured, the police being only one such institution. With increased organization, the Ferguson protests and riots do have the potential to transform from seemingly random attacks to ones that aim at puncturing the status quo. This is not a quixotic notion, it is within the realm of material possibilities, and activist-scholars should be lending their weight to this and other attendant struggles. The reliability and social productivity of voting for bourgeoisie parties is long dead. The demonstration turned riot, turned revolt, is the most effective means to bring about a new, more egalitarian social paradigm. While the current “unrest” in Ferguson and around the country is unlikely lead to any revolutionary impetus, it is a start. As people's consciousness is transmuted from subservience to the prevailing ideologies of the elite to something related to their actual position in the society, drastic social change will become increasingly possible.

The death of Michael Brown has spurred this process and has fomented mass discontent with the government. Furthermore, the events in Ferguson have fomented the most visible resistance to the status quo in the United States. What is needed now is to take the next step from indiscrimi-

nate attacks to ones directly pointed at state power as well as at the lackeys and apologists who allow it to prosper. The transformative potential emanating from the protestors' violence in Ferguson and elsewhere will not help recoup some “golden age” in the United States—there never was one—but can hopefully prove to be the kernel of radically altered social relations.

During the protests in New York City in the days after the decision to not indict Wilson, thousands took to the streets empathetically chanting “Hands Up, Don't Shoot!” Some, however, went even further, shouting the slogan “Arms Up, Shoot Back!” The former statement represents an appeal to state authorities, namely the police, to cease its murderous rampage upon those living in this country. The latter, represents a challenge—albeit prematurely and an incendiary one, given the balance of forces—to those that currently wield power, and have the legal (fictitious) right to kill whom they see fit. Instead of attempting to demonize the rioters and looters by invoking the image and memory of Martin Luther King Jr., it would be more advantageous for those “progressives” in our society to understand the Ferguson protests as part of the same genealogy as the Deacons for Defense, Malcolm X, Robert F. Williams, and the Black Panthers. What is occurring in Ferguson is symptomatic of the social dislocation that has been ever present but has yet to ferment.

When the state comes down on its citizenry violently, we must resist, with equitable violence if necessary. The attacks on property in Ferguson only need be redirected for a magnificent transformation of consciousness to come out of Michael Brown's death. If not, then Brown's death, the deaths of the aforementioned men, and the millions who suffered and died under the jackboot of state oppression in this country would have partially been lost in vain. Let us not protest the protestors, but express our solidarity, and our commitment to their struggle, which is invariably our own struggle. As we solidarize and join with the embattled communities in and around Ferguson, let us also remember to look beyond the provincial confines of our own state and express solidarity with others who struggle for a more just and equitable society, be they in Palestine, Mexico, or Burkina Faso. In the word of the late Burkinabé revolutionary Thomas Sankara, “It took the madmen of yesterday for us to be able to act with extreme clarity today. I want to be one of those madmen. We must dare to invent the future.”

• • •

*While the Advocate is opposed to state violence, and we support the protests on Ferguson, and we do not think that Wilson should be free, this editorial represents the individual views of the Editor-in-Chief, not the Advocate's or the DSC's.* Ⓐ

# CUNY Goes Corporate; Trustees Say Silence Implies Guilt

## Cop Cleared in Eric Garner Strangling Case

AS THIS ISSUE OF *the Advocate* went to press, Eric Garner's murderer, Daniel Pantaleo, has been cleared of any wrongdoing, a grand jury in Staten Island opting to refrain from indicting him on 3 December. On 17 July 2014, Pantaleo, and NYPD officer placed Garner in a chokehold (illegal even by the standards of the NYPD) which resulted in a fatal heart attack for Garner. Garner was not bellicose in his interactions with police and was unarmed.

The video of his murder sparked wide spread protests in the New York City Metro area, as the grand jury decision is likely to do so as well.

## The Board of Trustees Looks to Change CUNY's By-laws, Abrogating Students' Rights

THE CUNY BOARD OF Trustees voted on 1 December whether to eliminate a student's "right to remain silent without the assumption of guilt" from its bylaws. It also voted on whether College Presidents can increase penalties against students upon appeal.

They decided to go ahead with these changes and they specifically impact students involved in disciplinary hearings. Because the changes will negatively impact the due process protections afforded to students, a petition against the decision was passed by the United Student Senate, and presented at the Board's public hearing on 24 November. Updates about the results should come to you through the DSC representative for your program. Keep

## Reminder: Your Email Address Has Changed

AS PART OF THE roll-out of Office 365, students have been assigned new email addresses ending in @gradcenter.cuny.edu. The change-over took place on 1 December 2014.

**Overlap period:** At first, your current GC mailbox and your new Office 365 mailbox will exist in parallel. Students will have until 1 June 2015 to move any email they want to retain from their current @gc.cuny.edu mailbox to their new Office 365 mailbox.

**Forwarding:** As of 17 February 2015, incoming email will be automatically redirected from GC email accounts to the new Office 365 account. Email will continue to be redirected until 1 December 2015. After that, email sent to a student's old @gc.cuny.edu address will not be delivered.

For information and assistance, go to <http://it.gc.cuny.edu>.



tuned and demand that these fundamental rights not be revoked.

## The Project on a Governance for a New Era

IN THE JUNCTURE OF this voting, it should be noticed that, last August, the chairman of the CUNY Board of Trustees, Benno Schmidt, and the

American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) released the "Project on a Governance for a New Era: A Blueprint for Higher Education Trustees."

According to ACTA, this project is "the product of a summit facilitated by ACTA and chaired by Benno Schmidt... Signatories to the statement, a diverse group of 22 distinguished national leaders, include college presidents, trustees, business leaders, academics, and policymakers dedicated to ensuring America's colleges and universities shed 20th century thinking and successfully meet 21st century challenges." It is an interesting document, which mixes liberal rhetoric with obscure right-winged, market oriented perspectives.

It is worth reading for all students in the United States, and particularly by CUNY students, since the chairman of our Board of Trustees is one of the main forces behind it. In brief, the project seeks to hand control over high academic institutions to boards of trustees, which—it proposes—should

look at the business and governmental sectors to recruit their members, since, allegedly, they would know better than academics how to administer an education institution. Academics, the project argues, are too busy with their own areas of specialization. The members of the boards should be professionalized through ad hoc continuing education programs, a series of workshops that will teach them how to govern an academic institution appropriately. The trustees, coming from a variety of professions outside of academia, will presumably be better off at linking the academic institutions with the civic society. Overall, the rhetoric emphasizes the aim at excellence in higher education institutions, both public and private, in the United States, and it strongly advocates for a significant increase in power for board of trustees.

According to the proposal, “trustees must have the last word when it comes to guarding the central values of American higher education—academic excellence and academic freedom.” The issue of “academic freedom” is eminent, but it is not clear what is precisely meant by it—as it also happens with many other catch phrases flooding the document. For instance, it is alleged that

“academic freedom is the single most important value informing the academic enterprise, and governance for a new era requires trustees to protect it. Since the 1915 Declaration of Principles by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), academic freedom has been a two-way street: the freedom of the teacher to teach and the freedom of the student to learn. Trustees and administrators have, for the most part, done a good job of protecting the academic freedom of faculty. But they have

often failed to guard the academic freedom of students. It is a sad truth that in some instances, faculty, while being jealous of their own academic freedom, have diminished the academic freedom of students. Additionally, the academic freedoms of faculty, specifically contingent faculty, are increasingly under attack in recent decades. Recent surveys suggest there is an erosion in understanding and appreciation of academic freedom. Professional organizations such as the AAUP and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) are embracing an expansive definition of academic freedom that emphasizes rights, job security, and collective bargaining but which de-emphasizes faculty accountability and responsibility. Governance for a new era requires trustees to have the final authority and responsibility to protect academic freedom.”

Although this all its portrayed as to seem very sound and well intentioned, the precise meaning of the proposal often seems to fall through the cracks of a well-constructed rhetoric. When they thus posit that trustees should protect academic freedom, and they equate it with faculty accountability, what does this mean? What will this proposal mean, concretely, for the professor designing their syllabus? Or, when it proposes that professionals coming from the business and governmental sectors, who are the people that the project wants to empower? Why should people outside academia be the ‘solution’ for the problems of academic institutions? Do they know better the kind of education we are to receive? Or, in other words, what, and whose agenda is being advanced when the system of education is put in the hands of market oriented people? These and

other issues should be of our greatest interests, as current students, adjuncts, and future professors. The document must be read critically, and we should be aware of what is coming. While the Right proactively advances its agenda, where is a similarly carefully worked out project to face the problems of higher ed stemming from the Left?

The ACTA project can be found on the ACTA website at [http://www.goacta.org/publications/governance\\_for\\_a\\_new\\_era](http://www.goacta.org/publications/governance_for_a_new_era).

## **Budget Request for the Next Fiscal Year**

THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS posted on its website (on 26 November) a draft of the University Budget Request for the Fiscal Year 2015-2016. CUNY requests a \$135.7 million USD increase in total funding for senior colleges and a \$68.5 million USD increase for community colleges.

Thirty-seven percent of the budget request represents the costs of the University’s mandatory needs (like increases of salaries, energy, and building rental), and the other 63% represents the cost of the University’s Investment Plan. 52% of the funding for the investment plan would come from tuition revenues, whereas less than a third part would come from State or City aid, and a small part would come from philanthropy. For Community Colleges, the budget requests a \$250 USD per student FTE state base aid increase, together with a State commitment to grant this increase for each of the next three years.

It also proposes, among other things, investments in new full-time faculty, online education, academic advising, international education, research opportunities for students and faculty, and a considerable investment in the Advanced Science Research Center, along with extra funding for programs promoting student success. Happily, the university has realized

that “recent studies have shown a strong correlation between student access to and use of library resources and student success,” so the budget request includes a total of \$4 million USD for library services, \$2 million USD for senior colleges and another \$2 USD for community colleges.

## **GC Celebrates Forty Years of Naropa University**

IN 1974, CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA Rinpoche, a comparative religion scholar and a Buddhist meditation master, founded in Boulder, Colorado, the Naropa Institute, later becoming Naropa University.

It is the first Buddhist-inspired university in the West, and it engenders principles of non-competitive education and the importance of artistic and spiritual community. Not many people have heard about this very particular event in the cultural history of the United States, as a concrete, lasting result of the hopeful decades of the sixties and seventies in our country. The first session of



the Institute took place that summer of 1974, without any funds available, and without infrastructure. The event attracted more than 1,300 students. Important artists of the twentieth century, like Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, and John Cage were involved with Naropa in its formative years. The university has been an important epicenter of experimental poetics, inquiry, and activism in the United

States. On 5 November, The Center for the Humanities, Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative, The Poetry Project, and the PhD Program in English cosponsored an event to celebrate Naropa’s 40th anniversary.

If you missed this event, you can stream it at <http://videostreaming.gc.cuny.edu/videos/video/2238/in/channel/21/>. 🎧

# *Never Submit. Contribute!*

The *GC Advocate* newspaper, the only newspaper dedicated to the needs and interests of the CUNY Graduate Center community, is looking for new writers for the upcoming academic year. We publish six issues per year and reach thousands of Graduate Center students, faculty, staff, and guests each month.

Currently we are seeking contributors for the following articles and columns:

- Investigative articles covering CUNY news and issues (assignments available on request)
- First Person essays on teaching at CUNY for our regular “Dispatches from the Front” column
- First person essays on life as a graduate student for our “Graduate Life” column
- Feature “magazine style” articles on the arts, politics, culture, NYC, etc.
- Provocative and insightful analyses of international, national, and local politics for our Political Analysis column
- Book reviews for our regular Book Review column and special Book issues
- Local Music Reviews and Art Reviews

To view recent articles and to get a sense of our style, please visit the *GC Advocate* website: <http://opencuny.org/gcadvocate>. Payments for articles range between \$75 and \$150 depending on the length and amount of research required. We also pay for photos and cartoons.

Interested writers should contact the Editor at [gcadvocate@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:gcadvocate@gc.cuny.edu).



# Shaking the Heavens in Ferguson

**amy goodman**

“AS LONG AS JUSTICE is postponed we always stand on the verge of these darker nights of social disruption.” So said Martin Luther King Jr. in a speech on March 14, 1968, just three weeks before he was assassinated.

Michael Brown’s killing in August continues to send shockwaves through Ferguson, Missouri, and beyond. Last Monday night, Saint Louis County prosecuting attorney Robert McCulloch unleashed a night of social disruption when he announced that no criminal charges would be filed against Darren Wilson, the police officer who killed Brown. McCulloch inexplicably delayed release of the grand jury findings until nightfall. The prosecutor’s press conference deeply insulted many, as he laboriously defended the actions of Darren Wilson, while attacking the character of the victim, Michael Brown.

Soon after McCulloch’s announcement, Ferguson erupted. Buildings were set ablaze, burning to the ground. Cars were engulfed in flames. Aggressive riot police, ignoring much-touted “rules of engagement” agreements with protest organizers, fired tear gas canisters at outraged residents. Random gunfire rang out through the night.

“Black lives don’t matter,” said one young man protesting in the freezing cold in Ferguson on Monday night. Tear gas mixed with noxious smoke from raging fires nearby. Another protester, Katrina Redmon, explained her frustration with the failure to indict Darren Wilson: “He killed an unarmed black teenager. There is no excuse for that. A man was killed and somebody walked away ... we want

“And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard.”

—MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

answers. Because it seems like the only way you can get away with murder is if you got a badge.”

I was interviewing the demonstrators outside the Ferguson police station, which was ringed with riot police. We were not far from the spot where Michael Brown was killed, shot at least six times by Darren Wilson, and where his corpse was left in the road, face down and bleeding, for more than four hours under the hot August sun as horrified friends and neighbors looked on. After protests grew following Brown’s killing, state and local law enforcement

unfurled a shocking array of military gear and arms, helping expose how the Pentagon has been quietly unloading its surplus war-making materiel from Iraq and Afghanistan to thousands of cities and towns across the country. Since 9/11, over \$5 billion worth of this gear has been transferred. The United States now has an occupying military force: the local police.

The riot police and National Guard swarmed the white side of Ferguson, while the black side of town, along West Florissant Avenue, was ablaze. There were almost no cops there. Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon declared a state of emergency a week before the grand jury decision came down, yet the National Guard troops he deployed were nowhere to be seen in this part of town. About a dozen businesses went up in flames. Why was West Florissant Avenue left unguarded? Did the authorities let Ferguson burn?

In his 1968 speech, “The Other America,” Dr. King addressed fears of a forthcoming summer of riots like those that consumed Newark, New Jersey, Detroit and other black inner cities in 1967. King said:

“It is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard.”

Those unheard, the citizens of Ferguson who have been taking to the streets for over 100 days, weren’t the ones setting fires. They were demanding justice. Solidarity protests involving thousands around the country and around the world are amplifying their demands, linking struggles, building a mass movement.

“We’re going to shake the heavens,” one young man told me, as he faced off with the riot police. His breath was visible in the freezing night air. He was shivering in the cold, but he wasn’t going anywhere. It is that fire, that inextinguishable commitment, not the burning embers of buildings, that those who profit from injustice have most to fear. 🌍

Denis Moynihan contributed research to this column. Amy Goodman is the host of “Democracy Now!,” a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on more than 1,200 stations in North America. She is the co-author of “The Silenced Majority,” a *New York Times* best-seller.

# Remembering Leslie Feinberg

## Letters from Two Activist-Scholar Queer-Femmes

**jennifer polish and leilani dowell**

I loved my friend.  
He went away from me.  
There's nothing more to say.  
The poem ends,  
Soft as it began, -  
I loved my friend.  
—Langston Hughes

“REMEMBER ME AS A revolutionary communist.” Leslie Feinberg’s last words, spoken to hir lover of 22 years, Minnie Bruce Pratt, sum up hir life better than any memorial piece ever could. “Remember me,” ze—the gender-neutral ze and hir being Leslie’s preferred pronouns—implored Minnie Bruce, and by extension, all of us. But Leslie, how could we ever forget?

Leslie passed away on 15 November at 65 years old. These devastating words threaten to flatten hir dedication and fervor for true justice. Born in 1949 in Kansas City, Missouri and raised in Buffalo, New York, Leslie’s writing, speaking, and public activism as a self-described “anti-racist white, working-class, secular Jewish transgender, lesbian, female, revolutionary communist” radically shook the lives of so many who encountered hir work. In 1993, Leslie published hir ground-breaking first novel, *Stone Butch Blues*, which was subsequently translated into many languages as it became an unapologetically intersectional queer classic.

Member and managing editor of *Workers World* newspaper, Leslie’s research and writing on transgender movements, communities, and individuals throughout history contributed profoundly to queering Marxist theoretics and



activism. Writing powerfully about the myriad ways that capitalism and capitalist health care creates and perpetuates illness, suffering, and death, Leslie also contributed greatly not only to a queer understanding of revolutionary communism, but to an understanding which fundamentally integrated analyses of ableism and racism into revolutionary activism.

### **Leilani:**

THIS IS FOR MY comrade, mentor, and friend Leslie Feinberg. The person who took me under hir wing when I showed up in New York City from the other side of the country, feeling more than a little lost. At a time when the editorial staff was beginning to work from home, Leslie and I made our way to the [Workers World] office in Manhattan every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday so we could work together, learn from each other (because Leslie was always clear that ze could learn as much from me—a young, revolutionary, queer hapa woman—as I could from hir), build a friendship. I owe so much of my skills as an editor, journalist, and thinker to Leslie’s patient work with me in those early years.

### **Jennifer:**

YOU WERE A WARRIOR, Leslie. You were trained by the violence of heterosexism to know how to fight with your fists, but you were a warrior, also, of words. Written words and spoken words, words unspoken but clearly articulated as you held femmes with your eyes and fellow transmasculine people with your knowing. Words that defied expectation;

words that you weren't supposed to utter. Words that deliberately lacked academic jargon; words that intimately fused the academic and the activist as they fought to be accessible to the widest possible audiences. Words that you stitched together to give starving butches and femmes life-giving food across time and space, transcending everything we are taught about what is normal, what is moral, what is good. What is handsome. What is beautiful. What is both.

### **Leilani:**

I HAVE THIS PICTURE of the day that I first met Leslie, before I had even moved to NYC. We held a meeting in San Francisco around the LGBTQ struggle for Pride, and we were both speaking at the event. There I am, trying not to look all nervous that I was meeting “the” Leslie Feinberg, author of *Stone Butch Blues*, transgender warrior and solidarity activist. And ze's facing the camera but inclined towards me, with the warmest smile on hir face. I would see that smile duplicated on Leslie's face so many times after I moved to New York—a gesture of respect and love to anyone dedicated to living their lives in defiance of the daily onslaught of capitalism and imperialism.

The picture, taken in front of the Women's Building, blazes with color—the vibrant hues of the mural we are standing in front of, the deep red of the fancy femme shirt I wore for the occasion. And every time I see it, the warmth of the colors and the warmth of that smile transport me; I may as well be standing in the sun, ten or twelve years younger, head tilted upward to catch the rays on my face.

### **Jennifer:**

HOW TO DEFINE YOUR work, your life, to someone who has never had the privilege of knowing you, of experiencing the sheer power of your raw words? How to sum up the magnificence of the radical impact your life made on those you touched and those who touched your books?

You simultaneously brought to life and memorialized times and places and people that the forces of dominant history threatened to erase. Your novel *Stone Butch Blues* stitched together lives that were almost forgotten: working class butches and femmes in 1960s New York, forging lives that profoundly shaped the ways we live our lives today. Your writings, your speeches, your ways of living, gave so many of us the permission we thought we needed to embrace our femmeness, our butchness, our desires, our passions. To embrace the ways that we resist not just heterosexism, but racism, classism, capitalism, and ableism in our daily lives, through our survivals and the ways we give each other life and sustenance with each interaction. To embrace and to celebrate the microaffirmations we provide for each other in the (many) face(s) of the microaggressions

that threaten our very lives each moment of interacting with the world. To embrace and to celebrate ourselves and our comrades with loves rising far above the violence we face each day.

I am picturing you dancing with Minnie Bruce in Phase in DC, and I remembering.

I am remembering the photographs of you spray painting the walls of the cage that trapped CeCe McDonald because she defended herself against a transphobic, racist attack, and I am remembering the pit of acidic knowledge in my stomach that you were willingly, deliberately, putting your body and soul back into a place that had terrorized you so many times, all so that people would know, so that CeCe would feel it, so that people who, in this racist place, would learn (more readily from you than from CeCe), so that changes would be made.

I am remembering the dedication with which you lived your life, the same dedication with which Minnie Bruce assures us that you made love. I am remembering the ways you wrote and spoke in always thoughtful, determined, accessible ways, so that you would not alienate—but in fact intimately invite—those you were trying to reach, and I am remembering the ways that you refused to ignore the intricate fusions of the violence of racism, classism, sexism, ableism, and heterosexism.

I am remembering the ways that both your body and your body of writing held such handsomely beautiful fusions of genders, of academia and activism, of love(r)s present and love(r)s past (passed).

I am remembering you, and I am thinking of Minnie Bruce, and I am weeping.

Without you, Leslie, none of us are sure how to keep fighting; though because of you, warrior, we know that we must. Together.

### **Leilani:**

I WANT TO WRITE about just how fierce an anti-racist, pro-worker, revolutionary fighter Leslie was, in every moment, even as ze slowly succumbed to sickness. I want this to convey the belligerent fury I am feeling at the heteronormative, heterosexist structures of society in the United States, at the exhausting, constant attacks on our bodies, identities, souls that Leslie fought against for as long as I knew hir and that contributed to hir health complications over many years. I want to say, fist held high, Black and queer and proud, that I and my comrades will forever continue the struggle in Leslie's name.

But maybe I don't have to do this work today; I know and am heartened that so many others can tell these stories. What I really need to say is:

Thank you. 🌱

# Confronting Institutional Racism

## Steven Salaita on Academic Freedom, BDS, and the Colonial Logic of the Neoliberal University

**rayya el zein, gordon barnes, and melissa marturano**

IN OCTOBER OF 2013, Steven Salaita, then Associate Professor of English at Virginia Tech was offered a tenured position of Professor of American Indian Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC). Salaita accepted the position and resigned from his post at Virginia Tech. In the summer after the school year had finished, he and his wife, who also resigned from her job, and their young son were preparing for their move to Urbana. On 1 August, fifteen days before he was to take up his position, Salaita was informed by UIUC Chancellor Phyllis Wise that the written offer of employment to him was being rescinded. She and Christophe Pierre, the U of I system's Vice President of Academic Affairs, were refusing to submit his employment offer to the Board of Trustees for confirmation.

The reason for the revocation of the offer and the clear disregard for faculty governance at UIUC was pinned by the administration on Salaita's social media presence. They accused him of "uncivility" on Twitter. In July, the Israeli Defense Forces had begun so-called "Operation Protective Edge" in the Gaza Strip. For five weeks, the vastly superior armed forces of Israel bombarded the most densely populated strip of land on the planet. Over 2,000 people died, many of them children, as the IDF bombed schools, residences, hospitals, and places of worship. Watching this from afar, Salaita, a Palestinian-American, took to social media. His tweets critiquing Israel and the IDF, many of which took unsparing issue with the barbarity of the Israeli military, came to the attention of the administration, who deemed them "uncivil" and retracted the offer of employment. In September, the school year at UIUC started; the classes Salaita was slated to teach were cancelled or given to other instructors.

In the weeks that followed, tens of thousands have joined

campaigns to boycott the UIUC until Salaita is reinstated. In September, the U of I Board of Trustees voted 8-1 not to (re)hire Salaita after he was de-hired by the chancellor. On 17 November 2014 The Center for Constitutional Rights co-counsel in Chicago filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit against the University of Illinois, accusing it of failing to release emails between administration officials and trustees about Salaita's dismissal.

Professor Salaita was in the tri-state area from 17-20 November, speaking at several CUNY campuses, Rutgers, Princeton, New York University, the New School, and Columbia University. He sat down with Rayya El Zein (Theatre), Gordon Barnes (History), and Melissa Marturano (Classics), all GC students.

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**Gordon Barnes [GB]:** Your Freedom of Information Act lawsuit against the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois was filed this week and the Center for Constitutional Rights is accusing the University of failing to release emails between the board of trustees and the administration. What does your council hope to prove with this suit?

**Steven Salaita [SS]:** Mostly we feel like it is a matter of public interest. The decision has had visibly adverse effects on the reputation of the university and the ability of the university to function, and there is a desire, I think a strong desire, especially among the taxpayers of Illinois, to find out what exactly went into their decision making process, who was involved, and how it all went down. They are trying to maintain secrecy around a matter of tremendous public interest. Otherwise, it is a matter of trying to get a sense, for us moving forward, who some of the influential donors are, what exactly they were threatening, as well as the [financial support] they were threatening to withhold.



**GB:** What have been the general reactions to your speaking engagements after the firing? And also, now that you have started speaking here in the New York-New Jersey area, what have been the peculiarities of those talks?

**SS:** The reaction to the talks has been favorable. I've gotten lively, engaged, and curious audiences. To me, it indicates a profound level of interest and feelings of investment in the matters of academic freedom, the corporatization of the university, the importance of the unionization of faculty (contingent or otherwise, graduate students, etcetera), the continued suppression—or in some cases punishment—of advocates of Palestinian human rights on campus.

**Rayya El Zein [REZ]:** Can you speak a bit more on the importance of unionization in the academe and your ability to speak about what has happened?

**SS:** In my life, generally, I am a latecomer to labor issues, in part because I went to graduate school in places without unions. I am from a rural area, and I went to school in rural areas. But I think in places like New York City, Chicago, and the West Coast there is much more profound—or at least visible—engagement with labor issues on campus. The first thing that comes to mind is for me self-evident. Had the

University of Illinois faculty belonged to a union, the administration would not have been able to get away with [firing me]. [The faculty] have been organizing for a union for quite some time, and after this latest administrative infelicity, they're pressing even more for a union because they understand so much of what is at stake. I don't see the suppression of moves towards unionization as distinct from professors getting fired or being punished for political speech. I think they both lead back to a particular neoliberal governing paradigm in universities that comes out of a particular colonial logic which draws on matters of institutional racism. There is a certain demand for affiliation with the bureaucracy; that administrators are expected to stick together, and increasingly, faculty are expected to identify with the administration rather than with the so-called workers on campus. There are those problems, but more than that, the "adjunctification" of faculty labor ties in deeply to the suppression of speech rights. Because contingent or part-time faculty have no functional academic freedom, they can be fired at will. Because they are, more or less, at-will employees, they have to be extra careful not to criticize the administration or to engage in a political critique that goes beyond meek

liberal boundaries. I think it's not just economics that compels administrators to rely on contingent labor, it is also [about] having a huge expendable workforce under its control that they consider expendable and easily replaceable should those workers or employees go out of pocket so to speak.

**GB:** Have you received any criticism from people attending the talks you've been giving? From people opposed to you and are in favor of the university's decision to fire you?

**SS:** Actually, nobody has publically copped to supporting the university. There have been plenty of people complaining about my politics or complaining about my tone and language. The conversations have uniformly been respectful, for lack of a better term. There hasn't been screaming or yelling... though of course I haven't gone to Brooklyn College yet! So far it's been good and I have entered into some pretty interesting, enlightening, and productive conversations with folks of differing political opinions.

**GB:** How have these speaking engagements and the fallout after your firing affected your scholarship? A lot of what you have recently been speaking on regards the suppression of free speech and the lack of academic freedom, so I am wondering how you are negotiating between your role as an advocate for academic freedom and your individual role as a scholar.

**SS:** The two roles are not always in harmony with one another. As someone who got fired for political speech, I have an obvious interest in the maintenance of academic freedom as both a concept and a practice. But as a scholar I am inherently skeptical of the ability of "academic freedom," as a practice and an idea, to allow for opportunities to systematically critique state power, structural racism, or the continued colonization of North America. These are speech-acts, or forms of analyses that have never quite existed within the usual practices of academic freedom. In fact, they are analyses that have a long history of being punished in the academy and elsewhere.

**Melissa Marturano [MM]:** The board of trustees claims you were de-hired, or fired, because you violated "civility," which they say the university should value as much as scholarship. How is this emphasis on "civility" connected to larger trends in academe? Is this connected to the idea that the university should be about maintaining comfort or do you see this as an isolated attempt by one administration?

**SS:** It is definitely not isolated. "Civility" has long been in use as an administrative pet term, and you can really see how [the term's] use has been ramped up by other university administrators. I think it's telling that not a single college

or university president anywhere in the United States has spoken against the University of Illinois' decision. In that sense it indicates an investment in the university being able to get away with [firing me]. I have mentioned a few times a particular sort of colonial logic that governs universities and I think the invocation of the term "civility" is an important example. It is a term that comes out of wide ranging colonial histories, from all over the world—Africa, the Arab world, South and East Asia, certainly North and South America—it's a term that attaches itself to a particular history even if its users appear unaware of that history. The fact that they appear unaware tells us how pervasive and insidious that logic is and how it informs a certain type of ethos that, at the very least, is implicitly violent. It makes it easy for class disparities and disparities over access and belonging to become naturalized.

**MM:** The tactic of boycotting the University of Illinois—which has been endorsed by professors in all different disciplines as well as adjuncts and graduate students, to the total of thousands of people—in the wake of Chancellor Phyllis Wise's decision to fire you has evoked powerful parallels with recent waves of academic boycotts of Israel. Do you find these parallels productive, do you find them problematic? Is there a conflict between evoking and defending the principles of academic freedom in your case, against the University of Illinois, and your support of the academic boycott of Israeli universities?

**SS:** It depends on the context in which those comparisons are raised. I do think that BDS—or more specifically the academic boycott of Israel—and my firing have something profound to do with one another. Many people are saying that my firing is a sort of comeuppance because I was vocally in favor of the academic boycott (I continue to be vocally in favor of it) and that I am being treated with the same heavy hand that Israeli scholars are being treated with vis-à-vis the boycott. There is simply no evidence for that kind of nonsensical claim. In fact, the only Israeli faculty member who has ever been fired since the American Studies Association boycott resolution passed, was a guy named Amir Hetsroni. He criticized Operation Protective Edge and got canned for it. There is no evidence that any individual Israeli scholar or graduate students' academic freedom has in any way been restricted. Zero evidence. In fact, the opponents of the ASA boycott resolution screamed about academic freedom, well they have all lined up with the University of Illinois administration. Academic freedom is a red herring, it has everything to do with assuming whatever position happens to be most convenient in order to better protect Israel from criticism. That is their guiding principle; academic freedom means shit to them. They don't have any guiding principles besides defending Israel, and so they can

be for or against academic freedom depending on which particular viewpoint in that moment supplements that desire. It was the organizing collective of USACBI (United States Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel) that immediately sprang to my defense. We have plenty of examples of academic boycott actually being deeply devoted to practices of academic freedom as [opposed to] its critics who are perfectly happy to organize to get their political opponents fired or in some other way punished.

**MM:** On your Facebook, you wrote that you do not support boycotting individual scholars from the University of Illinois, but rather supported boycotting the institution. I think that this is an important distinction to make, can you speak more to this?

**SS:** The post that you reference came out of a specific conversation that I was witnessing on the Support Salaita Facebook page. Some folks were noting that some people seemed to be interpreting the boycott as an inability or unwillingness to invite scholars from UIUC to visit other campuses. I wanted to put my viewpoint out there that this was both counterproductive and unethical. [UIUC professors] are the ones that are really maintaining whatever semblance of dignity that university has left. We should be working hard to invite them and engage with them, rather than isolating them even more in what has become an even more difficult situation for them.

**REZ:** Could you say a bit more about what you mean? It sounds a lot like the defense some people use: “that we shouldn’t boycott members of Israeli academe because they are the ones doing the ‘good work.’” Where do you see the distinction in boycotting professors at the University of Illinois?

**SS:** The academic boycott of Israel is strictly against the boycott of individual scholars. They are not prohibited from doing anything, and likewise regarding the boycott at UIUC, individual faculty [members] aren’t restricted from doing anything. It seems to me that “boycott” is a sort of catchall term. It more so asks people to avoid the campus voluntarily in a specific act of solidarity. There is no basis for any sort of recrimination for someone who does go and speak [at UIUC]. What happens is, if someone has been invited to speak, or has an upcoming event, folks might get in contact with that person and say: “would you consider rejecting the invitation because the administration has proved time and again to be invested in institutional racism and to be against faculty governance and so forth.” I see it really as a request.

**GB:** Given the wide-ranging political usage of the term “academic freedom” around these recent debates, where do you hope that current conversation might go and where do you think that continued deliberation around “academic

freedom” might lead? As it currently stands, do you think that such debates, as are being formulated, serve to solidify the status quo in the university? Or is there a transformative socio-political thread that we can all tug on?

**SS:** I think it is easy for these movements and terminologies to be co-opted and become part of the status quo. That is what “they” do, “they” co-opt things and make them part of their own self-serving process. I do think that there are threads that we can tug on as you so wonderfully put it. I am noticing, even amongst the traditionally liberal professoriate, a growing cynicism and skepticism about administrative bloat and about the role of business interests in the university. To me, this seems to be a particularly productive or potentially fruitful thread. [The debates have highlighted] the ways in which moneyed interest are determining how the academic side of the university is going to be run. For example, the Koch brothers telling Florida State University what type economics professor can or cannot be hired. We have lobby money—or as they say in politics, special interest money—controlling the governance process on the faculty end, the educational end of the university. This poses a particular danger that I think can draw together a broad range of people of varying ideological stripes.

**REZ:** A coalition of graduate students here at The Graduate Center, CUNY has been trying to pass a resolution in favor of the academic boycott of Israel through the Doctoral Students’ Council. It failed to achieve majority at the last plenary, although it achieved plurality. UCLA student government this week voted to divest. You yourself have written about and worked on BDS campaigns. What do you think is the role of this organizing in the wake of both: the Israeli Defense Forces’ “Operation Protective Edge” over the summer and the intimidation you, as well as others (I am thinking here about Students for Justice in Palestine groups across university campuses), faced after critiquing it? How do you think BDS campaigns affect structures of power—at the level of the university, first, perhaps, but also internationally?

**SS:** Those are all really good, difficult questions. I do think, first of all, that there are connections to be made between “Protective Edge” and what is happening in activist communities in North America. We are seeing a crackdown regarding me and a bunch of other folks. It exists for many reasons. One of them being that this crackdown has always existed, not just in the context of Palestine. [This repression] has affected African-American scholars, indigenous scholars, and women scholars [in the United States] for decades. This is a long-standing process, it exists in a continuum.

Israel is very difficult to defend now. It is just very hard to raise a defense of Israel’s actions. I believe that is why—in the face of the slaughter of 500 children in less than two months—you did not hear that Israel’s defenders were trying

to deny that these war crimes were happening. Instead, they were simply blaming the Palestinians for them and attributing it all on Hamas. There is no actual defense of Israel. [What there is instead] is primarily one of two things: it is the Palestinians fault, or other countries are worse. Neither of these is a defense at all; neither is it a defense on an intellectual or moral level. It is an evasion, not an argument. The default strategy then is not to have the debate or conversation at all. You silence people, you shut them down, or you do not allow the conversation to continue. You call up Dov Hikind's office and tell him to start raising hell...

But more particularly, I think there is a psychological and emotional component to BDS that we do not often talk about because it is difficult to talk about psychological and emotional things without sounding like a biological determinist. What I mean by this is that—in what I hope is benign usage of those terminologies—it enables people who are witnessing these horrors from afar, who feel helpless, to make them feel like they are acting in some way, to feel like they are doing something. What it is that they are [actually] doing is a much more difficult question to answer. I think it's at the heart of what you are getting at. I think it is important to recognize that BDS, as effective as it has been in raising the issue of Israeli brutality and colonization and the complicity of American universities and Israeli universities in those practices, has not changed actual policies at this point. BDS is a means to an end. And that end, of course, is the liberation of Palestine. That is its ultimate goal. In that sense, we are all tactically very far away from that goal. But, at the same time, [BDS campaigns are] something that have a remarkable ability to push at the issues in a way the usual arguments against the liberal pieties of dialogue and friendship and coexistence have not been able to do. It forces people to stake out a position and then it flushes the liberal Zionists out: it allows them to be engaged and debated in that way. It also forces the people in power to confront the issue, even if it is only to deny [their complicity with Zionist policies], or to deny that BDS is effective, or to sing the praises of Israel. It forces them into a stance which [in turn] allows us to engage with them in clear ways. I think that BDS as a form of organizing is quite good in the arenas of discourse and in localized situations such as on an individual college campus, or in trade unions. But in terms of the broader goal of transforming policy, it has to be in conversation with comparable movements that collectively might be able to [effect] change.

**REZ:** So, do you see BDS as a strategy that is coming after and against “conflict resolution,” these kinds of discourses that dominate the liberal Left post-Oslo?

**SS:** Yes and no. It definitely comes after, it is definitely a response. But it is a way of wresting control of the terms

of the conversation. I do not see BDS as a full-on rejection of people who have Zionist positions per se. It is a full-on rejection, in most instances, of Zionism as an ideology. I would actually consider it a form of dialogue in which Palestine solidarity activists actually have a say in the conversation, rather than being relegated to spaces in which they always must be subordinate to the hurt feelings of the liberal Zionist.

**REZ:** Early career scholars familiar with digital media, such as ourselves, are watching your case with obvious interest for what it implies about what is and what isn't part of our scholarly output. On the one hand, we are encouraged to have digital presences, to be tech savvy, to not forget to engage the role of “public intellectual.” On the other, we are, through cases like yours, reminded that these technologies expose us to pressure, criticism, and censorship we might not otherwise face. Do you have advice for early career scholars who are navigating these concerns? If you were a recent PhD, with a Twitter handle and political opinions, watching your own case unfold over the past few months, what would it say to you about your future as an academic and an activist on social media?

**SS:** The platforms have changed dramatically and the ability to share opinions has become a lot easier. First it was blogs, and now it is Facebook, Twitter, and whatnot. It is a matter of changed conveyance. But in terms of the fundamental ethic of speaking in opposition to American structural racism or Israeli colonization or whatever, I made the decision early in graduate school that I was going to [engage these questions] and [that] I was going to be honest in my job interviews about it, so that they knew what they were getting. I learned early what so many generations of ethnic-minority scholars have already known: that you have to be three or four times as accomplished as your white, normative counterparts to get a job. That is why I have published my ass off. I am not particularly ambitious. I am just not stupid. I knew that if I was going to be a critic of Israel, then I also needed to have a stellar dossier. So, I put those two things together.

I would have probably been even more active on Twitter at the age of twenty-five or twenty-six than I am now. I have a family. I have things to do. Usually, even when I was actively tweeting, I would only get on there at night when my kid had gone to bed. I could see myself in younger or in a different era tweeting like a motherfucker—always tweeting.

But in terms of the advice—let me take what I just said and try to broaden it and also make it more specific. I think every young scholar or graduate student has to balance her political commitments with her scholarly desires or ambitions. I do not think it is a good idea to fully hide those commitments on the job market. You do not necessarily have to



trumpet them, they do not even have to come up—just do not lie about them. They need to be willing to take you on as you are. Some departments are willing to do that, and happy to do that, but most of them are cowardly. But that is not the kind of department you aren't going to be happy in anyhow, and after two years there, you are going to be seeking to leave.

I am not good at giving advice. Maybe because I am too easy-going, my general attitude to everything is: "Do whatever you want to do. And if you believe in it, do it. [As long as] you feel like you are doing something that is not unethical, then go for it." But let me say this. To me, speaking publicly, especially with our access to social media, it is not just a career risk, it is an emotional risk, it is an intellectual risk. You get yelled at, you get screamed at. You are making yourself vulnerable—especially around controversial issues—to ridicule, to verbal abuse, to threats, particularly if you are criticizing Israel. You are making yourself vulnerable in all these different ways. Do you know how many times I have caught hell on Twitter for saying things that are not popular among certain groups? It is hard! There were times when I went to sleep with absolute feelings of despair, with all these feelings of self-doubt, because of the kind of abuse you receive.

There is vulnerability in entering into these spaces in the first place. People have to feel ready to do it. If it is something they feel they want to do, if they feel it is productive to organize politically, if they feel it will be rewarding to speak publicly about certain political issues, and they have thought through the possible implications, both positive and negative, and if they feel it is meaningful to them, they should do it. I do not think people should self-censor. But if they are in a position where their feelings about the job market outweigh their desires to engage in this type of activity, they should wait, hang tight, and they should do it when they are ready. It requires readiness, both intellectual and emotional, and it requires a readiness to tailor your academic progress towards the possible contingencies towards these types of decisions.

**REZ:** I recently reread some of your pieces on anti-Arab racism and I was wondering if this case at UTUC has made you rethink any of that work?

**SS:** Yeah. Tons of it. It makes me kind of want to update it. I mean that particular critique. I have been thinking a lot about how being Arab plays a role in this—above and beyond, let us say, the case of Roman Finkelstein. I mean, what differences exist in being a Jewish critic of Israel and being an Arab critic of Israel. And I am sensing differences, but I have not quite worked them out yet. It is something that I'm still thinking about.

**GB:** You are not teaching, but many of us are, as gradu-

ate students and as adjuncts. If it were up to you, how would you like your case to be taught and discussed? What history is it a part of? Is this a part of the history of United States academe or of neoliberalism within it? Of Palestine and Israel and their ties to the United States? Of racism, of censorship, or something else entirely?

**SS:** What a great question. There may be a strategic benefit to limiting it to free speech and academic freedom because then you can draw in the broadest coalition. But I do not think it actually does us much good to limit it. For me, I like to situate it—and I hope that others continue to situate it—in the context of how deviant bodies—and bodies of deviant ideas—have always been punished and marginalized in academic settings. How blackness as both an idea and a typology has never been fully welcome in the academy. How indigeneity as a concept and as a decolonial practice has never been fully welcome in the academy. And now we see Palestine very often acting as this particular flashpoint—but it is in no way isolated from the forms of repression that came before it and that continue to contextualize it, and in many ways will re-perform it... But I think the issue, if we want to get really [precise] is one of punishing vocal Palestinians, specifically. If we're going to look at it, this aspect cannot be separated from this particular story.

**REZ:** At the beginning of this interview, you mentioned your recognition of the importance of unionization among those in the academy in the wake of everything that's happened. I'm just wondering if there are other things that have come up for you as a result of what you've gone through over the past few months?

**SS:** You know, I think maybe I've always been a little skeptical of authority figures. But this situation has really made me start to investigate, specifically, the ways in which these punitive practices have functioned in academic environments from a very long time ago. It made me think how important it remains to think through the corporate university as being a crucial element of a colonial society—not only the land-grant [university], existing on literally stolen land. (I mean, land-grant my ass! *Stolen land-grant* is what it actually is.) To me it becomes even more important to keep thinking about the ways that institutionalized racism, colonial paradigms, and a certain sort of colonial logic continue to govern these spaces, and in many ways define these spaces, and how much work we have to do to unpack how these processes work. And trying to think about ways in which those of us who are part of the settler society in one-way or another might avail ourselves of those who are knee deep in the work of decolonizing the continent. 🌍

Questions, opening blurb, and transcription prepared collaboratively. We thank Steven Salaita for his honest reflections and his generosity with his time.

# Palestine, Israel, and the Responsibility of Scholarship

## Against Absolute Boycotts, Towards a Politics of Ambiguity

**hillel broder**

CERTAINLY, SCHOLAR ACTIVISM (AND activist scholarship) has a long history among faculty and students at the City University of New York. In his last editorial Gordon Barnes, *The Advocate's* editor-in-chief, reminded us of the scholarly imperative to act politically:

“It is impossible to divorce our individual selves, or our collective selves from politics. Our scholarship is often politically influenced or derives from a particular set of experiences that involve political thought, this is particularly true for those of us in the social sciences and humanities.”

The question of politics in the academy and academic action within the political is a central one to this institution, its scholars, and its publications. At *The Advocate*, for example, we've come to expect the regular exposure of institutional abuse and exploitation of its contingent labor, and as contingent labor, we've benefited from the voice that publications such as these offers adjunct advocacy projects. If anything, *The Advocate* strives to realize itself as a forum for the oppressed in proliferating the generative and transformative roles scholars might hold.

However, when it has come to advocating for and enacting a political stance in solidarity with Palestine, these pages, as well as various other forums for student political engagement, have nearly taken for granted—and normalized—the reigning rhetoric of the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) movement against Israel without a critical examination of the history and vision of BDS, the premises of BDS, the allies of BDS, alternatives to BDS, and the effects of BDS both on our institution and in the world.

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that such dominant

rhetoric at CUNY culminated in an attempted vote to boycott academic institutions in Israel, put before the DSC plenary session, just last month, on October 24. *The Advocate's* consistent angle certainly suggested moving towards such a resolution; in Barnes' own words following the DSC plenary, such an emphasis on rigorously pointed political advocacy is understandable, even as *The Advocate* accepts contributions from students of all political persuasions.

However, the loudest voices about BDS were not reflective of popularly held opinion here at the GC. For it was also not surprising that this resolution was met with enough resistance—or at least enough ambivalence—by representatives and their constituents that it did *not* pass. In the democratic process over the course of the plenary, opposed doctoral representatives and students expressed various arguments, reiterating those discussed at prior department meetings and on various departmental email listservs, and these arguments proved strong enough to divide the vote to a sufficient degree.

The purpose, in what follows, is not solely to recap or reconsider what has been argued about the failed DSC resolution. Instead, I discuss a range of narratives around the question of Israeli-Palestinian relations and futures that call into question the necessarily *absolute* nature of an academic boycott of Israel. I suggest that we rethink the matter not by normalizing relations per se, but by holding in tension various discourses about the geo-political crisis in question, while scrutinizing the performance of reactive politics in both our local and global spheres. Throughout, I cite articles from the very recently published collection of scholarly articles *The Case Against the Academic Boycotts of Israel*.

However, in order to move forward, I first look back by summarizing the reigning rhetoric around BDS thus far

at CUNY (and, to some degree, elsewhere), even as I risk simplifying the rhetorical history and historical evolution of the movement.

The resolution, as all such resolutions to boycott Israel, invokes a response to “Palestinian Civil Society” (PCS) which has issued an international call for BDS against Israel until Israel, according to PCS, ends its occupation of Arab lands, recognizes equal rights for the Palestinian citizens of Israel, and promotes the right of return of Palestinian refugees. As academics, a group of doctoral students at CUNY responded to this call by considering a resolution to boycott academic institutions in Israel and divest from Israeli companies. In so doing, BDS proponents claimed to demonstrate solidarity with oppressed Palestinian academics, as well as followed the precedent set by a few United States academic bodies, including the American Studies Association (ASA). Anticipating an onslaught of criticism, students argued along the way that such a resolution is anti-Zionist but not anti-Semitic; additionally, students argued that such a boycott supports the academic freedom of Palestinians while not suppressing the academic freedom of individual Israeli scholars—only academic institutions, they claim, are complicit with “apartheid”-like military action.

Certainly as academics and empathic humans, CUNY students stand in solidarity with the suffering of the Palestinian people and the decades-long travail that Palestinian academics have suffered to maintain their profession and practice in a controlled and contained authority and non-state. We are at once deeply connected to and moved by such suffering, yet we feel powerless unless we respond to a call to action. And this is where we should think about political action in a nuanced way, as well as consider the outcomes of the proposed BDS program, of which the proposed but defeated DSC resolution to boycott academic institutions in Israel was but a part. How do we respond, in fact, when the Israeli university system not only maintains the most liberal institution for academic freedom and political resistance in the country—and in the Middle East? How do we make sense of the hundreds of institutionally-backed partnerships between Israeli and Palestinian scholars? And how do we proceed, too, with the knowledge that Israeli universities are at once democratic and non-discriminatory, encouraging the attendance of a diverse student body of Palestinian, Arab, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish students? In this regard, how, in fact, do we reconcile the call to boycott Israeli academic institutions when Omar Barghouti, the spokesperson for the BDS movement, studied for his doctorate from Tel-Aviv University, the institution that guarantees his academic freedom? How do we make sense, in fact, of the academic freedom afforded to all of the resisters and reformers of the political state of Israel, including Neve Gordon,

of Ben Gurion University, an outspoken proponent of the BDS movement? And how do we parse the most immediate effects of the ASA boycott as affecting a Palestinian student at Tel Aviv University, who was unable to recruit outside readers to review his thesis due to the boycott?

The first step towards a different narrative is to establish a future in which Israel, as a country, exists, as well as recommending political action with the future of Palestinian citizens living alongside Israeli citizens in two independent countries. This is opposed, of course, to the reigning BDS rhetoric—and implicit BDS subtext—in which a state of Israel would be dissolved to allow for a unitary state. Indeed, the third plank of the BDS movement, the right of return for all refugees (and their descendants, forever), is an untenable solution for Israel to accept and a politically divergent solution in global politics—denying, much as Peter Beinart has shown in his argument against the ASA boycott, the viability for an independent, democratic, Jewish state alongside a Palestinian one.

And CUNY’s Beinart is not alone. Indeed, Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority, and the Middle East quartet only see a two-state solution as the possible end-game for the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At Nelson Mandela’s funeral, for example, Abbas drew a distinction between boycotting Israel and boycotting the territories—the former of which he adamantly did *not* support for the economic and political welfare of his people (Beinart has made a similarly nuanced argument). In so doing, Abbas distinguished himself from extreme elements such as Hamas, the reigning power in Gaza that calls for Israel’s annihilation in its charter. And in so doing, Abbas distances himself from the reigning rhetoric of the BDS movement that calls for an effective dissolution of the state of Israel. Gabriel Noah Brahm and Asaf Romirowsky argue as much in their important article about BDS, “Anti-Semitic in Intent If Not in Effect”: The BDS insistence on a “territory stretching from the river to the sea” is “the antithesis of a call for peace and reconciliation between two peoples in a compromise solution that would allow both a place in the sun, side by side, in some kind of harmony.”

Such words echo those of an early, joint statement by the presidents of Al-Quds University and Hebrew University in 2005 in response to calls for an academic boycott. Both presidents argue that the functional site—and cultural beneficence—of the university generates constructive, collaborative political action:

“Bridging political gulfs—rather than widening them... –between nations and individuals thus becomes an educational duty as well as a functional necessity, requiring exchange and dialogue rather

than confrontation and antagonism. Our disaffection with, and condemnation of acts of academic boycotts and discrimination against scholars and institutions, is predicated on the principles of academic freedom, human rights, and equality between nations and among individuals.”

This past January, a professor from Al-Quds was interviewed by the *New York Times* about the international movement to boycott Israel; on the condition of anonymity, this professor attested that:

“More than 50 Palestinian professors were engaged in joint research projects with Israeli universities, funded by international agencies like the U.S. Agency for International Development. He said that, without those grants, Palestinian academic research would collapse because “not a single dollar” was available from other places. He rejected the call for a boycott as having no practical value.”

Even more: while proponents of an academic boycott claim to uphold academic freedom in solely focusing on Israeli institutions and not individuals, such a claim offers a false distinction that fails to reflect the practice of scholarship and the particular economy unique to academic freedom. These institutions, they claim, are complicit in militarized aggression, either explicitly or tacitly, in their governmental funding and affiliation. Again, I wonder if there’s an exclusivity to which Israel is falsely held—do not all nations fund their universities and benefit from research conducted at said institutions? At CUNY, we are not necessarily complicit with the agendas of our host institutions that guarantee our right to practice scholarship freely, but we are also not free to practice scholarship independently. To suggest that academic freedom exists independent of institutional affiliation and support is to imagine scholarship as a neo-liberal enterprise in which independent scholars operate independent of institutional funding and protection. Indeed, we are scholars with institutional affiliations, much as our counterparts in Israel—not by choice, but by necessity. We need universities to fund our studies, teaching, and research and to ensure and protect our academic freedom.

And that might be the best way to appreciate that academic freedom is an absolute priority. As scholars, we must recognize that scholarship at its best is based on the merit of ideas, not their nationality. We don’t trade in the economy of ideas; if anything, we critique such economies by enabling the optimal exchange of ideas. But we are bound by our nationality and institutional affiliation to the extent that they make such critique possible.

Unfortunately, encouraging a divisive, exclusive narra-

tive—both in conferring rights of academic freedom upon some while excluding others—perpetuates the greater BDS narrative in which Israel is the villain and aggressor and Palestine is the oppressed and colonized victim, which in turn freezes and reverses diplomatic progress by justifying the political right in Israel, on the one hand, and absolving the terrorist cells in Palestine, on the other. When two young Palestinian men commit a horrific massacre of four rabbis at prayer in a West Jerusalem synagogue, as occurred (as of this writing) just last week, the aggressors are lionized by Palestinian media and officials as both heroic soldiers and agentless victims, and the victims, four praying rabbis, as colonizing occupiers whose deaths are simply the collateral damage of Israel’s occupation. Let us be clear: these four rabbis were not occupiers of disputed territory, nor were they soldiers of any sort. They were four rabbinic scholars who were victims of a “brutal, ideological murder”; and they were killed solely because they were religious Jews living in the land of Israel and attending a house of worship. Yet Hamas and other Palestinian leaders would have you believe otherwise. While Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister condemned this recent attack in no uncertain terms, Hamas celebrated in the streets, lauding these two axe-murderers as heroes and holy martyrs.

This particular attack, unfortunately, has been described by many, including various Arab media outlets, as the turning point towards a “third intifada”: it is, at once, a horrific, culminating moment in a recent spate of terror attacks on Israeli civilians (at least two Palestinian terrorists have slammed their cars into crowds at train stations, indiscriminately killing civilians, in the past month—and, in a terrible coincidence, only days before and days following the failed DSC vote to sanction Israel!). Some have even accused Abbas of inciting such hatred in his response to what was a “call for freedom of prayer at the Temple Mount” for people of all faiths by a victim of a recent assassination attempt, Rabbi Yehuda Glick; while Netanyahu has vociferously denied such an attempt, the Arab media has spun such conciliatory and pluralistic rhetoric into a conspiracy by Israel to take over the Haram al-Sharif, which in turn has compounded the call for not only active resistance but terroristic action—and in the case of the four murdered rabbis, against Jews praying in their own houses of worship. The fine line between “active resistance” and absolute terrorism and violence is fine indeed—and one must hope that the absolutely devastating features of an “official” intifada are averted, if only for their divisive dead-ends.

All of this is to say, of course, that Israel and Palestine are future nation-partners, and that identifying Hamas, the reigning government in Gaza and an internationally recognized terror organization, as an enemy of both peoples and

their futures is to identify the tacit and terrorist allies of BDS ambitions. Of course, not all who protest Israel's occupation would wish Israel into the sea. This is only to say, then, that we rethink the implications of a divisive, destructive politics, and the international parallels of such resistance. We should ask ourselves about the endgame in considering such proposals: Is BDS actually suggesting a political future for Israel and Palestine to live side by side? Or does it further alienate the two sides from one another and empower the common enemy of both, Hamas, to resist with violence and terrorism against its own Palestinian people (aside from terrorizing the entire Israeli population), while it seeks to destroy PCS in the name of "liberation" by filling the vacuum (as it has done in Gaza)?

Think, for example, about the most recent war in Gaza this past summer, a war for which the DSC resolution condemned Israel entirely but ignored Hamas's presence and actions as morally reprehensible—and of provoking war. Indeed, while Israel absorbed aggressive and indiscriminate rocket and missile fire across its borders with Gaza, "Israel went to extraordinary lengths to limit civilian casualties" in its counter-attack against Hamas terrorists, Joint Chiefs Chairman General Martin Dempsey stated this past month, through an elaborate warning system and targeted air-strikes. In villainizing Israel as the sole regional aggressor, BDS proponents somehow forget the daily existential threat to Israel's citizens from the highly militarized, terrorist-ruled and Iranian-funded Hamas controlled Gaza strip. Given Israel's right to exist and maintain secure borders, Israel has the right to defend itself from the absurdly frequent rocket fire that terrorizes and traumatizes Israel's south on a daily basis. As Amos Oz was quoted, in a recent *New Yorker* article reassessing the genocidal threat against Israel's citizens, "What would you do if your neighbor across the street sits down on the balcony, puts his little boy on his lap, and starts shooting machine-gun fire into your nursery?" If you fire back, are you guilty, in fact, of genocide—or of self-preservation?

To claim that Israel has the right to exist is not to claim a form of racism against Palestinians, nor is it to propose an exclusive Zionism. It is simply to affirm an internationally recognized state's right for self-determination. But to claim that Israel does not have a right to exist is certainly anti-Zionist, if not anti-Semitic. Indeed, while certain pockets of boycott proponents have drawn fine lines between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, popular discourse and action against Israel's supporters trends quickly into the anti-Semitic. The action this past year in Paris and Berlin by pro-Palestinian—and anti-Semitic—mobs evidenced as much in their targeting of Jewish businesses, synagogues, and individuals. And in the United States, Jews at colleges across

the nation report being terrorized by Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) activists, including at CUNY's John Jay College, at which students were singled out by SJP protesters as Jews. Students at Temple University have reported being called kikes by SJP protesters in protests that are, supposedly, only anti-Israel. . And yes, counter to others' evidence in these pages that BDS is not anti-Semitic in pointing to the Jewish supporters of BDS, I would only counter by suggesting, as many have shown, that "Jew washing" is not evidence enough—indeed, plenty of Jews can be amply anti-Semitic. I heard as much at the 24 October DSC Plenary, at which one student suggested that BDS's sole value for CUNY students is to "tell the power structure of the Jewish establishment that they've lost their own turf", as the DSC resolution would "have no direct effect on Israeli institutions, let alone Palestinian self-determination." If the purpose of the symbolic gesture of BDS is reflexively directed upon our own power structures—and the goal is focused entirely on the Jewish establishment and Jewish politics—then what is exposed is an internal and specifically Jewish critique.

Furthermore, in considering the history of all boycotts, liberal intellectual Paul Berman has argued that the boycott of Israel is, perhaps, the oldest and most pliable of boycotts, one in which its proponents are constantly grappling with the terms of its merit—and in which its adherents find it impossible to disentangle its current rhetoric from echoes and rhetorical parallels of anti-Semitic discourse. Why, in fact, is Israel, a secular, democratic, and inclusive state, the only state in which Muslims, Christians, and Jews are free to worship alongside one another, the only one state that guarantees equal rights to women and ethnic groups and gays, the subject of sanctions? If the intention is to sanction all human rights violators and violations, and the only action taken is to sanction the Jewish state, then one must wonder about the underlying intentions—and the lack of recourse for a historically oppressed people in the call for its national dissolution. As Emily Budick writes, with the objection to the establishment of a Jewish state in 1948, of "returning to their national homeland after millennia of persecution and the Holocaust, there can be for BDS only one reasonable solution: the dissolution of the State of Israel." To support Israel, in other words, is not to support Zionism in any form. It is simply to adopt a reasonable position of anti-anti-Zionism in our current political climate, much as Ellen Willis has suggested, in her 2003 essay "Is There Still a Jewish Question?" Willis writes that the "logic of anti-Zionism in the present political context entails an unprecedented demand for an existing state—one, moreover, with popular legitimacy and a democratically elected government—not simply to change its policies but to disappear." Certainly the ASA President seemed to fall short of reason and even implicates

his own motives when responding, in response to *New York Magazine's* Jonathan Chait, that “many of Israel’s neighbors are generally judged to have human rights records that are worse than Israel’s [but] one has to start somewhere.” Starting somewhere, in this instance, involves nothing less than an endgame in which Israel disappears.

We’ve reached a stalemate, then, if the descent abroad results in a divisively absolute, supposedly agent-less, and entirely anarchist agenda, and the descent locally into anti-Semitic discourse and action. We recognize as scholars, too, that scholarship has its own economy of ideas, and that nationalist affiliation is at once necessary and irrelevant. As scholars considering this particular historical impasse, then, how might we build a discourse at universities that tolerates difference, that advocates two nation-states, and that does so in a mutually respectful—even if non-normalizing—manner? How, in other words, might we counter the absolutist “solution” of Hamas-fueled, genocidal rhetoric of “liberation” from the “river to the sea”? How might we counter, in Sabah A. Salih’s words that Islamism that has found “intellectual colonization” and safe-haven within the Left by way of an unquestionable reification—and distortion—of Said’s *Orientalism*? How might we reawaken our critical sensibilities to the shock that Martin Amis articulated in 2006 upon returning to England and witnessing placards at anti-Israel protests pronouncing “We are all Hezbollah Now?”

I wonder. Instead of moving towards more incendiary rhetoric, what if we were to resolve today, instead, to host a conference of Palestinian and Israeli scholars on questions of narrative and history? What if we, as models of rhetorical culture and engagement, imagined and worked towards a world in which both narratives and histories would be legitimized, even if held in a productive and irreconcilable tension? Let’s be clear: narratives and histories may never be resolved, and fraught claims for contested sites should not be normalized. But such is the work of political practice: to move beyond the easy performance of absolutist politics, we must sustain a model for collaboration and constructive inquiry—and what better place than our own Graduate Center to host such a conference. We might look at Shira Wolosky’s classroom, self-described in her essay “Teaching in Transnational Israel,” as a model for conflicting rights not through denial of narratives’ rights or normalization of the status quo, but through addressing “responsibility and respect of difference”, by way of a Levinasian ethics of difference. Perhaps, too, we might seek models of past successes

by examining the 2013 special issue of *Israel Studies* entitled “Shared Narratives,” which brought together the work of scholars from Israel and Palestine. I imagine that in such a tense political sphere, such action would certainly carry as much symbolic traction as the proposed, deleterious, failed boycott, and especially so in its resistance to the reigning conformism demanded by BDS absolutism.

Such productive ambiguity would be in good company with other academics fighting to retain academic freedom in a world in which institutions, regardless of their politics, promise such freedom to their academic constituents. Take the international petition to oppose boycotts of Israel’s academic institutions signed by over 1,500 academics: the petition prides itself in the core principles of an absolute academic freedom; the suspicion of mediated truth-claims; the global consensus for two, peaceful states; and the need for free access to world-wide and nation-less scholarship. Similarly, in response to the American Association of Anthropologists’ boycott of Israel, 300 anthropologists responded with a counter-petition on the grounds that “to boycott Israeli universities is a refusal to engage in productive dialogue...In Israel/Palestine as elsewhere, anthropologists can contribute by listening, learning, and leaving room for ambiguity.” Finally, in a rally against the proposed and failed attempt at a boycott here at the DSC, over 250 signers signed an online petition denouncing the resolution as anti-academic freedom and overly simplifying of a complex history. Ultimately, all petitions recognized, as Sari Nusseibeh, president of Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, has said, that “If we are to look at Israeli society, it is within the academic community that we’ve had the most progressive, pro-peace views and views that have come out in favor of seeing us as equals.”

As scholars of the humanities and sciences, then, let us follow the anthropologists’ call to “leave room for ambiguity.” Such is our training, responsibility, and legacy, as scholars, even as we engage in the practice of politics. As Michael Berube, past president of the MLA, wrote regarding the ASA resolution, the difference between the two organizations is that the former is a scholarly organization that is “firmly committed to the free and open exchange of ideas”, while the other “has other priorities.” In so doing at CUNY, we follow MLA’s precedent and continue to forbid absolutist, reductionist, privileged, and dangerously divisive positions. 🗳️

How might we build a discourse at universities that tolerates difference, that advocates two nation-states, and that does so in a mutually respectful manner?

# Ya Nos Cansamos, We are Tired

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## The Story of the Ayotzinapa Protests from Those on the Ground

**russell weiss-irwin**

HERE IN THE UNITED States, the grand jury in St. Louis has failed to indict Darren Wilson for the murder of Michael Brown. People are in the streets all over the country. Social networks are full of despair, anguish, and fear. #BlackLivesMatter, people are saying. #Ferguson. #ShutItDown. People are filled with anger against a cynical, white supremacist state that kills again and again and again.

Meanwhile, others who I know are full of the same emotions, but are expressing them with different hashtags: #Ayotzinapa. #FueElEstado. #VivosSeLosLlevaron, #VivosLosQueremos. My Facebook newsfeed is full of the anguish of Mexican students because I spent the first half of this year living in Mexico City, and I use social media mainly to keep in touch with my friends there. Lately, Mexicans are fighting back in the streets and online against a government that murdered 6 students and disappeared 43 more from Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College in Ayotzinapa. Dozens of universities are shut down by strikes. Student assemblies are replacing classes this semester. Mexico City has seen its biggest demonstrations of the twenty-first century. In rural areas, protesters have destroyed government buildings and shut down highways. The Mexican people's response to these disappearances has brought Mexico to a political crisis.

When I arrived in Mexico in January 2014, it wasn't this way at all. Rather than rebellious, Mexicans seemed beaten and depressed. At the end of 2013, Mexico City had dramatically increased subway fares, from 3 pesos to 5 pesos, making public transit completely unaffordable for working-class residents of Mexico City. In response, young people started the hashtag #PosMeSalto, Mexico City slang for "I guess I'll jump." On 13 December, the first day of the new fare,

thousands of youth jumped turnstiles and posted pictures on social media, but the movement quickly lost steam. When I got there a month later, the movement was definitively over. Mexicans had settled into the grind of struggling to find a way to pay the fare or find another way to get where they needed to go.

Meanwhile, striking teachers from rural states were occupying a public square near where I was staying. I went a few times to their encampment to see what their movement was like. Being in that encampment reminded me more than anything of Occupy encampments in the waning months of that movement. The spirit was gone and it seemed that people were just hanging on to hang on. The teachers had originally struck and come to Mexico City months before to try and block an educational reform aimed at busting teachers unions and imposing high-stakes testing in their communities. At first they occupied Mexico City's main plaza, the Zocalo, and took bold actions, like sitting down on runways so that the airport couldn't function. But the government didn't blink. The reforms were passed and the teachers forcibly removed from the Zocalo to a much less central plaza. By January, there seemed to be no way the teachers could win and that it was a matter of time before they went back to their states and returned to work, if they still had jobs.

On campus, there was a similar sense of a movement having passed. Two years before, in the spring of 2012, Mexico had its presidential election. The domination of the mass media and the political parties by a tiny elite completely divorced from the lives of ordinary Mexicans was clearer than ever. The candidate for the center-right party, then-Governor Enrique Peña Nieto, reminiscent of George Bush both for his neoliberal policies and widely mocked slips of tongue, came to give a campaign speech at a private university in Mexico City. When students protested him

to call attention the 2006 massacre of protesters in rural Atenco that he oversaw as governor, the media mostly reported that they were not really students at the school where he was speaking, just partisan agitators. In response, 131 of them made a video showing their ID cards. Almost immediately, others around the country began to symbolically claim to be the 132nd protester with the hashtag #YoSoy132 (I am 132). The #YoSoy132 movement took off as a student movement that focused on the corruption of the mass media and political parties. They aimed to defeat Peña Nieto's candidacy for president. There were rallies and walkouts around the country, but the election went forward and he was named president, although the election was widely condemned for irregularities and vote-buying. A little more than a year after he took office #YoSoy132 was over.

The school where I was studying, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) had been shut down entirely by a student strike in 1999-2000 that successfully stopped the implementation of tuition. UNAM has always been tuition free for all who can pass the exams to enter, like CUNY before open admissions. While I was there, people talked constantly about the strike, but it was difficult for me to imagine. UNAM had some amazing organizers, but the atmosphere was not much more mobilized than at CUNY. In some ways, it seemed less active. At radical events, you would see the same people again and again. People were disengaged from politics, even in the Political Science department. At off-campus rallies for International Women's Day or May Day, usually only a handful of students would come out, mostly members of disciplined Leninist organizations.

Other foreign students who I knew at UNAM came from places like Quebec or Chile and openly mocked the lack of mobilization on the part of Mexicans. While we were there, Peña Nieto and his friendly congress passed reform after reform, constitutional amendment after constitutional amendment, privatizing public goods, restricting civil and workers' rights. Mexicans would almost universally condemn the reforms if asked, but few were in the streets, leaving those who were subject to police beatings. Towards the end of the spring of 2014, I went to Mexico City's May Day rally. We failed to fill even a quarter of the Zocalo, partly because many unions didn't want to appear to be protesting against the government and partly because students didn't mobilize much either. In the end, a city of over 20 million produced only a few thousand marchers on International Workers Day. What hope was there for Mexico?

After the summer, as the school year again got underway, I was back in New York. On social media, I started to see some rumblings. On 24 September, the administration of the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN) dramatically

changed the charter of their institution. Administrators would now unilaterally set curriculum, instead of sharing governance with faculty and students. The mission statement that emphasized using science and engineering to improve standards of living for all Mexicans would be replaced with one that emphasized competition and entrepreneurship above all. Finally, many of the rights that had been guaranteed to students in the past would be eliminated, making it more difficult to form student clubs, impossible to change majors, and harder to maintain full-time enrolled status. Outraged, students from IPN poured into the streets, shutting down major avenues in Mexico City. They were joined by students from other schools, including many from UNAM.

Meanwhile, on 26 September, students from the Ayo-tzinapa Teachers College went to the town of Iguala to get buses and raise money so that they could go to Mexico City. The college in Ayotzinapa is an independent, self-managed, radical institution set up during the Mexican Revolution that trains mostly indigenous people from some of the poorest communities in Mexico to become teachers in their own communities. The students were headed to Mexico City, ironically, for the annual 2 October march marking the anniversary of the 1968 government massacre of student protesters in Tlatelolco. The series of events is somewhat confused, but the mayor of Iguala had some combination of city police and narco-gangsters attack the students, killing 6 of them on the spot, disappearing 43 more, and injuring 25 others who survived, escaped, and have told the story to the world. The story didn't get out immediately, and even when it did, it didn't immediately shock in the way that we might imagine it would in the United States. Keep in mind that in Mexico, every year tens of thousands are kidnapped, disappeared, or killed as part of the militarized drug war. It is estimated that in 2013 alone, 123,470 people were kidnapped.

Nevertheless, in October and November, the popular response to the disappearances grew and grew. 8 October was the first national day of action. On 13 October, UNAM went on a two-day strike. The strikes spread to other schools and states in Mexico. They became longer. My Mexican friends' posts online became less and less about kittens and TV shows and more and more about the 43, the marches, and strikes they were organizing, and the endless gaffes of the Mexican elite in the face of the crisis. By 20 November, the day of a national general strike, the country seemed transformed. Even people who had never seemed political before were posting radical attacks against the "criminal government." Chatting with a friend, I asked how she was. "Bad," she said in Spanish. "The whole country is in a bad time right now. It's impossible to be okay."

This seemed so different from past struggles. People



were angrier than they had been when the national oil company, Pemex, was privatized or when the teachers went on strike to save their schools. The people who stayed home on May Day were in the streets. The people who marched for #YoSoy132 were striking and occupying and shutting the city down. I started asking more and more of the people I knew and the people they knew about what was going on and why things were so different than before.

“It’s difficult to respond, honestly,” one friend from Northern Mexico wrote. “Mexico has been beaten and plundered for CENTURIES... we have a great power that we are only showing now.” Another suggested that the #Ayotzinapa movement brought together the forces resisting the drug wars and the student movement, breaking them out of their silos and bringing them together because “the Disappeared are just as much students as they are victims of the State.” Several said that they felt especially called to be involved with the movement because the students from Ayotzinapa could have been them. “Tomorrow maybe my brothers, friends, cousins could be missing... What happened to them could’ve happened to us, too,” said one person. Another: “We’re in the streets because we’re missing 43 students who could have been you or me.” Others pointed to technology and the ability to distribute information quickly across the country. Although Mexican print and television media are controlled by a tiny group of companies that are tightly politically aligned with one another and the leaders of major political parties, web-based media is much freer. “I think the Internet has given us another plane of communication, in which there is still something of freedom,” one person said.

Nearly everyone agreed that at some level it was exhaustion, some kind of accumulation of trauma. People used many metaphors of overflowing, breaking through barriers, and spilling over. More than anything, people used variations of the hashtag #YaMeCansé (I’m tired), which is a quote from a government official who said he was tired of the Ayotzinapa crisis, but which has been reclaimed by the protesters. “We’re tired of the injustice,” one person concluded. Another said, “This (the possible death of the students) was the spark we needed. We were tired, but they are killing us at such a young age... Enough is enough!”

The people I talked to ranged in age from 19 to 36 and included students from UNAM, from other schools, from other parts of Mexico, and non-student activists. Nearly all of them agreed that the most exciting things happening right now as part of the current upheaval in Mexico are the spreading of consciousness and attention from outside the country. One friend said, “To me the inclusive marches

seem essential. It’s not just students who are taking the streets, but families and workers as well.” “People you wouldn’t find organizing before now are,” observed another. “At the same time as the repression and the fear campaign are increased a notch, Mexicans’ political participation is as well.” “I’ve never seen so many people come together to fight for other people,” wrote a third. “I appreciate very much that among all of us, we’re planting a garden of consciousness, planting seeds with our actions.” Many talked about people “waking up” and seeing that this problem goes much deeper than a single government, and more generally about a process of mass politicization happening in the country.

Everyone I asked said that this movement was about all of the problems in the country, not only the 43 students. One woman said, “No struggle is an isolated case.” Another said, “This movement is like a ball of snow. It went, bringing in every injustice, and resting on the top layer is Ayotzinapa, so that’s the thing we talk most about, that motivates us the most, but it has been everything together. It’s just that this case was the



breaking-point, and because of that we all decided to go out and fight.” Many people I talked to said that the goal of the movement is, or should be, the total overthrow of the government. Even one person who didn’t argue for overthrowing the government said that the most important aspect of the movement for her was that “Our government is afraid of us... and they should be.”

There are many amazing stories coming out of Mexico right now. An important one that hasn’t received enough attention is that of the 20 November actions in Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora state. Sonora is a large northern state on the border of Arizona, and like many other northern

states, it tends to be wealthier and more conservative than the rest of Mexico. In 2009, a nursery in Hermosillo, called Guardería ABC, where working-class parents left their small children burned to the ground, killing 49 children who were inside. This was a clear case of government negligence and corruption, because the politically connected owners of the nursery have still not faced any justice. There has been a national movement, focused in Hermosillo, to demand justice for the children killed in the nursery. In Sonora, the movement for justice for the Ayotzinapa students (who, between the murdered six and disappeared forty-three, total the same number as the children of ABC) has largely come out of and stayed closely tied to the Guardería ABC Justice movement. On 20 November—when the whole country had a general strike and marches in every city—in Hermosillo,

they marched from the main university to the State Congress building, and simply seized it. There the



people held sessions of congress inside the building, passing laws and resolutions about Ayotzinapa, the Guardería, and other issues. Many of my friends who participated in that taking of the congress told me it was an experience they would never forget, especially because only a short time ago, they would have never imagined something like that happening in Sonora. Things are changing.

I also asked people what they wanted people in the United States to know about their movement and what is happening in their country now. Three messages came through clearly from everyone: First, don't ignore what's happening and don't forget about it. Second, don't think that it doesn't have to do with you, or that it's only our problem; the blood of the Ayotzinapa students is not only on Mexican hands. Lastly, spread the word to everyone you know.

On the first point, many Mexicans are not studying at radical teaching academies in rural areas or traveling through drug-war-torn towns to protest, but nevertheless, they say that they feel that what happened to the 43 students could happen to them or anyone they know. I would encourage us to take on that way of thinking. Yes, we are not in the same situation as the Ayotzinapa students, or even UNAM students, but the state here also kills and disappears people, through mass incarceration, deportations, police murder, extraordinary rendition, and other ways as well. Mexican organizers have sought to push at the boundaries of definitions to bring together the Guardería ABC and Ayotzinapa. We can do the same.

The extensive ties between the United States' repressive apparatus and the Mexican equivalent are not surprising considering how friendly the two governments are, and the strong interest that the United States has in maintaining the status quo in Mexico. In this case, they are still coming to light more and more. Meanwhile, the Narco-wars in Mexico are fueled by drug consumption and drug policy in the United States. The current drug laws make no sense for the United States, and they are destroying Mexico.

Another woman writes, "Let's begin by you respecting us. Reject your racist laws that treat Latinos like criminals. In our country, you don't listen to us, you don't pay us, you don't educate us. We need freedom of movement across borders. America is an entire continent." These issues are all connected.

Finally—we in the United States must talk about what is happening in Mexico. There is the main story, which is still not well-enough known, but also more recent events. Since 20 November, the authorities in Mexico City have begun taking many more students into arbitrary detention. This is a violation of students' political rights. Meanwhile, we must also spread the word about the hopeful news coming out of Mexico, that in a place like Sonora,

the people took over the state congress for a few hours last week. People value the fact that around the world, other people know what is happening in Mexico. Help to make that more true.

In the past few days in the United States, we've seen the movement against police brutality erupt across the country with many forms of resistance and many connections being drawn with other movements. What has happened in the past few months in Mexico should give us hope. Perhaps we, too, can learn from the past few years of movements in our country and take this opportunity to exploit the political crisis on both sides of the border. It's time; enough already; #YaNosCansamos! 🇲🇽



# Pieces to a New System

## Participatory Budgeting and Worker Cooperatives

**alexander kolokotronis**

THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES: ECONOMIC, political, and cultural. The trick of any ruling elite is to convince just enough people that there are no such alternatives. There is no magic bullet, no singular alternative institution that by itself can transform or transcend a system. Yet, in combination, as a set and in a network, such alternative institutions carry the possibility of both building and fomenting system-change.

In all likelihood a single type of alternative institution will not do the job. In fact, any one type would likely be subsumed to the logic of capitalism, and/or the state. Historically, this has been borne out in both democratic employee-owned firms and community participatory governance institutions. In the United States the former has manifested in the northwest where plywood worker cooperatives degenerated into capitalist firms due to the combination of their great success and inadequate legal structuration. With the latter, there is the possibility of fermenting a xenophobic localism and provincialism. Thus, there remains the importance of mapping already-existing alternative institutions. Two key alternative institutions for large scale societal transformation are: participatory budgeting, and worker cooperatives.

The International Cooperative Alliance defines a cooperative as “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.” As such, a worker cooperative is an enterprise that is owned, controlled and democratically operated by its employees. Accordingly, cooperatives are generally guided by seven principles: “voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for community.”

According to the Participatory Budgeting Project, participatory budgeting is “a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget.” Or, as put by Student Organization for

Democratic Alternatives (a student group in New York that advocates for participatory budgeting and worker cooperatives), participatory budgeting is a democratic process wherein “people meet, discuss and propose things they’d like to see implemented and funding in their communities.” Started in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 1989, it is one powerful example of present-day direct and participatory democracy and governance.

### **San Francisco Bay Area**

IN CHARTING THE DEVELOPMENT of worker cooperatives and participatory budgeting it is important to start in the United States. The United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives (USFWC) estimates that there are 350 worker cooperatives in the United States. It is also estimated that forty of these worker cooperatives are immigrant-run and owned. Numerous examples of such can be found in the Bay Area.

With approximately thirty dues-paying worker cooperatives comprising the Network of Bay Area Worker Cooperatives (NoBAWC, pronounced “No Boss”) the San Francisco Bay Area is a major site of democratic employee-ownership. The total amount of worker cooperatives in the Bay Area is unknown. Nonetheless, they range from radical book-publishers such as AK Press in Oakland, to cafes such as Alchemy Collective in Berkeley, to even a bakery called Arizmendi in San Francisco which has five “sister” worker cooperatives across the Bay Area.

Yet, one of the best examples of empowerment through worker-ownership can be found in the efforts of Prospera. Formerly known as Women’s Action Gaining Economic Security (WAGES), Prospera is an Oakland, California based non-profit “dedicated to empowering low-income Latina immigrants through cooperative business ownership.” Many find worker cooperatives are a means to tackle the feminization of poverty. As the 11 July 2014 *Yes! Magazine* notes, “women comprise two-thirds of all minimum-wage workers.” Of this amount, 26.2 percent are white women, while 35.8 percent and 46.6 percent are African-American and Latina, respectively. To combat this, Prospera itself has

incubated five immigrant-owned and run cleaning worker cooperatives with over 100 worker-owners in total. These worker-owners earn approximately double to triple the incomes they had previously made.

The Bay Area has also seen the growing implementation of participatory budgeting. Currently three districts in San Francisco have incorporated the practice. Yet, it is Vallejo—another Bay Area city—that is moving full steam ahead with the implementation of participatory budgeting. In 2012 Vallejo was the first city in the United States to establish participatory budgeting city-wide with the community deciding how to spend \$3.2 million USD. The practice has recently come under attack from local politicians, though. Nonetheless, there has been pushback by residents to, at minimum, keep participatory budgeting as is.

## **New York City**

THERE HAVE BEEN SIMILAR developments in New York in terms of immigrant-run and owned worker cooperatives. Specifically, this can be seen with cleaning worker cooperatives Si Se Puede!, Pa'lante Green Cleaning, Apple Eco-Cleaning, and EcoMundo Cleaning.

New York City is also home to the largest worker cooperative in the United States: Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA). Founded in 1985, the Bronx-based CHCA employs a staff of over 2,000 while assisting over 4,000 elderly people. Forming a partnership with 1199 SEIU, CHCA has also been a leader in building bridges between worker cooperatives and labor unions. Together they're working to promote worker-ownership, as well as institute best-practices across the home care industry.

In New York, however, another momentous development has taken place: the passage of the \$1.2 million USD Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative as part of the Fiscal Year 2015 New York City budget. Setting a historic precedent, the Initiative aims to spur on the incubation of another twenty-eight worker cooperatives through the various on-the-ground incubator organizations. If successful, there will be over fifty worker cooperatives in New York City. This has included Worker-Owned Rockaway Cooperatives, or WORCs. The WORCs are an attempt to make worker cooperatives part of the revitalization process in Rockaway, Queens. Thus far two of five worker cooperatives have been launched: a construction cooperative called Roco Mia, and a bakery named La Mies.

Simultaneously, New York has also seen a significant rise in the implementation of participatory budgeting. Only two years ago participatory budgeting was used in four city council districts. Currently it is used in twenty-four of fifty-one districts, with constituents directly deciding upon the usage of \$25 million USD. As pbnyc.org notes, “voting

in participatory budgeting is open to all residents 16 years of age and older, removing tradition obstacles of full civic participation such as youth, income states, English-language proficiency and citizenship status.” In fact, even those as young as eleven years old can participate in the neighborhood assemblies wherein residents suggest ideas and proposals. This aspect of participatory budgeting has generally held across the United States, including in Vallejo.

## **Chicago**

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING HAS ALSO slowly expanded in Chicago. Currently, it operates in four of the fifty wards of Chicago. Due to brain cancer, teacher and popular labor leader Karen Lewis was prevented from challenging incumbent Rahm Emmanuel in the Chicago mayoral election. Her platform was expected to include participatory budgeting.

According to a 23 September 2014 DNAinfo article, “Lewis said she would call for the ‘restoration of participatory democracy,’ giving Chicago residents a voice in everything from the Board of Education’s annual budget to the city’s annual budget.” Lewis went as far as to state “Instead of giving us something and saying ‘Here’s what it is, comment on it and we’re going to do what we do anyway,’ [let’s have] participatory budgeting.”

Lewis’s speech was given at an event held at New Era Windows Cooperative. In 2008, when it was known as Republic Windows and Doors, the business was caught in the midst of a financial scandal as its private owners attempted to fire the workers with three-day notice. Reminiscent of the old syndicalist vision, the workers of New Era held a number of direct actions from 2008 to 2012, including a six-day sit-down strike in 2008. In aggregate, the direct actions paved the way to cooperativization. Conversion to a worker cooperative was cemented when The Working World (a cooperative revolving loan fund) stepped in, providing a loan of \$665,000 USD. The conversion received wide media attention, including from *Democracy Now!*.

## **New England**

NEW ERA WAS NO isolated case of business conversions to worker cooperatives. In fact, conversions are being deeply analyzed and strategized for the growth of cooperatives by various organizations across the United States. Why?

Democracy at Work Institute (DAWI) cites a 5 July 2013 *New York Times* article by Gar Alperovitz. In it Alperovitz states “Every year 150,000 to 300,000 businesses owned at least in part by boomers become candidates for employee takeovers as their owners hit retirement age. That means that over the next fifteen years retiring boomers could help create two to four million new worker-owned businesses nationwide.” Other organizations, such as the New York City

Network of Worker Cooperatives (the New York City worker cooperative business association) and Sustainable Economies Law Center, among many more, have incorporated conversions in their expansionary outlook.

There was also another crucial factor in the strategizing of conversions among the cooperative movement in general: Island Employee Cooperative (IEC) in Maine. With 62 worker-owners, IEC is the largest worker cooperative in Maine. From the towns of Deer Isle and Stonington, IEC was formed out of three rural Maine businesses: Burnt Cove Market, V&S Variety and Pharmacy, and The Galley. According to the Cooperative Development Institute, these businesses have provided “the community with a full array of groceries, hardware, prescription drugs, pharmacy items, craft supplies, and other goods and services.”

Being one of the larger firms in the area, converting and combining into a worker cooperative was not just simply about manifesting the vision of democratic employee-ownership. Buying and converting the businesses—which were purchased from retiring owners Vern and Sandra Seile—was also about keeping jobs in the community. An article from 17 November 2014 from *Shareable* notes that “For every \$1,000 spent at a food coop, \$1,606 goes into the local economy.” While IEC is not a food cooperative, cooperatives in general prove to be a means of keeping funds and resources in the community.

The Valley Alliance of Worker Cooperatives (VAWC) has also had a hand in conversions. According to its website VAWC has converted five “traditionally owned businesses” into worker cooperatives. VAWC contains eight member cooperatives in the area of Western Massachusetts and Southern Vermont. Solar power installation, recycling and trash, body care products, and printing are some of the industries these cooperatives are in.

Boston has a number of worker cooperatives as well. This is indicated by the Worker-Owned and Run Cooperative Network of Greater Boston (WORC’N). In its directory it includes approximately fifteen cooperatives.

In January of 2014 Boston also launched the first youth participatory budgeting scheme in the United States. All city residents within the ages of twelve to twenty-five have deliberative and decision-making power over \$1 million USD. This year’s first ever youth participatory budget included the decision to fund playground upgrades, art walls, laptops at schools, and sidewalks.

Nearby Boston, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, it was

announced that \$500,000 USD would be allocated through participatory budgeting.

## **Jackson, Mississippi**

WHILE KAREN LEWIS WAS planning a run for mayor based, in part, on a platform of instituting participatory democracy, Chokwe Lumumba won the mayoral election of Jackson, Mississippi on such a platform. Despite raising five times less the amount of money than his main primary opponent, Lumumba was catapulted to victory through grassroots work.

Part of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM) (which itself calls for the creation of worker cooperatives), Lumumba pushed for a heavy dosage of participatory governance and workplace democracy. In fact, as a June 2014 *Jacobin* article notes, Lumumba went as far as to advocate for “the new organs of people’s power, absolute and direct democracy, to replace existing structures.”

In the interview portion of the article Lumumba himself states “people should become more and more involved in reforming and changing the structures that surround them



and the people that surround them—determining who handles structures, and how they should be elected, and who should be elected—until the people’s power becomes the same as, becomes simultaneous with, the development of government.” Lumumba proved that one successfully run a lowly-funded political campaign based on a policy platform of building participatory governance and economic democracy. For Lumumba, participatory democracy and solidarity economy weren’t meant to be a simple supplement, but the pillars of a new society.

Lumumba died early in 2014. Nonetheless, as indicated

by the “Jackson Rising: New Economies Conference,” Cooperation Jackson and its parent-organization MXGM are still touting and actively seeking to build the “Mondragón of the South.”

## Spain

WHAT IS MONDRAGÓN? MONDRAGÓN is likely one the first names you will hear in introductory cooperative circles. Founded in 1956, and consisting of 85,000 worker-owners, Mondragón is the world’s most successful worker cooperative. Based in the Basque region, Mondragón is a cooperative of cooperatives—specifically 110 worker cooperatives across a whole range of industries. Mondragón even has its own cooperative university.

Generating €12.5 billion EUR in revenue in 2013, Mondragón is comprised of 289 organizations and enterprises in total, though, as Mondragón states on its website, “Any company interested in joining Mondragón must already be or must become a cooperative.” In being a transnational enterprise, the rate at which cooperativization occurs varies. There are varying legal and cultural conditions; many places still do not accord a legal status to cooperatives.

Speaking adequately about Mondragón, its governance structures and bodies, its unionization, and its numerous past and present ventures and projects exceeds the scope of this article. In fact, it would likely take a book, and there have been books written on Mondragón alone. Many have been overwhelmingly positive, while others have been critical, however, Mondragón has undergone internal reforms this last decade so as to spur on further participation and to stay true to its constitution as an alternative mode of production and organization.

There are two important things to note with Mondragón: its connection with United States cooperative movement and its response to market failures and difficulties. As it regards the latter, this can be seen with the failure of Fagor. Rather than responding to crisis by simply laying employees off, Mondragón retained workers of the failed firm at 80 percent of their salary while seeking to relocate them to new positions. This is in sharp contrast to the average firm, which, in an age of neoliberalism, often seeks any excuse to cut down its workforce and ramp up production. Since the 2008 financial crisis such can be found in both the private and public sector.

As to Mondragón’s presence in the United States cooperative movement, it has its own United States office with Mondragón USA, and it has partnered with a number of organizations. This includes a partnership with the 1.2 million member United Steelworkers (USW) union. In its 2014 constitutional convention, the USW passed Resolution No. 27 on Worker Ownership and Workers Capital, which

states “Our union will continue to promote and develop unionized, worker-owned Union co-ops.” Mondragón has also been involved with the scaling up of the cooperative movement in Cincinnati, Ohio (In Ohio, both Cleveland and Cincinnati are pioneering a new strategy for cooperative development through, in part, utilizing their universities as “anchor institutions,” which aim to hold down and create community wealth).

Mondragón is not the only worker cooperative in Spain though. According to a 7 May 2014 CICOPA (International Organisation of Industrial, Artisanal and Service Producers’ Cooperatives) article, 734 worker cooperatives were created in Spain in 2013, following the creation of approximately 500 the year before. In a 2009 International Labor Organization (ILO) report titled ‘Resilience of the Cooperative Business Model in Times of Crisis,’ there were “18,000 worker cooperatives employing 300,000 people.” Adding the recent upsurge in launched worker cooperatives in Spain, it is reasonable to estimate that the number has increased to over 20,000.

In Spain participatory budgeting has been more widely implemented than in the United States, in cities including, Madrid, Sevilla, and Málaga. In a mapping of participatory budgeting around the world, Tiago Peixoto notes that it is used in over fifty cities and towns around Spain. The Participatory Budgeting Project notes in its own map that in Sevilla, “from 2004-2013, residents decided on roughly 50% of local spending for their city districts, for capital projects and programs.”

## Emilia-Romagna Region, Italy

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING HAS ALSO spread widely in Italy. Peixoto notes that in Parma “citizens have access to the information about the PB process and to all of the proposals for the allocation of the budget.” There has been heavy inclusion of online features to participatory budgeting with a map allowing “citizens to visualize the location of the proposed projects and to access further information about them (i.e. purpose, scope).” Voting may be done online as well “by providing ID number and date of birth, which allows the system to identify the eligible voters (i.e. Parma residents).” In Parma citizens have two votes: “one vote for one of the projects proposed in the district of residence” and one “for projects that are considered to be of general interest.”

Yet, even more notable than participatory budgeting in the Emilia-Romagna region is the degree to which worker cooperatives have taken hold. According to a piece from Kent State University citing University of Bologna economist Stefano Zamagni, “about 30% of the GDP in the region and up to 60% of the GDP in some cities like Imola.” The Kent State study notes that there are 8,000 cooperatives in Emilia-

Romagna, and Erbin Crowell in his article “Cooperating Like We Mean It: The Co-operative Movement In Northern Italy,” notes that approximately two-thirds of these are worker cooperatives.

In her article, “Financing the New Economy,” Abby Scher notes that Italy “requires cooperatives by law to contribute 3 percent of their annual surpluses toward the loan fund of their choice to develop the cooperative sector,” with this portion remaining untaxed. This merely one example of how Italy has implemented policy helping to grow the cooperative sector.

## France

AS REPORTED BY THE *Guardian* on 3 October 2014, Paris will now open up €20 million EUR of its municipal budget to be allocated through PB. It has also been implemented in the outskirts of Paris as well as in cities such as Poitiers.

Worker cooperatives are also on the rise in France with its new policy implementation. Leading the round of new policies is, according to CICOPA, a law favoring workers in the buyout of firms with less than 250 workers. The law has introduced a requirement to “provide information when the company owner decides to sell his business” so as to allow the workers to submit a bid. This law of “preferential right” is part of a package of policies intended to result in a “cooperative shockwave,” or, in other words, the doubling of the amount of worker cooperatives in France within five years. The number of worker cooperatives in France currently stands at approximately 2,300.

## South America: Cuba, Venezuela, and Argentina

CUBA DAWNED THE COVER of the 24th-30th March issue of *The Economist*. The title read “Cuba hurtles towards capitalism” with an accompanying ten-page “special report.” Since, little to no mention of the waves of worker cooperative conversion has been made by the periodical. According to CICOPA, between 2012 and mid-2014, 498 worker cooperatives have been approved by the Cuban government, with plans for much more. Some in Cuba see workers cooperatives as a means to revive a stagnant economy.

Venezuela has seen the rise of a system of Communal Councils (CC), which bears some similarity to the ethos of participatory budgeting. Venezuela hosts an estimated 90,000 cooperatives with around one million members. According to a 30 June 2013 article by Dario Azzellin, anywhere between 10-450 families can form a CC, depending on whether such families lie within an indigenous, rural, or urban zone. By 2013, approximately 44,000 communal councils have been setup.

Famously, in 2001, Argentina was home to a number of

factory “recuperations,” wherein over 200 businesses were taken over by their workers and converted into worker cooperatives. These 200-plus worker cooperatives are composed of over 12,000 worker-owners. The cooperative movement as a whole has been growing of late in Argentina as well. Also, Argentina has increasingly incorporated participatory budgeting. Most significantly, this has taken place in Buenos Aires, however, more innovative efforts have been undertaken in La Plata. According to Peixoto, 30 percent of La Plata’s budget is directly decided upon, while the residents are permitted to “present a list of options for the allocation of the remaining 70 percent of the budget.”

## Conclusion

NEITHER PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING OR worker cooperatives are magic bullets of change, however, in combination, they present viable alternatives to the existing dominant order. Participatory budgeting is only contingently part of the state, and worker cooperatives are still required to compete with capitalist firms. Yet, the contingency of the current alignment and placement of these alternative institutions allows us to analyze and situate them within a more forward-looking paradigm. Cooperatives have proven to weather market failures and crises better than capitalist firms, while participatory budgeting constitutes a more transparent and hands-on alternative to politics as usual.

A major reason for the Left to push for these alternatives institution is that they provide the wider populace with a vision beyond hyper-individualism, manifested in politics as representative governance and in economics as individualistic entrepreneurship. The Left has not only failed in times of stability, but it has failed during times of crisis due to its inadequacy in presenting viable alternatives, let alone vision. Participatory budgeting and worker cooperatives are not simply institutions that the Left can tailor policy around, but are also institutions that can capture the public imagination when the next crisis comes. If system-change is to be achieved it is necessary that institutional alternatives are made real and tangible, especially ones that hold the potential to move us beyond capitalism and the State. Constructing alternative institutions is necessary for building experience and providing a guiding vision; these are prerequisites for practicable system change and transition. Constructing in itself is both a means of building solidarity and overcoming present conditions. In addition, overnight transformation usually wreaks of brutality and shoddy implementation; historically this has resulted in violent regression. Building and implementing alternative institutions allows us to more adequately and creatively put together a new system—a new whole—as its parts and pieces begin to emerge and come into place. ☺

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# Beyond a Neurological Disorder

## Helping Children with Autism and Their Siblings

**emily a. jones, nicole neil, and daniel m. fienup**

**T**HERESA AND EVAN ARE sister and brother. Theresa is a young girl diagnosed with Autism. Evan is her younger typically developing brother. Theresa speaks in full sentences, but does not respond well to changes in routine or noisy environments and shows a great deal of difficulty interacting with her peers and her brother, Evan. In fact, when we first met them, Theresa and Evan didn't really play together at all. When they did play near each other, they usually did so with separate toys. Theresa would not share her toys and often made hurtful comments to her brother, such as "I like when your blocks fall down."

. . .

Intervention for children like Theresa has come a long

way since the early days when Leo Kanner first described Autism in 1943. Autism is now considered a neurological disorder that results in developmental differences in communication and social skills. Autism is also thought of as existing on a spectrum, because of the wide range of communication and social abilities and deficits that different individuals display. The state of treatment for individuals for Autism has vastly improved with Applied Behavior Analysis leading the way according to a 2009 National Autism Center report. As we have made strides in meeting the individual needs of people with Autism, like Theresa, it has become increasingly obvious that Autism affects every member within the family system. Parents of children with Autism have their own unique needs, often showing elevated levels

of stress. Theresa and Evan's interactions clearly show how much siblings are affected, too. Siblings of children with Autism may have more feelings of depression, loneliness, and embarrassment than children who do not have a sibling diagnosed with Autism and compared to siblings of children with other disabilities. The sibling relationship when one sibling has Autism is characterized by less intimacy, fewer prosocial behaviors, and less nurturance than relationships between siblings when one child has Down syndrome. Siblings often spend less time together than typically developing. Children with Autism show significant deficits in social-communication skills as well as restricted and repetitive behaviors and interests that interfere with interactions. Typically developing siblings, in turn, may lack skills to effectively react to those limited communicative behaviors, prompt positive interactions, or respond to challenging behavior exhibited by the child with Autism. Adjustment problems and poor sibling relationships may persist or increase over time.

Relationships between siblings, regardless of whether one individual has Autism, are valuable. It is within our sibling relationships that many of us have our first opportunities for socialization; young children learn to talk, share, and negotiate social environments. These relationships are a model for interactions with friends. Siblings often share a special bond unlike any other in what is usually their longest lasting relationship. Sibling relationships when one sibling has Autism are, perhaps, even more important. In childhood siblings can provide numerous opportunities for social interaction. Because children with Autism show impairments in social skills and communication, opportunities to interact with siblings are critical to the social development of the child with Autism. Improving the sibling relationship when the children are young is also important because of the long-term commitment the siblings will have to each other. Unfortunately, many individuals with Autism continue to require assistance in adulthood. As adults, siblings take on care giving and advocacy roles. Theresa and Evan were clearly missing out on the social opportunities that would benefit them both and form the basis for their relationship now and in the future. Theresa's behavior limited their interactions. Evan was young, but beginning to ask questions about Theresa's behavior and showed real concern about it, including being upset and hurt when his sister did not want to play with him or showed challenging behavior.

All this suggests that, in addition to addressing the needs of the child with Autism, siblings too may require unique help from mental health professionals to address their own needs and foster their sibling relationship.

Only recently have researchers begun to examine ways to help siblings of children diagnosed with Autism and the

sibling relationship. There are two primary ways that service providers (i.e. psychologists, social workers, educators) seek to help siblings and the sibling-relationship. Support groups focus on siblings' social emotional adjustment. Support groups typically involve several siblings and a mental health professional. The children learn about each other, Autism, and their families. They engage in activities that teach positive ways to cope with having a sibling with Autism. A second type of intervention focuses on specific interaction skills such as playing games together and having conversations. With this approach, the instructor identifies specific interaction deficits and then teaches the typically developing sibling to facilitate more prosocial interactions with his or her sibling with Autism. Research suggests that each respective way of intervening has different benefits for siblings and the sibling-relationship: on the one hand, support groups help sibling's mental health concerns, on the other hand skills instruction results in learning that specific skill.

### **SIBS Club: Fostering Sibling Relationships**

THE SIBS CLUB, A community program offered on the weekends at Queens College, designed as a replication and expansion of a program that began at Long Island University as a collaboration between Emily Jones and Kathleen Feeley in 2010 (The Support and Skills Program for Children with Autism and their Siblings). The club is a comprehensive approach for addressing the individual and combined needs of siblings when one sibling has Autism. The program targets the individual needs of the children with Autism by providing social skills instruction. The program targets the individual needs of the siblings by providing support groups aimed at the children's combined needs by providing inclusive recreation time.

SIBS Club is built around four core values:

- ▶ Socializing with other children
- ▶ Interactive activities for all children in a family
- ▶ Building relationships between siblings, and
- ▶ Sharing with other siblings of children with Autism.

The club meets for two hours a week over ten weeks.

During the first hour of the program, the individual needs of each child are addressed. Each child with Autism receives one-to-one instruction. We target social and communication skills, such as requesting, playing games, and turn taking. Simultaneously, all of the typically developing siblings meet for a support group focused on their needs. A support group leader engages the children in activities that focus on learning about Autism, coping with family differences, and identifying strategies to engage their siblings with Autism. The most exciting part of SIBS Club, literally and figuratively, is the inclusive recreation time for the second hour of the program. All the children play relay races, freeze dance,

and other fun games. We teach siblings to play these games together and individualize our support so that each set of siblings interacts as best as they can.

• • •

*Theresa and Evan attended SIBS Club. During recreation time, we saw how difficult it was for them to interact. In fact, Theresa was not able to participate in recreation time at all at first; the noise and activity were overwhelming for her. Because the goal of SIBS Club is to facilitate sibling interaction, instructors engaged Theresa and Evan in activities in a smaller, quieter room. But these activities were also difficult. Theresa would not play with Evan or share toys with her brother and often said mean things to him. Instructors prompted Theresa to give Evan compliments and, with lots of encouragement, share her toys with her brother. At the same time, the instructors continued to bring Theresa and her brother into the recreation room with all the other children for short periods of time, helped Theresa to remain calm, and provided encouragement for staying in the recreation room.*

## **SIBS Club: A Different Way to Teach Future Service Providers**

A CENTRAL GOAL OF SIBS Club is to meet the needs of sibling-relationships now and in the future. One way we accomplish this goal is by providing training to undergraduate and graduate students, our future service providers. Thirty undergraduates enroll in a practicum course (Psych 372) each semester. Undergraduates learn about how to intervene with children with Autism and then gain hands on experience working directly with children with Autism for the remainder of the semester. Overseeing the undergraduate students and the programming for the children are graduate students who are learning more in their chosen field. Graduate student training focuses on curriculum development and supervision of direct care providers.

As a training program for undergraduate and graduate students, SIBS Club offers a unique opportunity. Psychology undergraduates often take courses to learn about mental health and child development. However, these courses only teach students a conceptual understanding. In contrast, SIBS Club offers experiential learning that includes traditional course components such as lecture and readings, but goes many steps further by allowing undergraduates to meet children with Autism, learn how to help these children, and then gain supervised experience helping children with Autism and their siblings.

Psychology graduate students also have a unique training experience. Many universities that train students to work directly with children with Autism with a sole focus on the individual needs of the child. At SIBS Club, we teach our graduate students to think about the family system.

Everyone in a family has unique needs and improving the lives of each family member improves the lives of the other family members, too. To top it off, our students interested in research help us evaluate SIBS Club and the many working parts of the program.

• • •

*After ten weeks of SIBS Club, not only has Theresa and Evan's relationship improved, but their student instructors have changed. Learning many skills and watching Theresa and Evan progress led Theresa's student instructor to pursue her graduate education in Applied Behavior Analysis. She is now in her first semester of her graduate program and also working at a local agency that provides intervention to children with Autism.*

*Theresa and Evan's interactions are very different today. By the last weeks of SIBS Club Theresa and her brother spent the majority of recreation time participating in the recreation room in activities with all the other children. On one of the last weekends, she and Evan completed a relay race in which they carried an egg on a spoon and passed it to one another—and they didn't drop the egg either! Theresa also approached Evan and asked him who his best friend at school was and what games he played with his friend.*

*Theresa and Evan's parents have also observed how different their children are with each other. Now the siblings play together at home; Evan even said he "loves" to play with his sister and his parents say that he has become his sister's "biggest cheerleader." ♻️*

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# In Defense of Robots

## Why Advances in Robotics and Artificial Intelligence Do not Pose a Risk in and of Themselves

**greg olmschenk**

**R**OBOTS ARE COMING TO kill or enslave you. At least, this is how they're portrayed in popular culture. In *The Terminator*, Skynet seeks to destroy all humans and control the Earth. In *I, Robot*, V.I.K.I works to enslave humanity so that it can protect humans from harming themselves. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, HAL 9000 takes control of the human's spacecraft and kills as many of them as possible. In movies, robots are frequently depicted as ominous super intelligences which aim to break free of their role as a tool of the humans and control them instead. In reality, robots are stupid and receive an undue amount of criticism.

It has been clearly shown that computers can beat humans at chess and jeopardy, and this makes it appear as though computers are almost equal to—if not exceeding—human intelligence. The problem is that humans are very bad at looking hundreds of moves ahead in board games and memorizing millions of facts. Both of these are tasks that are simple for a computer to accomplish. In contrast, most tasks people find menial are so difficult for computers that no robot today can accomplish them. Folding laundry, holding a coherent conversation, and walking to the grocery store without bumping into people or stepping in a puddle are tasks that are impossible for any existing robot to do as well as humans. Furthermore, even the robots that have some skill in one of these areas have absolutely no skill in the other two, not to mention the thousands of other tasks humans do with only the tiniest amount of thought.

A computer “thinks” about things in a very different way than people do. Rather than having clever ideas, what gives computers the appearance of intelligence is their ability to try stupid ideas insanely fast. When a computer plays chess, for instance, it basically just looks at every possible move that can be made in order and chooses the one that gives it the best outcome. The computer decides which board states are the best using very specific rules given to it by chess grandmasters. The machine looks at the position of each

piece and, using the specific value rules, counts up a total value for that board state, then it just picks the one with the highest value. Given this set of rules, a lot of paper, and a lot of time, any person could play just as well as the computer. All they have to do is follow the instructions, just as the computer does.

To suggest that a computer “thinks” is a bit misleading. Computers actually just follow a very exact sequence of instructions, each of which can be understood and easily performed by a person—though at a much slower pace. There's never some mysterious thought process going on that is not understood. People have often told me that they are “creeped out” by the fact that after looking at options for a new phone online, suddenly they start seeing a lot of ads about phones. To them it seems as if the computer is “watching” them, learning what they like, and figuring out what else they might like. Again, this is implying a form of consciousness and is giving the computer program far too much credit. Google's system actually just keeps a database of websites you've visited and compares them against what other people have visited. When it sees similarities between two databases, it shows you more sites that are in the database similar to your own.

It's important to know that Google's, the NSA's, and others' systems have no understanding of why you look at these things or what makes them similar. The computer doesn't understand why these relations are important, it just finds them and then executes some other set of instructions in response. It's only when an employee at one of these places asks the database to show them people who search for a specific thing that any entity that actually thinks sees your data, and that rarely happens for the ordinary person. Whether the employees should be able to see such data is a different discussion.

One of the areas of robotics the general public is most interested in is driverless cars. Though you may, as a human, think that walking to the store would be easier than driving down a highway, it is not so for a robot. This is one of the

areas where robots may replace humans in the not so distant future. Cars are big, strong, and can easily kill a person, so the idea of handing the keys over to our computer creations justifiably gives people pause and many questions arise.

And, what if I want to take a scenic route and the car tells me “no, that’s not the most efficient path”? The idea that the car will want to transport you without taking into account human considerations—such as scenic paths, driving in a comfortable manner, etc—is one of the most common fears I’ve heard about robotic cars. However, there’s good evidence to doubt this will be a problem. Google maps lets you reroute its suggestions, should you want to take a different route, and usually gives you several options from the start. There’s no reason to assume a robotic car wouldn’t do the same. If some company did make a driverless car that ignored the comfort of its users, that company would surely lose out to the company that made the cars with the passenger in mind. The cars may be robots, but the designers are not. These companies realize that if you make a product that doesn’t take the user’s point of view into consideration, you’re not going to be able to sell your product.

But, what if the computer in the car makes a mistake? Unlike the first question about robotic cars, this will certainly be a real issue. The computers will make mistakes, and someone will get killed at some point. It’s completely unreasonable to expect that these robotic cars will be able to drive perfectly every time. The real question is whether they will be more dangerous than human drivers. The answer

is no. When robotic cars become common place, they will be much safer than any human driver. However, they will hardly become common place. This is true for a very specific reason: the human perception of the safety of robots. Consider the following situations: A child on a bicycle flies out into traffic from around a corner. The person whose car the child comes in front of may not have time to react and the child is killed. On the contrary, a robotic car can react much faster. It may have been able to react, and do it in such a way as to prevent injury—breaking and swerving in the precise calculated directions.

Consider a second case: a child falls and is knocked unconscious on an empty street. A human driver coming down the street easily recognizes the child on the ground and stops. A robotic car may see the color of the road and the child’s cloths as being too similar and think it’s all road and the child is killed. It should be noted that this particular case is unlikely to cause trouble for the robot car, but an unpredicted analogous situation surely will. While the result of these two situations is the same—a child lost their life—it’s easy to see how the reactions will be different. In the first case, people would find it hard to blame the human driver. After all, there was no time for a human to react. Even if the computer would have easily avoided the problem, the fact that we understand humans not being able to react in time would make most people see the death as an unfortunate, but unpreventable, accident. The second situation is completely the opposite. Because people do think like humans

## Two poems written by Maillardet’s Automaton, circa 1800

### Poem 1

Enfant cher des dames,  
Je suis en tout pays,  
Fort bien avec les femmes,  
même avec les maris.

### Poem 2

Unerring is my hand though small.  
May I not add with truth.  
I do my best to please you all.  
Encourage then my youth.

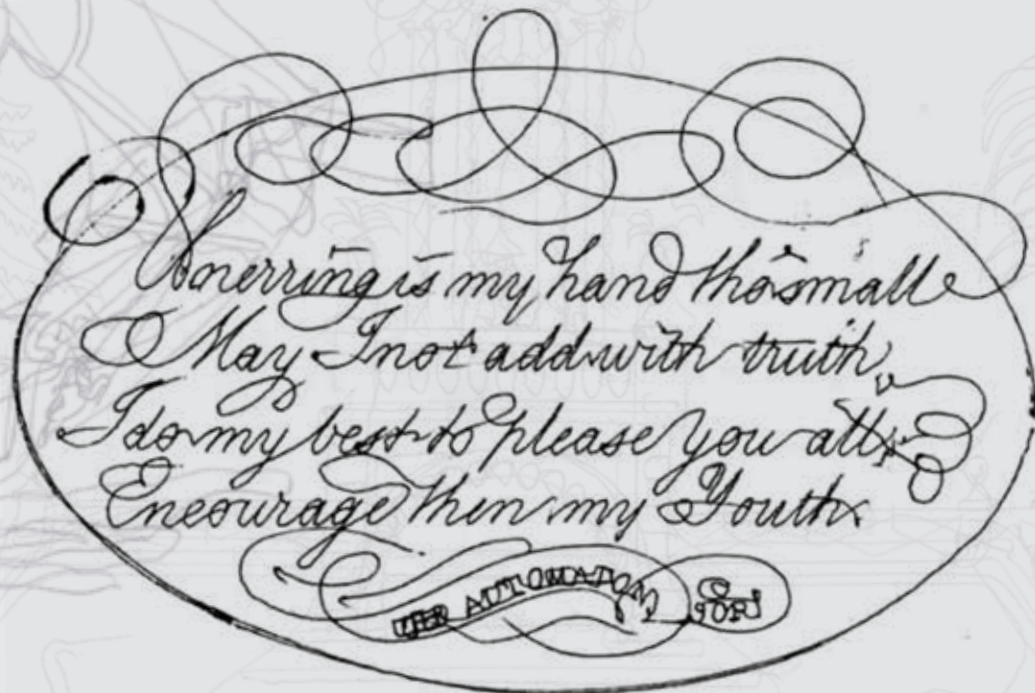


and see the robotic car killing the child as an obviously preventable mistake, headlines around the world would site this as evidence against robotic cars. It's easy to imagine the outrage that would follow such an event. Even when driverless cars are many times safer than human driven cars, the biased human perception of the accidents will prevent the driverless cars from becoming common. They will have to be tens or hundreds of times safer before anyone will use them in light of a human driver preventable deaths.

From tiny robotic manipulators used in precision surgery to rescue robots finding survivors of a disaster, robots—and more over computers—are helping to save more lives every day. Of course, robotics is not a cornucopia that only pours out life-saving technology. Military applications of robotics are wide spread and growing. Whether this is good or bad, the destructive capabilities of robots is clearly apparent. It's completely conceivable that legions of robots could be used to suppress, control, and slaughter people very easily. Robotic power and resources in the wrong hands are very dangerous, to be sure. With this looming danger in mind, wouldn't it be better to stop or prevent the research on robots all together? A counterpart of this argument in ancient times would presumably argue that we shouldn't forge metal because someone may use that power to make a sword. Like all other advances in science, the discoveries in robotics are neither good nor evil. It's the applications of these discoveries which society must choose to permit or restrict. And just like all other advances in science, these discovers can also be

used to improve the lives of people around the world.


For how robots think today, this is all fine and well. However, many are looking toward a more distant future. Will robot intelligence become more human-like? Will robots become smarter than humans? Will robots take over the world? It turns out that there is no fundamental mechanism in the brain that cannot be simulated by a computer. At least we don't yet know of one, and there's no reason to suspect that we will find one. This means that it's completely reasonable to expect that one day robots will be able to be as intelligent as humans, and even more intelligent. Before long, computers will be able to make as many calculations as the brain can. This is one of the larger points which people such as Ray Kurzweil makes toward explaining when computers will surpass humans in intelligence. However, the number of calculations doesn't matter much if the combination of these calculations doesn't do something clever. To create a computer with human intelligence, we have to understand the human brain. There's a long way left to go in neuroscience before we will have such an understanding. That said, there's often the argument—and science fiction theme—that we might accidentally create super intelligent computers. It's true that this is technically possible, but only in the same way that it's technically possible that you could walk in the pouring rain for an hour and not have a single drop of water hit you. When computer scientists make a mistake in their code, almost every time it breaks the code—the code stops working at all. The chance that so many mistakes in code



could somehow all work together to create a super intelligence is similar to coming home completely dry after that hour of walking in a deluge. When computers are given human intelligence, it will be purposely done.



Again, though, there's no reason to expect that this will never happen, and in fact it seems most reasonable to expect that one day it will happen. When it does, will robots take over the world? Probably. But not in the way movies usually depict. To conquer the world, you need a reason. Otherwise, why would you do it? The robots will have to want to take over the world. However, wanting something is an emotion living things have evolved to help them survive. If we were to develop robots with emotions—again, no fundamental reason to expect that we can't—there's every reason to expect the full range of emotions. Not just want and anger, but compassion and happiness as well. A super intelligent robot would probably only have as much urge to kill you as you have urge to kill a turtle you found in the park. The idea that robots would want to enslave humanity has always been



particularly flawed. Robots can already do mechanical tasks much better than us, so if they could also do intelligent tasks better than us they would be much better off building more of themselves than enslaving us.

Of course, this is looking at robots becoming more intelligent separately from humans. More likely, they'll become more intelligent in augmenting humans. Seasoned pilots often mention how, when flying, the plane feels like it becomes an extension of their body. As much as you can make jokes about it, our smart phones and other devices are becoming extensions of us in the same way the wings are to a pilot. Computers are continually becoming more integral in our lives. These devices will continue to augment our abilities more and more over time. At some point, the human part will become the smaller part portion of the equation, though this will probably happen gradually and with no clear turning point. Also, it will likely be without any opposition or even without anyone noticing. The robot take over will be unnoticed and probably won't be a bad thing for humans. 

## MIND GAMES ANSWERS

Check out the puzzle column on our Back Page.

oranges but not both. There are two possible cases which are very similar:  If the fruit turns out to be an apple, then we know that this box does not contain any oranges and thus should be labelled "Apples". Consequently, the box that is wrongly labelled "Apples" should be labelled "Apples and Oranges" (since "Oranges" is already assigned, and we know that the initial label, i.e. "Apples", does not suit this box). Finally we assign "Apples" to the box wrongly labelled "Apples".  If the fruit turns out to be an orange, then we know that this box does not contain any apples and thus should be labelled "Oranges". Consequently, the box that is wrongly labelled "Apples" should be labelled "Apples and Oranges" (since "Oranges" is already assigned, and we know that the initial label, i.e. "Oranges", does not suit this box). Finally we assign "Oranges" to the box wrongly labelled "Apples".

the pot of gold. There are two possible cases:  If the guard from whom we ask the question is the truthful guard, she will truthfully tell us what door the truthful guard would direct us to. And since the truthful guard always tells the opposite of the truth, we will find out which door has the lion behind it.  If the guard from whom we ask the question is the untruthful guard, she will tell us the opposite of what the truthful guard would direct us to. Therefore we will find out which door has the lion behind it. In any case, it becomes clear the pot of gold is behind the door that is not mentioned by the guard we queried. **#3: Correct Box Labels**  
We should take a fruit from the box labelled "Apples and Oranges"; Since we know that none of the boxes is labelled correctly, we can conclude that this box contains either apples or

**#1: Three Containers**  
AN OPTIMAL SEQUENCE OF steps is given in the below table.

Step #	8-pint container	5-pint container	3-pint container
6	1	4	3
5	1	5	2
4	6	0	2
3	6	2	0
2	3	2	3
1	3	5	0
0	8	0	0

If we represent a state of the containers by a triple of nonnegative integers indicating the amount of water in the 8-pint, 5-pint, and 3-pint containers respectively, we can express the above sequence as follows:  
 $800 \rightarrow 350 \rightarrow 323 \rightarrow 620 \rightarrow 602 \rightarrow 152 \rightarrow 143$   
 Note that in each state the sum of the integers is 8, which means we don't throw away any water.

**#2: Crucial Inquiry**  
WE SHOULD ASK EITHER of the guards what the other guard would tell us if we asked her which door led to

# Racial Capitalism and the Black Radical Tradition

► “Confronting Racial Capitalism: The Black Radical Tradition and Cultures of Liberation.”  
At NYU and the GC, 20-21 November 2014.

**nadejda webb**

ON 20 NOVEMBER, THE Skylight room witnessed the initial panel within the symposium “Confronting Racial Capitalism: The Black Radical Tradition and Cultures of Liberation.” Elizabeth Robinson was the first to present, discussing the impact of voice. As a major figure in community radio, Robinson has facilitated many voices being heard. She claimed this as a crucial tool against both domestic and international imperialism. Thulani Davis followed, tracing community building before the Civil Rights era, along a circuit of cities and towns in which agricultural distribution and labor camps gave way to political organizing centers. Paul Ortiz concluded with photos and other material documenting the intersections between the Latino and Black struggles. Ultimately, they demystified the growths of the Black Radical Tradition and foreshadowed what came later: a careful analysis of the Black Radical Tradition and where it is to go.

By the time Angela Davis arrived at the podium in the New York University Global Center, the auditorium was packed. The audience came to full attention, ready and willing to hear what thoughts she would bequeath. Angela Davis began the concluding plenary with a question: “What is the work necessary for the settler?” The following two hours explored this idea, maneuvering through the Black Radical Tradition, abolition feminism, and productive contradictions. The night before, Cedric J. Robinson

concluded his talk with a distinction between ideology and experience: the latter did not dictate actions, but the former. Davis proceeded to survey the making and the implications of the Black Radical Tradition, which by this point, had been described as a living tradition and a collection movement. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, speaking after Cedric J. Robinson, thought this as well, earmarking Raymond William’s structures of feelings as an adequate means by which to intervene in its understanding. As Cedric J. Robinson explains in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, the Black Radical Tradition comes out of African resistance against European enslavement. It is of the African Diaspora, limited to no one hemisphere, being that the slave trade knew no bounds, as other hegemonic disruptions within the lives of raced peoples knows no bounds. The work of C.L.R.



James, Stuart Hall, both West Indians, stands alongside that of James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, which stands beside that of Cornel West, Marcus Garvey and Kwame Nkrumah. Working through the politics of positionality, the theory of relative positions tagged by markers of difference, each scholar attempted to highlight and situate difference, calling of a better society as they called for drastic changes.

Angela Davis continued her talk by situating abolition



Feminism within the Black Radical Tradition. Abolition feminism has the power to embrace difference and generate new thoughts, she noted, as it holds the power for one to imagine a different world. Pretending that the struggles against forms of racism, classism, sexism and anti-queer movements are separate would do no work in terms of dismantling the colonial impulse or resisting assimilation into heteronormative patriarchal structures. She remarked on the powerful ideological tendencies of those within movements “to see certain things with absolute clarity;” she urged a consciousness of global structures of war and settler colonialism. “I question my own approaches as I question,” this being the hallmark of abolition feminism, she stated. To remake and refashion would mean continual agency and in-



vestment in analyzing one’s discourse, ideology and actions.

Gina Dent continued with this point. She showed an image of a prison and raised the question: “Where is this prison?” Audience members yelled out “California?” “Paraguay?,” “Honduras?” It was in Colombia. The seeming generality of the prison echoed points already made by Elizabeth Robinson and Ruth Wilson Gilmore: that policing, like many other tools of capitalism, is an international affair. Carceral industrial technologies were shared: developers who established one system tended to take part in the establishment of many more (they are also a part of the development of high schools). She continued to focus on the politics of ideology and passport privilege. As she showed another image, this time of women in indigenous dresses holding a sign stating: “Feminists Against Neoliberal Terrorism” Dent

recounted that some people had asked her whether activists asked the women to hold the sign. This signified another form of policing and privilege, one that attempted to designate which ideas were for whom, and ultimately, who had the intellectual weight to vie in theoretical arenas.

The idea of global struggle decimates this point, instead investing in the fact that all struggles are connected. In sharing the story of a La Toma, a mining community established in 1636 by escaped slaves, Dent again reestablished the reaches of racial capitalism and shared struggle. They do not mine in modern fashion, ensuring the viability of the land across generations. The government of Colombia has undermined them, however, continually selling the right to their subsoil. This reverberates struggles for land historically

and in present day. Yet another image came into view, one of a painted “I have a dream” on a concrete wall in Palestine. This time, Dent commented on the betrayal of language: within the prison that is Palestine, context re-envisioned the dream, the obstacles to the dream and to the people dreaming. The users of words, the audience among many others, are charged with making words meaningful and disrupting the understandings that we take for granted. Claiming space as free would mean, in the words of Angela Davis, “rethinking, reviving and reteaching.”

The notion of felon was also contested, as another image of three older women was shown, each raising their hand to signify

their previous arrests and detention. What are the static ideas that have consumed meaning as to extinguish it? One of Davis’ final points restated this idea and pointed to another image, this time moving. “Bamako,” the movie, managed to conflate the happenings of seemingly divorced spaces, that of village and city, western court and the oral tradition, and weddings and deaths. Dent argued that this conflation offered a realistic means by which to view a world governed by seeming differences and hierarchies. By visually witnessing what one thinks is separate together, relationships and questions about these relationships become clearer. As Davis stated at the beginning, this is another radical tradition that have come from the Black Radical Tradition, and this is exactly what is needed: a new means by which to imagine a different world. 🌐



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# When Theft is a Public Service

► *The Burglary: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover's Secret FBI* by Betty Medsger. Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, 596 pages.

**rhone fraser**

ON 8 MARCH 1971, eight individuals burglarized the FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania, and exposed the FBI's counter intelligence program, or COINTELPRO, to the world. Within the next month, one of the burglars, John Raines, "dropped five packets of FBI documents into a mailbox... to Senator George McGovern, Democrat from South Dakota; Representative Parren Mitchell, Democrat from Maryland; Tom Wicker, columnist at the *New York Times*; and... a reporter at the *Washington Post*." The "reporter at the *Washington Post*" was Betty Medsger, and her new book released this year called *The Burglary: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover's Secret FBI* is a historical account of the burglary, its contents, and the lives of those involved in it before and since. For the very first time, the names of the burglars are completely disclosed as well as the detailed and frantic responses by FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who sought to prosecute the eight burglars—unsuccessfully.

Medsger writes that the documents revealed the existence of a secret FBI that "usurped citizens' liberties, treated Black citizens as if they were a danger to society, and used deception, disinformation, and violence as tools to harass, damage, and—most important—silence people whose political opinions the director opposed." The burglary was conceived by Haverford College physics professor, Bill Davidon, a "secular Jewish humanist" inspired by the work of Daniel Berrigan, who faced "authoritarian treatment" from the United States government and the Catholic Church. "Davidon shared Berrigan's deep concern for the people in the peace movement who had despaired and turned to violent protest," says Medsger. By 1970, Davidon grew to resent the war the United States' government and its supporting law enforcement agencies were waging against dissent, seen in the murders of civilians by the National Guard at Kent State and Jackson State. Medsger writes that in New York at a vigil in support of these slain students, "hundreds of construction workers...rampaged through the streets attacking students with crowbars and other heavy tools wrapped in American flags... Vice President Spiro Agnew wrote a letter of thanks to the union official who organized the attacks on the students, Peter Brennan, head of the New York City Building Trades Council. He congratulated him for "his impressive display of patriotism...on the day of the

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attacks...the president rewarded Brennan...in 1972, by appointing him secretary of labor." Davidon was confident that "if evidence of official suppression of dissent could be found and be presented to the public, people would demand that such suppression be stopped." He asked each of the seven other burglars to join him in trying to burglarize the FBI office and present the papers inside the office to the public. Consequently, Davidon asked John and Bonnie Raines to join him. Bonnie agreed to his secret plan and later arrived in the Media FBI office posing as a nearby college student who was doing research on the FBI for a class assignment. She was "dressed...as a nerdy coed in a skirt, sweater, and long dark heavy winter coat." That was a cover. While in the office, she staked out the floor plans of the office for Davidon: "by the time she left, she felt she would be able to draw a detailed sketch of the office."

With interviews of these burglars, Medsger weaves a compelling narrative of a suspenseful burglary that is a lesson in not only dissent but also white privilege. She shows how the Media burglars succeeded because they were not suspected of being burglars. Of Bonnie Raines, she writes that "she had been able to use her all American girl-next-door looks [i.e. "white"], still intact at twenty nine, to move the burglary forward." As John Raines told Medsger: "you can do anything you want in the United States if you wear a suit and tie...especially if you are white." Keith Forsyth was another burglar and accomplished locksmith who picked the two locks leading to the room with the documents. Another factor in the burglars' favor was the 1971 Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier boxing match televised on 8 March 1971 from Madison Square Garden: "all of them grasped the idea that the match was going to be so special that it was possible every sports-loving person in the country—maybe, they dared to think, even the people who lived in the apartments on the two floors above the FBI office—would be riveted to their televisions and radios that night."

With the documents in their hands, the burglars escaped to a remote farmhouse loaned for a couple of weeks to Davidon. They classified the documents, copied them on an antiquated Xerox copier and mailed them to various reporters. Medsger quotes the cover letter she received containing the burglarized documents being from the "Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI." She said they revealed "Hoover's preoccupation with surveillance of Black people and students, especially Black students...documents provided information about these cozy relationships, including the

ones between the FBI and employers and with government employment agencies.”

Medsker’s study shows how the FBI became a tool of the wealthy ruling elite to eliminate individuals whose ideas would threaten their power. One clear example of the close relationship between the FBI and the ruling elite was the CEO of Xerox’s cooperative reaction to Hoover’s demands. The FBI sought copies of Xerox 660 copiers across the Delaware Valley in order to track the burglars. The company cooperated and provided the FBI with a list of all its customers who leased their copiers. When the Xerox general manager decided after a month to stop cooperating with the FBI, Hoover “immediately issued an order that every FBI office must cancel its lease with the company”. The then Xerox CEO Charles Peter McCulough, whom Medsker does not name, “ordered Xerox employees to resume cooperating with the FBI and wrote a deeply apologetic letter to Hoover, assuring him that Xerox was on board again and always would be at the service of the bureau...at that point, Hoover rescinded his order [and] all copies produced on 660 copiers once again streamed into the FBI lab to be compared with copies of the Media documents.”



Medsker writes that “the FBI regarded Black people [as] dangerous and [that] must be watched continuously.” To “watch” them, they used informants who infiltrated “groups the FBI considered to be Black Nationalist and Black revolutionary, including in one category groups that were known to be violent as well as ones known to be nonviolent...the importance of recruiting people who would inform on Black people was strongly and repeatedly emphasized.” William O’Neal was one who informed Chicago police about the location of Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton—whom

Above: Betty Medsker.

they killed.

Following the general summaries of these documents, Medsker in her chapter “The Subterfuge Continues,” traces the history of Hoover’s authoritarian rule in the FBI since the forties. What Medsker calls the Secret FBI was founded by Hoover to collect data on citizens and morphed into programs with different names: from the Custodial Index to the Security Index to the Administrative Index, to COIN-TELPRO in 1956. Hoover built so much power that by 1971, even after the documents were released to the public, public outcry was minimal.

In June of that year, Hoover learned through informants, namely Robert Hardy, about a raid of a draft board being planned in Camden. Hoover’s assistant director, Al Rosen, wrote in an internal memo: “we hope to link many of these individuals with the Media break-in.” Planners of this raid were arrested and stood trial. However, “the FBI had no evidence linking...anybody from the Camden group...to the Media burglary.” Hardy was paid \$5,000 before the trial, but he turned against the FBI in favor of the accused raiders. At the trial’s conclusion “all twenty eight defendants had just been acquitted of all the crimes for which they had been

tried.” The trial was a testament of the FBI’s failure to nab the Media burglars.

Medsker posits that Hoover “created the national narrative on anticommunism.” However, she fails to trace this national narrative to the United States’ support for dictatorships across the globe following Hoover’s 1972 death, such as those in Chile, Cambodia, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Grenada, and countless other nations. She does point out the fact that the national narrative created by Hoover essentially put United States imperialism on hyper-drive because, “in his mind, all dissenters were equally danger-

ous whether they advocated violence or nonviolence.” This recalls Obama’s kill list sanctioning the bombing murder of Anwar al-Awlaki, who had no documented ties to al-Qaeda. The classification of “terrorist” or “al-Qaeda tie” was done in a manner as indiscriminate as Hoover’s broad definition of communists.

Probably Medsker’s most informative chapter on the details of these burglarized documents is the nineteenth, called “Crude and Cruel,” in which she describes the very dirty tricks intended to undermine Black Nationalist groups:

“agents hired prostitutes known to have venereal disease to infect campus antiwar leaders,” and letters were sent “taunting the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. to commit suicide.” COINTELPRO operations were opened against “the Socialist Workers Party, the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, the Black Liberation Movement, the New Left, the American Indian movement.” Medsger writes that publisher Alfred A. Knopf’s file “was active for forty years primarily because of FBI interest in the authors Knopf published, some of whom Hoover considered subversive.” The Free Speech Movement that flourished at UC Berkeley became an opportunity for Hoover to fire Clark Kerr, head of the University of California system from 1958 to 1967, who drew the ire of Hoover because he defended the rights of professors who refused to sign a loyalty oath infringing on academic freedom. Likewise, these documents revealed a plethora of other violations of privacy and civil liberties.

In the last quarter of the book, Medsger describes how for each of the burglars, “post-burglary life varied greatly.” Bob Williamson and Keith Forsyth “crashed before they found a satisfying new life.” Williamson became a libertarian while Forsyth, after disabling draft boards, became an electrical engineer. Ron Durst became a financial investor. Susan Smith who, like John Raines, was a veteran of Freedom Summer 1963, provides Medsger with one of the most profound assessments of the burglary: “public resistance” she said, “generated a powerful sense of community and solidarity,” but “because the resisters were hiding, the Media burglary could not do that.” The author told that if the burglars had not hid, the mainstream media would have focused on their criminality and not the documents. And so, the potential of what Susan Smith calls “a powerful sense of community” certainly begs the question of whether their hiding inhibited their purpose. Judi Feingold, another burglar, became first a park ranger, and then a horticultural therapist. Bill Davidson could not stop his activism, which included sabotaging Air Force Jets preparing for Vietnam. Whereas John and Bonnie Raines remained in hiding in order to raise their children, until this year.

Medsger also describes how the efforts to establish some regulations on the FBI via a charter failed. In her second to last chapter, she claims that people living in the United States have had a “more muted reaction” to the evidence presented to them about the overreach by the NSA and the FBI. Nevertheless, she does not account for the fact that the more favorable mainstream media coverage of this overreach was a consequence of the increased consolidation of media ownership—about which her former co-worker Ben Bagdikian does write about in his book *The Media Monopoly*. Like the Federal Reserve, the FBI to this day has essentially no serious executive, congressional, or judicial oversight. In

fact, the latter branches help the FBI to invade privacy regularly. Medsger compares Hoover’s unlimited surveillance to the information collected needlessly by the FBI since 9/11, which has ultimately led to “minimal benefit regarding the discovery of terrorists’ plans.” Such “minimal benefit,” is not a result of excessive government surveillance more than it is a problem of the imperialist (racist, sexist, pro-neo-Nazi) criteria the government uses to kill, imprison, or detain individuals using this information.

Medsger’s book, especially after exposing Hoover’s mangled judgment, raises the questions: Who gets to define what a terrorist is? And, in what ways does this definition empower the ruling elite to continue imperialist oppression? A stronger connection between government surveillance and the ruling elite than Medsger provides in her book is necessary, like the one that, for instance, Edward Snowden has done in his January interview with the German television network NDR. Medsger focuses her critique on a single individual, rather than showing how Hoover’s surveillance—as well as today’s government surveillance—executes the wishes of a wealthy ruling elite.

Davidon’s hope that the suppression of dissent be stopped ultimately did not happen. However, the question should be raised, when he wanted to present the information about the FBI’s suppression of dissent to the public, what “public” did he have in mind? Why didn’t it include institutions of the Black press, like the *Baltimore Sun*, or the *Philadelphia Tribune*? And so, Medsger could have elaborated on how the nature of a racially segregated society limited Davidson’s goal that the suppression of dissent be stopped. Critical questions are left aside, such as why was this secret FBI program being ignored or dismissed by members of the community it was most detrimental to: African Americans? Or, why did Parren Mitchell, who, like Medsger, first received the burglarized documents, give it to the Justice Department? Medsger does not ask why the burglars chose not to send these documents to more dedicated Black journalists, like Chuck Stone of the *Chicago Defender*, or Earl Caldwell, then of the *New York Times*. The nature of the release highlights Susan Smith’s point that secrecy inhibited the amount of public resistance. Even more inhibiting is the social construction of race and class.

In spite of the absences of such critical perspective, overall, this book is a must read to understand the history and function of national narrative of anticommunism in the United States, and how race and class are still factors that advance these hostile anticommunist beliefs promulgated by Hoover. 🌐

Watch Rhone’s interview with Betty Medsger about *The Burglary* at Delaware County Community College: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WE07XefJ1hc>.

# Slavery, Intimacy, and Recrafting History

- ▶ *Sugar in the Blood: A Family's Story of Slavery and Empire* by Andrea Stuart. Alfred A. Knopf, 2013, 353 pages.
- ▶ *The Story of Land and Sea* by Katy Simpson Smith. HarperCollins, 2014, 243 pages.

## kristina huang

WHERE ARE THE MOTHERS in the sweeping narratives of empire-building in the Americas, and by attending to their stories how might mothers reconfigure the way we think about the production of history? When I think of my own fascination with narrative forms that began during my adolescence, heroic portrayals of men dominated: textbook passages about explorers in the New World, spaghetti Westerns, Melville's novels, television detectives dramas. In my schooling and in my afternoon consumption of popular culture, narratives that engaged mothers as historical actors were peripheral to the imagination. Even in my current studies, which turn to the early Atlantic world, the corporate, archival structures of church and state produce a hagiographic story of exceptional men who are on the vanguard of history. Two recent works from popular presses bring refreshing perspectives on the intertwined histories of slavery, dispossession, and empire-building in the Americas. Andrea Stuart's *Sugar in the Blood: A Family's Story of Slavery and Empire* and Katy Simpson Smith's *The Story of Land and Sea* turn to mothers in reconstructing the past and, through these figures, trace variegated terrains of power dispersed through imperial violence and expansion.

In *Sugar in the Blood*, Stuart traces the matrilineal roots of her family tree back to the seventeenth century and routes them back into the present. Beginning with her maternal grandfather eight times removed, George Ashby, and his migration from England to Barbados, Stuart narrates an epic tale of how her family's past is woven into the story of imperial rule and the sugar plantation development in the Caribbean. The tale spans three parts—"The Pioneer," "The Plantocrat," and "The Legacy"—and balances the intimacies (historical, economic, and otherwise) shared within and between the continents surrounding the Atlantic. Stuart tactically slips in and out of the subjunctive mood to describe unwritten parts of the past. When George Ashby first arrives to the Caribbean, Stuart writes: "That first night, when the sun had set and the light was fading from the sky, George Ashby *would have* pitched his tent and made a fire more for light than heat. Beyond the circle of illumination cast by the flames, the darkness was full of strange noises. The music

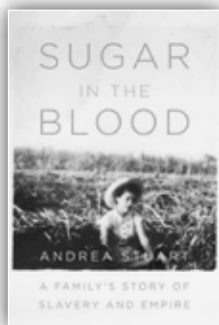
of the Caribbean night—that orchestra of sounds made by cicadas, frogs and rustling leaves—which seemed so charming when accompanied by the bustle of Bridgetown, now seemed menacing...and George *must have* slept fitfully if he managed to sleep at all." From George Ashby's arrival to Barbados, to the Middle Passage, to the conjugal relations of Robert Cooper (Stuart's grandfather four times removed), "future-in-the-past" forms of narration effectively remind the reader that racial slavery and the violence of empire continue to constitute the culture we consume and condition how we understand freedom in our contemporary world. While imaginatively creating a dialogue between the past and present ("Sugar was the commodity that drove the geopolitics of the era, just as oil does to today," British abolitionist "pamphleteers were the bloggers of their day"), Stuart writes of how sugar, settlement, and slavery are not simply forces that shape the intricacies of her family story: they shape domestic relationships and those relationships in turn "rippled outwards." In this way, *Sugar in the Blood* tells a global (her)story that "fixes its gaze on the connections between continents, between black and white, men and women, the free and the enslaved—demonstrating that the individual is not just a victim of global history, but an author of it as well."

In comparison to the temporal and spatial scale of Stuart's epic, *The Story of Land and Sea* is narrower in scope. It focuses on the years following the American Revolution and centers on a North Carolina coastline. The novel opens and closes with a cast of characters who orbit around the memory of Helen, the inheritor of a plantation who dies of childbirth. The center of the novel is where Smith most effectively works through the various relational networks that swivel around Helen: her relationship with her plantation-owning, turpentine-distilling father, Asa; her romance with John, a former pirate who becomes a soldier; and her tense relationship with Moll, an enslaved girl who is presented as a tenth-year birthday gift to Helen.

Like Stuart, Smith draws from her own engagement with the archives as a historian to craft the setting for these characters. Her PhD research, which was turned into a monograph, *We Have Raised All of You: Motherhood in the South, 1750-1835*, appears in this debut novel: broken up into three periods of time in the novel—1793, 1771-83, 1793-94—Smith develops multiples meanings of motherhood in the early South. Tabitha and Helen, a daughter and mother who don't know one another, are each accorded with

a part that explore motherlessness. The final section centers on Moll's fortitude as slave and mother as she witnesses one of her children, Davy, sold off. In an emotional scene Moll's young son expresses excitement at the prospect of possibly buying his freedom. Moll is tormented: "She can't say what she wants. What can a mother like this want for her child? It does no good to tell him he's breaking her heart. He will blow away from this town, out of her arms, will always be a boy, fighting out of wherever he is. She lifts her face and wraps her arms around him and rocks him until his shoulder is wet with her tears. God has never seen her family...On the other side of this life, on the other side of slavery, on the far side of this sea, what is there waiting? Emptiness; it's all she's seen. In the morning, her son will ride into that blank and will not return. Is it freedom if she's not there to witness it? Is it love if it has no object present?"

It is, to some degree, a bit unfair to compare Smith's novel to Stuart's hefty and haunting *Sugar in the Blood* and the generic qualities and personal stakes of each respective author's writing differ, of course. But, for a moment, I want to turn to the representations of Smith and her work that seem to have widespread mass appeal. I am thinking, specifically, of a profile that appeared in the July 2014 issue of *Vogue* magazine, where Smith is characterized as a Southern belle who "admires Terrence Malick's *The New World* and Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, films that share her provocatively unbounded view of history." Ironically, if we were to compare Smith's novel with the aforementioned films, the three works share a contained, rather than unbounded, view of history: representations of imperial violence are firmly circumscribed in the United States' past, and these representations are reimagined to create aesthetic distance and excite intense feeling. When asked in interviews to discuss how she negotiates the ethics of imaginatively representing the thoughts and actions of the enslaved characters: "I'm always nervous about speaking with a voice of someone whose experience is so different from mine," Smith said in a NPR interview earlier this year. "But I believe we have a responsibility to do just that. I think fiction in particular allows us to empathize with this wide spectrum of humanity, and in order to put yourself in another person's life you have to have that empathy." This is a nice sentiment, but one that enjoys the liberty of not having to grapple with the compromised relationship between aesthetic representation and the racial structuring of the world. It's one thing to use fiction as a means of attending to a shared past and its discomfiting realities; it's quite another to grapple with the ongoing histories of empire and slavery, and challenge the



narrative styles that mediate these histories.

To be clear, I am not criticizing Smith's skill or intelligence as a writer. The wispy prose of *The Story of Land and Sea* can be quite lovely at times. Early in the novel, Smith alludes to Donne's tolling bells—an image that reappears in a few places in the novel—and invites the reader to think about the fragility and shared spaces of human existence. Moments like this one gesture at Smith's belief in fiction as an empathetic mode for recuperating a "wide spectrum of humanity." However, as Andrea Stuart incisively remarks in the second part of *Sugar in the Blood*, where she describes the plantation culture of Barbados and touches on the question of agency: "There is always a danger when documenting [the stories of slaves] of turning them into mere symbols of what this terrible system could do to people...To do so would dehumanize them just as surely as slavery tried to do. So we can only hope to understand the enormity of the system that they were resisting and exercise compassion when we judge the strategies they used to endure it." It is precisely Stuart's ability to balance both the intricate narrative about her ancestors and the enormity of the sugar plantation system that makes *Sugar in the Blood* a remarkable achievement.

When read together *The Story of Land and Sea* and *Sugar in the Blood* generate a dialogue regarding the relationship between imaginative writing and the uses of history. We might consider, for instance, how a sense of historical distance can create a particular reflective mood, as Smith does in her novel. In the case of *Sugar in the Blood*, we might think about how Stuart imaginatively deploys the subjunctive in the writing of history in order to establish continuities between past and present. Or we might consider how Stuart recalibrates the legacies of slavery, settlement, and empire in her turn to landscapes and the lyricism that they inspire; they too are sites transformed by these legacies: "All the rest was a sea of sugar cane, extending so wide and deep that it seemed to touch the horizon. The cane had as many moods as an ocean: on a still day it absorbed the heat of the sun and sent it back into the sky in shimmers, at other times when it was breezy, the cane waved ceaselessly, creating what the historian C.L.R. James called 'the song that never ceased.'" But perhaps the most powerful overlap and provocative question that *Sugar in the Blood* and *The Story of Land and Sea* bring to popular audiences is this one: how might a turn to structures of intimacy—familiar, domestic, and sexual—narrate an alternative history, one that not only illustrates the way power is dispersed in the past and present, but one that enables new aesthetic forms of relating? 🍷

# December Bulletin from the DSC

## **You Gotta Fight for Your Right to Participate**

THE GOVERNANCE TASK FORCE of the Doctoral Students' Council (DSC) continues to examine student involvement in program leadership bodies across the Graduate Center (GC). Students on the Task Force also serve on standing committees of the Graduate Council, the GC's governance body, and in this capacity are tracking changes in program curriculum and bulletins.

Upon its creation last year, the task force conducted a survey of Executive Officers and Program Representatives to learn whether or not program governing committees actually meet and if so, whether students are represented, are voting members, and how well the activities of those committees are documented. Currently, the task force is analyzing the data to create program "report cards" that will be broadly shared in the coming months. Be on the lookout for your program's score in the *Advocate*, on the DSC website, Facebook, and Twitter.

The Governance Task Force continues to investigate the potential application of New York Open Meetings Law (OML), which requires that meetings of decision making bodies be open to public attendance, to Program Executive Committees at the Graduate Center. The task force is also seeking to ensure that student program representatives are properly elected to serve as members of the Graduate Council.

## **No Robert's Rules, No Self. Know Robert's Rules, Know Self.**

THE DSC IS WORKING to organize training on Roberts Rules of Order

with Chief Librarian Polly Thistlewaite, who also serves the Secretary of the Graduate Council and that body's Parliamentarian. The DSC hopes that cultivating familiarity with parliamentary procedure will encourage both student and faculty participation on various program and GC committees.

## **Mo' Health Insurance, Mo' Problems**

NEW CHANGES TO NEW York State Health Insurance Program for State and Local Government (NYSHIP) and the New York State Health Insurance Exchange are underway. To ensure that students are getting the most out of their plans, the DSC's Officer for Health and Wellness has compiled important information and resources for students online (<http://opencuny.org/healthdsc>).

Students covered by NYSHIP could experience a lapse in coverage if they do not inform the GC of changes of address, campus employment affiliation, or title (going from fellowship to adjunct or vice versa). Be sure to update the GC's NYSHIP Coordinator Scott Voorhees ([svoorhees@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:svoorhees@gc.cuny.edu)) in order to maintain coverage.

For students not covered by NYSHIP, the New York State Health Insurance Exchange is now in an open enrollment period through 15 February 2015. Additional information and support is available on the GC Website or by contacting Elise Perram of Student Affairs ([eperram@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:eperram@gc.cuny.edu)):

## **Keep Calm, Meditate On**

AS AN EXTENSION OF finals relief stations, the DSC is now hosting free Chan/Zen Buddhist Meditation as a straightforward approach to cultivat-

ing clarity and coping with stress and anxiety. Students are invited to attend sessions on 9 and 16 December from 3:00 to 5:00 pm in Room 5414. No registration is required, but participants are asked to arrive prior to the session.

## **Resolving to Protect Student Rights**

AT THE LAST PLENARY meeting, the DSC lost the quorum necessary to enact policy and pass resolutions. Students wishing to act as a proxy representative at plenary meetings of the DSC may contact our Officer for Governance and Membership Kyla Bender-Baird ([membership@cunydisc.org](mailto:membership@cunydisc.org)).

One proposed resolution urged the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York to preserve students' rights in academic and disciplinary hearings "to remain silent without the assumption of guilt" and to not have penalties increased upon appeal. After CUNY-wide student campaign, The Board of Trustees has since voted to enact changes to Article XV of the CUNY Bylaws while retaining those student rights.

A second proposed resolution in solidarity with Students of Mexico protesting the disappearance of 43 fellow students from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Normal Rural School of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, Mexico has been resubmitted for consideration at our upcoming plenary meeting 12 December 2014.

## **Your Email Address**

FOR A REMINDER ON the changes to your email address (to [@gradcenter.cuny.edu](mailto:@gradcenter.cuny.edu)), see the News in Brief on page 5. 📧



## MIND GAMES BY MARYAM GHAFFARI SAADAT

### #1: Three Containers

THERE ARE THREE CONTAINERS with capacities of 8, 5, and 3 pints. The 8-pint container is full of water and the other two are empty. How can we get exactly 4 pints of water in one of the containers while meeting the following conditions?

- ▶ We are not allowed to throw the water away, and can only pour it from one container to the other.
- ▶ In each move, we should keep pouring the water until either the source container is emptied, or the destination container is full of water (i.e. we are not allowed to stop pouring midway).

### #2: Crucial Inquiry

SUPPOSE THERE ARE TWO doors, behind one door is a ferocious lion and behind the other door a pot of gold. The doors are protected by two guards, one of whom always tells the truth and the other always tells the opposite of the truth. You do not know which guard is truthful and which is untruthful. You are allowed to ask only one question from one of the guards. What question would you ask in order to determine which door leads to the pot of gold?

Hint: you should ask a question to which the answer of both guards would be the same.

### #3: Correct Box Labels

THERE ARE THREE BOXES of fruit containing the following:

- 1) just apples,
- 2) just oranges,
- 3) apples and oranges.

One of the labels "Apples", "Oranges", and "Apples and Oranges" is assigned to each of the boxes.

You know that none of the labels is correctly assigned. Given that you are only allowed to take a look at one piece of fruit from one of the boxes, how can you assign the correct labels to the boxes? ♪

solutions on page 38

## PH.D. COMICS BY JORGE CHAM



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Check out the new Advocate listserv! It's at [GCADVOCATE-L](mailto:GCADVOCATE-L)  
New website URL! Go to <http://opencuny.org/theadvocate>  
Guess what, we're even on Twitter! Follow [@GC\\_Advocate](https://twitter.com/GC_Advocate)