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Practice Resurrection: Urban Planning, the Right to the City, and Transformative Social Justice

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**PRACTICE RESURRECTION:
URBAN PLANNING, THE RIGHT TO THE CITY, AND
TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL JUSTICE**

by

Megan Hebard McRobert
B.A., Smith College, May 2006

THESIS

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Practice Resurrection:
Urban Planning, the Right to the City, and Transformative Social Justice
Megan Hebard McRobert
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ABSTRACT

Social justice movements organize against contemporary conditions of oppression and domination. Today's movements often target neoliberalism as an agent of both economic and cultural marginalization, citing environmental degradation, increasing wealth disparities in the information/service economy, and destruction of community-based institutions in the name of capital accumulation. One such example is the right to the city, both an intellectual idea and organizing framework for social action. The right to the city utilizes a Marxist framework to argue that cities are part of capitalist processes of production and, thus, space can and must be a site of intervention in the service of social justice. This thesis argues that the right to the city literature and organizing practices effectively implement critiques of both capitalism and neoliberalism, enabling material gains for the urban dispossessed, as well as structural critiques. However, the right to the city literature largely fails to make explicit the connection between colonialism and capitalism in producing both urban space and social narratives. Both organizers and academics within the right to the city largely neglect the relationship between the contemporary city and Indigenous resistance and sovereignty movements, though they often operationalize a decolonial analysis by critiquing the discourse of subjugation of the Other. This thesis argues that the lack of an explicit connection between colonialism and capitalism limits the radical potential of the right to the city movement. Think tanks have proven to be an effective means for generating and disseminating narrative and influencing the contemporary political landscape through individual and social consciousness. Therefore, this thesis argues that social justice funders should behave more like think tanks than foundations in part by facilitating a convergence on the question of the relationship between decolonization and consciousness in order to further

advance the radical vision of contemporary social justice movements, of which the right to the city is one example.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Literature Review	9
Right to the City Alliance Case Study	29
Selecting Case Studies.....	31
Participatory Budgeting: Material Gains and Consciousness	33
Homes for All: Colonial Discourse and the Question of Land	40
Bank vs. America: Urban Frontiers and Gentrification	47
FIERCE: Love as a Social Movement.....	52
Social Justice Foundations: Funders as Facilitators.....	58
Case Study Conclusion	63
Recommendations	65
Conclusion	69
Works Cited and Consulted	73

List of Figures

Bank vs. America Poster	50
Summary of Recommendations Diagram.....	68

Introduction

Projections indicate that by 2050 the world's urban population will almost double, increasing from approximately 3.4 billion in 2009 to 6.4 billion in 2050 (World Health Organization). Social unrest, dwindling natural resources, growing concerns about climate change, and wealth disparities demonstrate the urgent need to connect urban space to the question of justice. The right to the city engages the nexus of space, politics, economics, and culture with the explicit task of centering the needs of urban inhabitants over the needs of the market economy and capital accumulation. This thesis seeks to contribute to an expanded understanding of the theory and practice of the right to the city in order to understand what it does well and make recommendations as to where both the theory and practice could be challenged or invigorated. Specifically, this thesis argues that both the right to the city literature and organizing practices effectively intervene in neoliberalism but that decolonization efforts are inconsistent and, at times, retrench colonial discourse.

This thesis is an attempt to better understand the conditions facing the contemporary city with the explicit intent to further the aims of radical social justice movements. As such, it is grounded by the following research questions: What cultural context is necessary to advance the visions of the right to the city movement? What strategies and analysis already exist, where do they function well, and where do they falter? What are the available tools, mechanisms, and ideas that could further contemporary efforts to organize around the question of social justice?

For the purposes of this analysis, several distinct terms – capitalism, neoliberalism, colonialism, and neocolonialism - are used to describe and analyze contemporary conditions. Capitalism describes an economic system characterized by private ownership and entrepreneurial freedom as means to invest and accumulate profit by individuals and corporations. Though forms of trade have existed for millennia, capitalism as an economic system emerged between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe. Since the eighteenth century Industrial Revolution, capitalism has spread quite rapidly and today most people in the world live under a capitalist economy (McCraw, 2011). In the last 25 years, the term neoliberalism emerged in part to rehabilitate capitalism in the wake of market crises (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism describes a “theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Thus, neoliberalism functions as both a revival of liberal economics and an ideology of human relations.

In describing contemporary global economic and political conditions, there is a strong relationship between neoliberalism and imperialism. Linda Tuhiwei Smith uses the term imperialism to describe processes that started in the fifteenth century. “Imperialism and colonization describe “a chronology of events related to ‘discovery’, conquest, exploitation, distribution, and appropriation” (Smith, 21). Specifically, imperialism functions as “idea of spirit with many forms of realization” and a “discursive field of knowledge” that has realized itself through economic expansion and “the subjugation of

‘others¹’” (3) (Smith, 2010, p. 21). Imperialism is understood to have been integral to and necessary for European economic expansion and allowed the securing of new markets and resources. However, the process extends beyond economics and includes cultural subjugation, physical and intellectual violence, domination of the modes of knowledge production, governance, and relations with nature, and family. Imperialism functions as an ideology, as well as economic and political process.

Colonialism describes a subset of the concept of imperialism and refers to the physical outposts of imperialism that started “as a means to secure ports, access to raw materials and efficient transfer of commodities from point of origin to the imperial centre” (Smith, 2010, p. 23). Colonialism in the United States describes both the displacement and genocide of Indigenous² peoples, as well as ongoing cultural and intellectual processes that rely upon subjugation to justify economic and territorial expansion. Both slavery and the colonization of Indigenous peoples relied upon a discourse of the Other as a commodity and necessary to the process of the reification of capital accumulation. Colonization “almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a suppression – often violent – of the heterogeneity of the subjects in question” (Mohanty, 1984, 333). Mohanty argues that while colonization refers to a process of exploitive economic exchange, it is primarily a question of discourse (Mohanty, 1984, p. 333). Neocolonialism and neocolonization emerged after the withdrawal of Western colonial powers from territories to describe the maintenance of

¹ The term “Other” draws on the work of postcolonial theorist Edward Said and has since been taken up by

² The term Indigenous peoples is used here, however, I acknowledge the range of terms used by colonized peoples and the politics inherent in a non-Indigenous researcher selecting one label. Other terms include: indigenous, First Nations, First Peoples, Native Peoples, Native American, First Peoples (Smith, 2010, p. 6).

colonial power through economic, political, and cultural channels (Childs and Williams, p. 5). The terms highlight colonialism's functional power as not merely a question of territory, but of the global economy, discourse, and ideology. This thesis will use the term colonization because the United States is still under colonial rule. For Indigenous communities living within the borders of the United States, colonialism is very much intact. Additionally, colonialism will be used to refer to the narratives of subjugation of the Other upon which economic extraction relies. Colonization is not a relic of the history, but an ongoing process of economic accumulation that relies upon an ethic of constant expansion, violent otherization, and the continued assertion of the superiority of positivism as a mode of knowledge production.

Contemporary globalization relies upon the logic of colonialism in that it asserts the unquestioned logic of exploiting natural resources, imposing entrepreneurial business norms, and dismissing the importance of preserving culture and ecology. Taiaiake Alfred, author of *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* summarizes the implications of colonialism as “the belief in the superiority and universality of Euroamerican culture, especially the concepts of individual rights as the highest expression of human freedom, representative democracy as being the best guarantor of peace and order, and capitalism as the only means to achieve the satisfaction of human materials needs” (Alfred, 2005, p. 109). Alfred argues that it “is the unquestioned normalcy of these beliefs and assumptions that must be problematized for decolonization to occur” (Alfred, 2005, p. 110). Decolonization describes a multifaceted set of processes. This thesis will attend itself to two specific instances: centralizing the question of Indigenous sovereignty and the legal, territorial, cultural, and economic liberation from

ongoing colonial rule, as well as the interrogation of colonization as a discourse and ideology that relies upon violent narratives of the Other and that impacts subjects at the level of consciousness (Smith, 2010; Sandoval, 2000).

Contemporary social justice movements take many forms in organizing resistance against domination and repression. One example is the right to the city, which is both an intellectual idea and an organizing slogan for urban social justice movements. French philosopher Henri Lefebvre coined the term “right to the city” in the 1968 publication of *La droite a la ville (The right to the city)*. Lefebvre utilized a Marxist framework to re-center urban inhabitants as the producers of the city and argue for the right to demand a city that meets the needs of its inhabitants. There are a number of ways that the concept of the right to the city has been applied in practice. Anti-displacement campaigns in (among others) China, Brazil, India, Germany, Spain, Canada, and Mexico have taken up the frame of the right to the city as a way to critique and rally against the impacts of the globalization of capital. Applications of the right to the city term vary and include calls for legal reforms as well as calls for radical social change. The World Charter for the Right to the City, for example, structures the right to the city as a set of legal and civil rights and relies heavily on governmental implementation to unite disparate various urban responses to globalization within a single framework. The Charter emerged out of discussions at the 2001 World Social Forum and was later at several global convergences and finalized Barcelona in September 2005. The primary case studies for this thesis are drawn from the Right to the City Alliance (RTTC), a coalition of local organizations based in cities throughout the United States that utilize a range of tactics to agitate around a variety of issues, including economic justice, housing, and the use of public space.

The right to the city presumes that a number of factors, including economics, contribute to the production of urban space. The right to the city examines and critiques the role of the market economy in producing a specific city space. A primary intervention posed by this thesis is the argument that colonialism is also a factor of production of contemporary urban space and, as such, should be considered a root cause of urban injustices. Colonization and capitalism are distinct processes, however, they do mutually produce one another. Both processes focus on the individual as the organizing unit of society, extraction of labor and raw materials for the purposes of accumulation and expansions, and the naturalization of hierarchy.

The right to the city explicitly orients itself against capitalism and neoliberalism, an orientation that intersects with an anti-colonial analysis. Anti-neoliberalism and anti-colonialism both interrogate the assumptions of space as a form of capital and the narratives that normalize individual acquisition and regulation of space through exclusion of the Other. At the same time, the right to the city's emphasis on neoliberalism misses the question of the ongoing process of territorial colonialism of Indigenous populations. The right to the city literature and organizing practices serve as one instance of urban social justice organizing. This thesis seeks to generate a better understanding of contemporary functioning of power with the explicit intent to contribute specific recommendations in the service of decolonization. Specifically, this thesis argues that urban planners, social justice organizers, and foundation funders each inhabit unique positions to challenge colonization as both a question of space and of discourse.

Social justice organizers vary in their goals and visions. This thesis defines organizers as conveners of community with the intent to challenge inequity and

domination. The right to the city is one concept that organizers use to frame their analysis and strategy to challenge repressive power. Organizers utilize a range of tactics within an overarching strategy for social justice. Social justice seeks to transform the state, while also recognizing its use as a tactic and site of leverage. Often, the state enables neoliberalism, as when policy is used to re-zone an area to facilitate economic expansion or when legislators eliminate industry regulations. The state is both a site of tactical resistance to neoliberalism's role in shaping space (such as winning more funding for public housing) and complicit in community disinvestment (such as writing plans with more benefits for private developers than community members). Additionally, the state continues to assert itself as a colonial power, as exhibited by the ongoing domination of land and Indigenous communities. Thus, the state can also be a point of leverage in challenging capital and seeking transformation on the basis of the goals of decolonization. Therefore, urban planners exist as both interlocutors who can interface with the state, economy, and community. Though planners do not pass specific policies alone, they are in a position to enable or disenable community participation and are also in the position to use technical information to expand community engagement. Planners are also conveners of community who work inside of and outside of the state to engage and express community narratives and visions through the issue of space. Similarly, funders of social justice organizations and movements are in a unique position to facilitate research convergences and cross-pollinate across distinct movements.

At its most basic, the right to the city challenges the logic that asserts that some communities are disposable while others are worthy of organizing a city around, as well as the idea that any other task must be subordinate to the unceasing search for capital

accumulation. I argue that the right to the city literature and Right to the City Alliance launch effective, tactical challenges to capitalism and neoliberalism but that colonialism is neglected as a root cause of injustice. To remedy this situation, this thesis argues that social justice funders and foundations are in the unique position to facilitate a convergence on the question of decolonization by centralizing it in research prompts and connecting different organizations and approaches on the question of decolonization. Specifically, organizers, funders, and planners should centralize the question of decolonizing consciousness as a means to challenge neoliberalism and colonization as a process of discourse, social imagination, and individual psychology.

Literature Review

For the purposes of this thesis, colonialism is understood to function in two distinct ways: (1) as an unresolved historical process of land theft and displacement and its legacy of the legal marginalization of Indigenous communities within the United States; (2) the dissemination of colonial narratives and the contested, though ever-present, discourse of power that normalizes and naturalizes domination of the Other (Porter, 2010; Smith, 1999). Colonization is a historical fact as well as an ongoing process that shapes urban spatial development as well as cultural narratives about the use of space. The right to the city concept interrogates modes of production to reveal the ways in which urban space is not neutral but is, in fact, both produced by and contributes to the reproduction of economic, political, social, and psychological norms. The purpose of this section is to gain a better understand of the elements of the right to the city theory, as well as the relationship between urban planning and colonialism.

Colonialism is a question of land because it is, in part, a question of territorial acquisition. In *Unlearning the Colonial Cultures of Planning*, Libby Porter argues that land use planning enabled the spatial expression of colonization. Historical colonialism was a means to experiment with modernity and colonists experimented with town use and layout as best means for stimulating production (Porter, 2010) including the relationship of buildings to each other as well as sanitation and transportation systems.

Land was fundamental for the success of colonization in making new territories by securing imperial state rule and creating economic growth in those territories. Land use planning was the principal instrument of state control of land, and therefore of state rule and economic growth, in those territories. In the context of settler states this has meant that planning has been, and remains, integrally involved in dispossession. (Porter, 2010, p. 51)

Colonialism continues to shape the planning and production of the contemporary city; a “colonial order of space persists in the contemporary formulation of land regulation and management in settler states. In (post)colonial spatial cultures, space can be deemed natural or cultural, named and measured through the canons of western science, and made legible to certain classificatory and regulatory structures.” (Porter, 2010, p. 105). Porter’s work extends Henri Lefebvre’s framework that argues that space is produced by capitalism, as well as by the daily experiences of residents. Lefebvre’s 1974 *The Production of Space*, argues that every society produces its own space, thus space can be understood as a physical and social process/product of capitalist production (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 321), therefore it can be a site of intervention for radical social change. Lefebvre’s work enables an academic analysis of the relationship between urban space and social justice, utilizing a Marxist framework to deconstruct the processes that produce cities. Lefebvre responded primarily to capitalism, defined as an economic system of a free market with an emphasis on private ownership and the accumulation of profit and the extraction of surplus value. Porter extends his framework to reveal the ways in which colonialism produces space to meet its economic and cultural needs and how these processes continue to impact Indigenous communities.

Porter uses Lefebvre’s understanding of social space to frame the relationship colonialism and the production of space.³ “Representations of space – like maps, physical

³ “Lefebvre frames the production of social space as a triad: Spatial practice or ‘perceived’ space; Representations of space, or ‘conceived’ space; Representational space, or ‘lived’ space. “Abstract space,” according to Lefebvre, is the space of instrumental rationality, fragmentation, homogenization, and, most important, commodification. It is the use of space by capitalists and state actors who are interested in the abstract qualities of space, including size, width, area, location, and profit. In contrast, “social space” is the space of everyday lived experience, an environment as a place to live and to call home. For Lefebvre, the uses proposed by government and business for abstract space, such as planning a new highway or

and cognitive – shape narratives and consciousness of space, who it is for, and how it should be used; [conceived space] is “the ‘mental or ideational’ field of spatial imagination that is the work of dominant systems of thinking for the purposes of administering and remaking space.” (Porter, 2010, p. 15) (Lefebvre, 50) Planning is one of the ways that colonial dominance of land not just as a physical process, but as a narrative process. “Much of the work of colonialism, it could be interpreted, is to impose (often violently) a conceived space upon the lived spaces of Indigenous peoples.” (Porter, 2010, p. 15) Colonization is not simply a historical process, but an ongoing construction of an ideological system.

Like Lefebvre, Porter deconstructs the tools of planning as tools of positivism and seeks to disrupt them as value-neutral. Knowledge and science assist in domination both in terms of enabling processes of resource extraction and exploitation as well as the naturalization of positivist processes of knowledge production (Lefebvre, 1991). For example, maps were needed to parcel land and private property and also functioned as representations of space and an expression of the “explorer’s gaze.” Porter argues that “western settler states, and their planning systems especially, have a particular way of seeing space, and that this is quite distinct from Indigenous ways of seeing space. Moreover, this produces manifestly unjust outcomes, oppression, and marginalization.” (Porter, 40) She uses this example to critique assumptions that collaborative planning is

redeveloping older areas of the city, may conflict with existing social space, the way residents think about and use space. This conflict between abstract and social space is a basic one in modern society, according to Lefebvre, and involves spatial practices (spatial patterns of everyday life), representations of space (conceptual models used to direct social practice and land-use planning), and spaces of representation (the lived social relation of users to the built environment) (1991, pp. 33, 38-9).” (Gotham, Shefner, Brumley)

always socially just. Far from neutral, planning processes “are fully embedded in the rational-comprehensive models of ‘traditional’ land use planning. Such models are colonial spatial cultures, hegemonic in that they serve a mode of production. Even while this is always fractured and always partial, as Lefebvre (1991) shows, it is nonetheless an active reconstitution of colonial space production” (Porter, 2010, p. 147). Urban planning is a site where colonialism and capitalism as narratives and modes of production have been both challenged and re-entrenched.

Porter also draws on the work of Edward Said to explicate colonialism as both a question of land management and of narrative. “The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now has plans for its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative (Said, 1993, xiii)” Porter, 2010, p. 47). Porter effectively demonstrates how unchallenged narratives circulate as people seek to make meaning of the world and their place in it in relation to other human beings. Colonial discourses of the Other shift through and are inherently unstable, however, they still wield tremendous power in shaping accepted forms of knowledge and ways of being in the world. The colonial production of the Other functions to marginalize and delegitimize community-based knowledge production, a process that encompasses Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities alike.

Narratives are part of the work of asserting authority and legitimacy in decision-making and meaning-making processes. Porter argues that planning is not just a process of land regulation, it is also a cultural process of narrative (re)production and, therefore, colonial spatial cultures are both present in and re-entrenched by planning processes. As a

form of narrative production, the “powerful performative work of planning – of deciding what counts as nature and what counts as culture – both constrains and produces possibilities for Indigenous presence and power.” (Porter, 2010, p. 105) The relationship of planning to colonization can be understood as both a historical process and as an ongoing narrative. “If planning is a producer of place, what does it claim is worth producing and how is this particular view of the world continually mediated and reconstituted?” (Porter, 2010, p. 105) What is given meaning in the production of space? What cultural narratives are re-entrenched or challenged in the process? These questions are relevant for the right to the city, a movement that continually seeks to deconstruct and strategize against processes of domination through a critical understanding of urban space.

The right to the city inserts itself as a social justice intervention in the process of urban production. Lefebvre coined the term “right to the city” in the 1968 publication of *La droite a la villa (The right to the city)*. The right to the city largely seeks to re-center urban inhabitants as the producers of the city. He sought to reframe urban production as a function of economics and politics, as well as a collective process to which every inhabitant contributes. The “right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life” (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 158), though he asserts that the “right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 173-4). The right to participation refers to the right of urban residents to play a central role in the decision making processes that produce the city

while appropriation refers to “the right to occupy already-produced urban space, it is also the right to produce urban space so that it meets the needs of inhabitants” (Purcell, 2002, p. 578) while the oeuvre “refers to the city and urban space as a creative product of and context for the everyday life of its inhabitants” (Purcell, 2002, p. 578). Lefebvre took pains to acknowledge the ephemeral, uncategorizable quality of urban life – the encounter, the performance, the fete – and to argue that while workers should be able to guide the processes of economic and political production and distribution, urban space is also produced through social and emotional processes.

Contemporary right to the city theorists –Don Mitchell, Tovi Fenster, Margit Mayer, Mark Purcell, Peter Marcuse, as well as David Harvey – apply Lefebvre’s Marxist framework to a critique of neoliberalism. Right to the city critiques of neoliberalism include: critiquing the role of the state in the regulation of public space and the question of homelessness (Mitchell, 2003); the role of identity in the question of regulation of space (Fenster, 2005); and the question of ideologies of individualism and private property (Harvey, 2008). By centralizing questions of participation, space, and ideology, the right to the city serves as both an economic critique, as well as a social, political, and cultural critique.

A question raised about the functionality of the right to the city is its reliance on the word and the concept of rights to frame a debate that is much larger than questions of citizens demanding concessions from the state (Mayer, 2012). Peter Marcuse asserts that this is not a call for expanded legal rights within the existing legal framework, but that rights can be a means of conceptualizing and struggling for a different city all together and thus constitute a strategic point of leverage in fighting for the right of those who

produce the city to create a city that serves their own needs (Marcuse, 2012). The struggle for rights is “an important, if still limited, tool in the production of space against the forces of abstraction that seek to destroy it. Rights themselves, therefore, are part of the process of producing space” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 54). Rights can be a strategic way to frame social justice arguments as well as the observance that the right to the city encompasses broader issues than juridico-legal rights. The question of decolonization also dialogues with the question of “rights” in the right to the city, framing a challenge to the notion of universal citizenship and underscoring the importance of seeking not just equal rights within existing system but a transformation of existing processes of power and decision-making. A decolonial analysis provides an additional means to conceptualize the strategic function of state-based rights; policies and treaties are a means of dispossession and assimilation, but are also a means for Indigenous communities to control own land and resources (Porter, 2010, p. 28).

An oft-cited text that frames the arguments of right to the city is David Harvey’s article, “The Right to the City” (Harvey, 2008). Harvey argues that urban growth/development can be understood as systemic crises of accumulation. Capitalism requires constant growth in order to sustain itself. One of the core elements of the right to the city is a critique of capitalism’s process of accumulation by dispossession, a term used to describe gentrification but that could also be applied to colonialism. Though Harvey neglects it, colonialism is also a process of ongoing dispossession, “a fact that state-based planning is not only confronted by, but complicit with.” (Porter, 2010, 34). Though dispossession is never totalizing and colonization is an unstable and contested process (Porter, 2010), it represents an act of violent theft and dehumanization.

Colonialism and capitalism are both processes of individual profit accumulation with spatial implications. As Lefebvre argues, space is produced by economics as well as social and cultural processes. Harvey makes a similar argument:

The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. *The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.* (Harvey, 2008) (emphasis added)

This thesis argues that transforming ourselves is not just a right, but an obligation, and that the transformation of self and space can and must be enabled by decolonization. As Alfred insists, “the revolutionary objective must be recast as self-transformation” (Alfred, 2005, p. 201). Organizing principles emanate from people’s hearts and minds, thus this must be a primary arena of change (Alfred, 2005). Decolonization is as much a spiritual and emotional process as it is a question of political and economic autonomy (Alfred, 2005, p. 139). The imperial/colonial mentality includes the beliefs that “sharing and equality are wrong”; “selfishness and competitiveness are good”; “science and technology are ‘progressive’ and therefore good, whereas humans (being cursed with Original Sin or just being unweildy are bad and nature is fearsome”; “order is of higher value than truth and justice”; “Euroamerican culture is the perfect form of human existence” (Alfred, 2005, p. 110). Alfred argues that social transformation can only be achieved “through the steady challenging of the intellectual and cultural foundations of Settler society in the media, schools, popular culture, and the arts” (Alfred, 2005, 64).

Chela Sandoval makes a similar argument (Sandoval, 2000) that connects consciousness and radical social organizing and frames resistance as both an act of individual consciousness and as collective action that is the social expression of that consciousness. Sandoval and Alfred call for a decolonization of the mind to enable social transformation. Neither is interested in discovering or arriving at a location of pure resistance but in illuminating the infinite ways in which resistance already takes place as a mental and spiritual process.

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, rather than a bleak verdict in which resistance is futile, Sandoval (2000) outlines theories, methods, practices and procedures that “comprise a cognitive map for guiding practitioners toward a dissident and coalitional consciousness effective in making a place for creative forms of opposition to the neocolonizing cultural imperatives of postmodern globalization” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 5). She describes the far-reaching effects of global neoliberalism as a “democratization of oppression”, in that it does not conform to modernist conceptions of power and that this is its very site of potential. Sandoval argues that under colonial modernity, the colonized always experienced a fragmentation of self but that under postmodern globalization, that fragmentation is now experienced widely. “There has been an upheaval under neocolonizing postmodernism that has transferred a potentially revolutionary apparatus into the body of every citizen-subject, regardless of social caste” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 5). Colonialism is both a historical injustice that has never been remedied and an ongoing process of psychological, social, economic, political, and cultural subjugation that is experienced across identity groups.

Sandoval utilizes the framework of Frantz Fanon and Roland Barthes to argue that colonization is a process of imposing hierarchical binaries (colonizer/colonized, male/female, white/black, heterosexual/homosexual, culture/nature, active/passive) and that the colonized subject survives in part through the construction of a third-person consciousness that participates in colonial structures to survive while, simultaneously, maintaining autonomous subjectivity. These binaries are not fixed, but mutually produce one another in an unstable and fraught process. Nonetheless, the regulation and imposition of binaries continues to assert itself through epistemic and physical violence. Both Sandoval and Porter use historic examples of colonialism, but rather than remain in the realm of the historical, they both argue that contemporary social, political, and emotional relations of colonial power continue to be produced in the present day. The term neocolonization describes “the policies through which a powerful force maintains or extends control over foreign dependencies” (Sandoval, 2000, p.186n6). The definition of “foreign” does not simply conform to the boundaries of the nation-state, but refers to the “colonizing ethic of Western Europe” and that the U.S. third world feminism is one instance of a movement-based challenge to the “rationality and philosophical moorings of Western man” (Sandoval, 2000, p.186n9). A decolonial understanding takes into account the question of the autonomy of Indigenous nations within the United States as well as the diffuse understanding of contemporary power. Colonization is both a political and economic process, as well as a guiding ethic, thus, it can and must be challenged in different ways and with different methods.

Colonial discourse continues to circulate and assert the supremacy of positivism and provide one of the underpinnings of a capitalist logic that foregrounds acquisition

over human dignity. Porter conceptualizes decolonization in the same terms as Sandoval and Lefebvre, as an ethical orientation and a process, rather than an arrival at a liberated city. Sandoval and Porter both foreground an ethic of radical love; “it is love as a deep practice of connection: of selflessness, humility and compassion. It is not a ‘model’ of being or a set of rules, but an ethic towards others, a daily practice” (Porter, 2010, p. 157). Love answers the questions of, why bother? I join Porter and Sandoval’s call for the transformative potential of love; “it is love as a politics of service, compassion and insight that will move us to radical practice: toward a more transformative (post)colonial politics of planning” (Porter, 2010, p. 158). Sandoval and Porter both understand love not as a construct of Western romance but as a process of affinity and compassion that has the ability to “puncture through the contingencies of everyday life” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 165). Love is the challenge to colonialism and is not possible to regulate or police away; love is “an extra, uncategorizable, unnamable meaning haunting all human need to name, classify, order, and control” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 144).

Though the language is different, Lefebvre makes a similar argument:

Listening – with even half an ear – to the vengeful discourse of a Valerie Solanas in her S.C.U.M. Manifesto, powered as it may well be by deep resentments, it is hard to resist the conclusion that it is time for the sterile space of men, founded on violence and misery, to give way to a women’s space. It would thus fall to women to achieve appropriation, responsibility that they would successfully fulfill – in sharp contrast to the inability of male or manly designs to embrace anything but joyless domination, renunciation – and death. (Lefebvre, 380)

Leaving aside more contemporary critiques of identity politics and gender essentialism, Lefebvre’s challenge to capitalist space still holds. What would it look like to “give way to a woman’s space”? Or, what would it look like to (1) acknowledge the patriarchal

history of capitalist cities (Lefebvre's geometric-visual-phallic) and (2) generate space based around the restoration of the body, rather than regulation of the body? (Lefebvre, 1991). In other words, what would a city organized by love look like?

If as a movement slogan and intellectual idea, right to the city purports to seek a radical transformation of urban space, then the role of colonialism in shaping contemporary imagination and consciousness must be both exposed and challenged. A decolonial analysis of the right to the city is both about understanding processes that produce contemporary urban space as much as it is about interrogating the ongoing colonial discourse which urban planning is a part of both re-entrenching and challenging. The colonial narrative of what space is for whom and what, a narrative that constantly mutates and eludes itself in an ongoing recapitulation of basic tropes of Otherization, tropes that continue to marginalize and dispossess urban inhabitants. Colonialism is both an economic and physical process, as well as a psychological process that continues to shape lived urban experience. Challenging capitalism without challenging colonialism is an incomplete task, at best. At worst it is a reproduction of systemic violence. The task of unlearning colonial complicity and settler privilege is urgent. The colonialist logic underpinning the spatial organization of urban space has been too often inadequately addressed by the right to the city. If the right to the city seeks to transform contemporary space, social relations, and the self, then it must challenge colonialism [as both a psychological and a physical process] as well as neoliberalism, else risk re-entrenching processes of dominance and Otherization. The right to the city theory launches an appealing intervention into neoliberal discourse, however, this intervention is not only incomplete but is doomed to reproduce political, economic, and cultural processes of

marginalization if it does not consistently generate and operationalize a critical analysis of the question of colonialism.

As Porter argues, colonization is, in part, a process of narrative production. In order to better rise to the task of challenging colonial and capitalist narratives, it will be helpful to understand one of the dominant story-telling institutions of the contemporary political landscape: think tanks⁴. Though many factors play a role in shaping consciousness - religion, government, labor, family/kinship, culture, geography – think tanks play a unique role in the contemporary political landscape in the US. Specifically, both conservative and liberal think tanks contribute to the saturation of colonial and capitalist ideology in the public imagination. Think tanks use policy, research, and the media to shape public narrative and social imagination (Parmar, 2002; Covington, 2005). While this has largely been in the service of capitalism and colonialism, there are lessons to be extracted for radical social justice organizers. Specifically, conservative think tanks have been successful in funding strategically and in generating and disseminating narrative for public consumption.

Advocacy think tanks with explicitly ideological and partisan means emerged in the late 1980's (Weaver, 1989, p. 567). In *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, Christine Ahn (Ahn, 2007) argues that this pattern has allowed an economic elite to control where funds are spent, rather than paying taxes to be distributed to the public and an estimated

⁴ For the purposes of analysis, think tanks can be divided into three categories: conservative, liberal, and left. Right wing foundations explicitly enable neoliberalism using illegitimate and unsubstantiated arguments backed up by a media and political machine that can disseminate their outputs (falsely) as scholarship, and so are much more effective than liberal foundations in shaping the public narrative. Liberal foundations and think tanks (and organizations on the liberal reform end of the RTTC movement) enable neoliberalism by focusing their attention on trying to reform it.

45% of the \$500 billion foundations hold actually belongs to public in form of lost tax revenue (Ahn, 2007, p. 65). By 2000, the wealthiest members of society paid 22.3% of income in federal taxes, as opposed to 26.4% in 1992 (Ahn, 2007, p. 64-5), citing two major factors – reduced capital gains taxes and bigger (tax-deductible) gifts to charity (Ahn, 2007). Think tanks are a way to exploit tax policy while controlling allocation of wealth and research outside of governmental structures. Think tanks and the rise of foundations are major components of federal disinvestment, the effects of which the right to the city and other social justice movements seek to address (social services, housing, etc). Additionally, think tanks have been successful in implementing a range of methods to serve their purposes, primarily in their function in both generating ideas and disseminating them for popular consumption.

Both liberal and conservative foundations have been used to provide social services within a specific ideological context. Inderjeet Parmar (2002) argues that liberal foundations – such as Carnegie, Ford and Rockefeller – functioned to consolidate US global hegemony and impose neoliberal economic philosophies in the Global South post-World War II. The foundations sought to spread and entrench ideals of rationalism and philanthropy in strategic locations that would support ideals of US economic expansionism. Education that was pro-US was seen as an integral part of anti-community policy. Thus, think tanks have been a mechanism to further solidify neoliberal discourse.

Sally Covington, of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy argues in “Moving public policy to the right: the strategic philanthropy of conservative foundations” (Covington, 2003) that the impact of conservative think tanks on the US political and economic landscape has been enormous. She cites think tanks as one of the

structures that pose an ideological challenge to social justice organizing, such as the Heritage Foundation's work on narratives around healthcare and immigration policy.

Among the most important of these changes are the long-term decline in electoral participation, the deepening class skew to US voting patterns, the transformation of political parties into top-down fundraising vehicles, the growing role of money in politics, the rising political importance of the media, and the decline of institutions (such as unions and political parties) that once played a stronger balancing role in setting national, state, and local priorities. Over time, these changes interacted in a way that reduced opportunities for low-income people to exercise influence while enlarging such opportunities for upper-income constituencies. Philanthropic money thus converged with political opportunity in a way that has not only pushed the debate to the right but also exacerbated America's "participatory inequality" (Covington, 1998).

Though sometimes contradicting one and another on policy specificities and bearing ideological distinctions, liberal and conservative foundations formulate and disseminate public narratives of colonialism and capitalism.

Without overstating conservative successes or portraying the US conservative movement as monolithic, conservative think tanks have been successful in constructing and disseminating narrative in the service of furthering their political agenda, more so than liberal and social justice oriented think tanks. Covington argues that the "long-term investments that conservative foundations have made in building a 'counter-establishment' of research, advocacy, media, legal, philanthropic, and religious sector organizations have paid off handsomely" (Covington, 2003, p. 105). The mastery of marketing and media is an element in their success; this includes using the media to disseminate op-eds, write scholarly articles, start own news networks and funding the media: "Conservative foundations also provided \$2,734,263 to four right-of-center magazines between 1990 and 1993, including *The National Interest*, *The Public Interest*, *The New Criterion*, and *The American Spectator*. Over the same time period, however,

four left-of-center publications- *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, *In These Times*, and *Mother Jones*-received only \$269,500 from foundations.” (Covington, 1998)

Andrea Smith critiques the consequences of these patterns, arguing that

Progressive funders generally give money to specific issue-oriented campaigns, whereas right-wing foundations see the need to fund the intellectual projects that enable the Right to develop a comprehensive framework for presenting its issues to the public. These think tanks, research projects, journals, etcetera, may not have immediate short-term impact, but, in the long run, they altered the public consciousness (Smith, 2007, p. 6).

Conservative foundations have dedicated a tremendous amount of resources to “ideas” rather than “issues” (Ahn, 2007, p. 47). At the end of the 20th century, the right raised more than \$1 billion just to fund “ideas” and are far more likely to fund “core operations” while progressive institutions tend to fund issue-specific projects and campaigns (Ahn, 2007, p. 47).

Covington argues that conservative foundations “bring to their grant making programs a clear vision and strong political intention, funding to promote a social and public policy agenda fundamentally based on unregulated markets and limited government” (Covington, 2003, p. 107). Their integrated strategy includes: scholarly research that forms the intellectual basis of policy that think tanks translate into briefings and position papers for conservative media outlets disseminate broadly, law firms that “pursue strategic litigation,” and leadership trainings for young conservatives who are then ideologically prepared for careers in economics, government, journalism, and the law (Covington, 2003, p. 106). Think tanks organize meetings to strategize how to communicate new information “greater public opinion and policy impact” and host trainings for activists and subsidize student participation and training, as well as support

communication between organizations and grant makers and recipients (Covington, 2003, p. 107).

In “Why Strategic Philanthropy is Social Justice Philanthropy,” Niki Jagpal and Kevin Laskowski (2013), argue that in spite of billions of dollars spent by progressive institutions failures persist, citing widening public school disparities and continue to not serve the most vulnerable populations, the U.S. has the most inefficient healthcare system of developed countries in the world, the nonprofit arts sector, though vibrant in many ways, often fails to reach vulnerable populations or effect social change, and that in spite of “\$10 billion in grants to environmental causes from 2000 through 2009, environmental initiatives have been stalled at the federal level for decades while existing regulations have been rolled back and undermined.” (Jagpal and Laskowski, 2013, p.3) Their research concludes that strategic philanthropy can advance social justice agendas through supporting operating budgets, providing long-term funding, and investing in ideas, advocacy, and grassroots organizing.

From within the conservative movement, author John Miller describes conservative funding successes in similar terms as Covington. These include investing strategically and concentrating funding; investing over the long-term; investing in cultural ideology; going directly to policy makers; and creating media and publishing books (Miller, 2003, p. 8). Miller looks at the Olin and Bradley Foundations as case studies of conservative success that shifted debates in different ways. Olin helped to build the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise, Manhattan Institute, and Stanford’s Hoover Institution. Of the most interest to radical organizers is the emphasis on strategic funding and dissemination of narrative. Miller argues for the importance of strategic

funding – “Before philanthropists think about funding, they should think about strategy” (Miller, 2003, p. 63). He argued that the Olin and Bradley Foundations “focused on solving problems by moving the debate” (Miller, 2003, p. 63), which is “attributed to philanthropists who have built flexible organizations, such as think tanks and magazines, that can respond to a variety of unexpected challenges.” (Miller, 2003, p. 63)

Conservative think tanks often generate faulty research, however, there is enough of a system in place – including media outlets and policy papers – to support and spread these ideas. The lessons to be extracted from conservative think tanks in service of radical left organizing include: invest in operating budgets, invest over the long-term, invest in ideas not specific campaigns, focus equally on developing and disseminating/marketing ideas, seek to change policy, build media infrastructures, implement evaluation processes that take ideology into account, and facilitate communication across and between grantees, organizations, and researchers through summits, fellowships, and trainings. As will be demonstrated, there are social justice foundations that are implementing strategic funding, however, there is a distinct lack of convergence around the question of decolonization. Social justice foundations are also working strategically and responsively and organizing efforts regularly win material victories in marginalized communities. These efforts could and should be strengthened by following guidelines of strategic funding and centering the question of decolonization in the production and dissemination of radical narratives.

While it is important to critique the potentially problematic aspects of finances, Stephanie Guilloud and William Cordery, of Project South, argue that fundraising can be an organizing strategy and that “part of building community power is creating a

community economy in line with our principles and analysis” (Guilloud and Cordery, 2007, p. 108). “In a community-based economy, resources flow from and return to the same community. Community organizing and fundraising allows those affected by the work of an organization to determine its course” (Guilloud and Cordery, 2007, p. 109). Examples they give include selling their curriculum and toolkit and collaborating with organizations on events and fundraisers so that costs are shared; parties and events are used not just to raise money, but to connect people in community (Guilloud and Cordery, 2007, p. 110). “Developing a real community-based economic system that redistributes wealth and allows all people to gain access to what they need is essential to complete our vision of a liberated world. Grassroots fundraising strategies are a step in that direction.” (Guilloud and Cordery, 2007, p. 111).

To conclude the literature section, I have argued that the right to the city theory provides an effective critical intervention in the relationship between capitalism in urban space, specifically around the questions of participation, appropriation, difference, and the city as oeuvre. I have also argued, however, that the right to the city literature reveals an absence of a decolonial analysis or strategy. I have also argued that the right to the city helps planners to conceive of a social justice intervention with their positions in relation to the state and be used to be challenge, change, and utilize in service of communities. This is the research “problem” which can be “solved” through a strategic engagement with think tanks. The question of decolonization can be facilitated by social justice funders, who should do so by both funding organizations strategically and centering the question of social, political, and physical decolonization. Decolonization attends itself to

the orientation of love in order to address historical harms and their impact on the present as well as challenge the naturalization of colonialism through narrative.

Case Studies

The Right to the City Alliance

Right to the City Alliance was formalized as a coalition of existing anti-gentrification organizations at the US Social Forum in 2007 and today a nonprofit staff based in New York City coordinates campaigns as well as communication between the 43 member organizations. Member organizations sign on to the Principles of Unity developed at the Social Forum and collaborate on shared campaigns through the Alliance while maintaining their own local work. The Principles of Unity are: Economic Justice, Land for People vs. Land for Speculation, Land Ownership, Democracy & Participation, Services and Community Institutions, Indigenous Justice, Environmental Justice, Reparations, Internationalism, and Rural Justice (<http://www.righttothecity.org/index.php/about/mission-history>). Member organizations include a broad range of issues and organizing ideologies, even within the bounds of shared principles of unity and theoretical framework. Campaigns include incarceration, immigration, transportation, land use, housing policy, environmental justice. Organizations vary in their political positioning with some (ex: (Virginia New Majority) taking a progressive reform approach and others (ex: Queers for Economic Justice) centering a radical analysis. Shared Alliance campaigns include: street vendor organizing, public housing, vacant lots, transportation, and immigration while campaign tactics include: direct action, eviction defense, policy and legal, social media, and research.

At the LA Urban Congress, Gihan Perera, a founding member of RTTC Alliance and co-founder and current Executive Director at member organization Miami Workers

Center, reflected on the function of the frame of the right to the city for organizing. In recounting the forming of the Alliance in 2007, he reflected on the economic context at the time. In 2007, the US was at the height of the housing market bubble and grassroots organizing was happening around many issues – housing, transportation, land, culture – and began to seek a frame for connecting the struggles:

How do you get some concession out of capital with no real strategy that brought us together? We were all reacting to what was happening and impacting our people, but it was reaction, we didn't have a theory of power. One of the things that the founders recognized was the need for a frame to bring all of this together. We happened upon the right to the city frame because it did some things – recognized in history of fighting against capital, had been mostly workers. What we had found was, essentially, it's not just about workers and factories - the city was the factory. People living, city created, destroyed, social class relationships. The city struggle was the class struggle, the capital struggle. (LA Urban Congress, September 12, 2012)

Later, Perera jokingly pronounced Henri Lefebvre “Henry La Favor,” reflecting the question that was asked during the founding of the Alliance - “what does he have to do with communities of color and our own history?” – with - “This is a frame, not a dogma. We should make it our own and link to own struggles.” (LA Urban Congress, September 12, 2012)

The RTTC Alliance illustrates successes of the right to the city framework in organizing against the brutalities of capitalism while also revealing both the organization's limitations on the question of colonialism, as well as its approach to decolonization. The following case studies focus on economic justice campaigns - Participatory Budgeting NYC, Homes for All, and Bank vs. America – while the Alliance member organization Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment (FIERCE) illustrates challenges to the discourse of the Other.

Selecting Case Studies

Before proceeding with the case study analysis, a word on research methods. Case study documents draws on texts already produced in the course of organizing (such as organizing reports and social media platforms). In the course of research, it became obvious that a number of Right to the City Alliance member organizations consistently negotiate a relationship with outside researchers and must hold specific boundaries. As I result, I consciously chose to maintain my distance, rather than use participant-driven qualitative methods, such as interviews or surveys. For example, the organization FIERCE hosted “Walk This Way: FIERCE walking tour of the West Village” on September 29, 2012, offering the perspective of LGBTQ youth of color in the redevelopment and gentrification of NYC’s West Village. An update to the event announcement included the following text:

This is a peoples' walking tour that is grounded in grassroots histories and isn't a formal academic tour. The purpose of this tour is to build solidarity between FIERCE LGBTQ youth of color doing community organizing and donors and allies who support FIERCE's work. A lot of times our communities are studied for academic purposes in ways that don't benefit the communities being studied. This tour takes the opposite approach by lifting up the voices and experiences of ordinary people, specifically LGBTQ youth of color, who are making history by living it. It's a safe space for everyone to learn, laugh and share about their own lives and experiences. As such, we request that everyone respect that the tour won't be a space to interrogate the young people leading it for academic purposes. (Walk This Way: FIERCE West Village Walking Tour, 2012).

Similarly, the Boston-based member organization ACE (Alternatives for Community and Environment) has a “Student request policy” on its website:

ACE receives many student requests for interviews and information about environmental justice work. While we are honored to be contacted and excited

about the broad range of environmental justice projects, we are unfortunately unable to answer every request.

To remain true to our mission of building the power of lower income communities and communities of color to achieve environmental justice, we ask for an exchange of volunteer time for student requests. This policy ensures that our time spent working with students outside our primary constituency will still help us advance environmental justice in the region (Student Request Policy, 2012).

ACE requests that anyone seeking to use them for research purposes complete in-office training and volunteer in the office and clearly states that they are unable to support research requests outside of the Boston area.

The organizations are not anti-research, but are clear in the limits to which they can support the burden of accommodating outside researchers who take up time and resources without necessarily adding value to the organization. Participant-based research is not necessarily inevitably invasive, however, based on my position outside of the organization and given that I was not able to guarantee that my recommendations would be useful to the RTTC Alliance, I opted to utilize publically available texts and documents as the primary research texts.

Participatory Budgeting: Material Gains and Consciousness

The right to the city critiques capitalist modes of production and allocation of the surplus, specifically raising the question of participation in urban governance and economic allocation processes. One of Harvey's primary concerns is to realize "greater democratic control over the production and utilization of the surplus" (Harvey, 2008, p. 7). The RTTC Alliance member organization Community Voices Heard (CVH) serves as one of the sponsors for the New York City Participatory Budgeting (PBNYC) process. Participatory budgeting affords an example of the implementation of right to the city's call for more democratic mechanisms of allocation. PB illustrates one alternative decision-making process and illustrates how it might be implemented in order to democratize the contemporary city. However, PB also underscores the importance of critically evaluating power dynamics and resisting the temptation to romanticize collective processes. As the literature demonstrated, colonialism is both a question of property and of consciousness and discourse. PB illustrates the ways in which the questions of material goods and consciousness are mutually reinforcing and must be attended to simultaneously.

In participatory budgeting, residents vote directly on the allocation of municipal funds. While democratic modes of allocation exist in various forms, PB as a specific model was developed in Porto Allegre, Brazil, enabled by a "window of opportunity" that opened when the progressive Labour Party (PT) came to power in 1988 (Sintomer, Herzberg, Röcke, 2005, p. 3). Communities called for expanded participatory mechanisms at the same time that progressive elected officials were in a position to do implement reforms.

The US-based Participatory Budgeting Project cites over 1,000 cities and communities worldwide currently utilizing the process (*A People's Budget*, 2012), including Chicago, Vallejo, and New Orleans. In 2011, RTTC Alliance member organization Community Voices Heard (CVH) worked with the national Participatory Budgeting Project to implement the process in New York City for the first time. Funds were made available through capital discretionary funds made from four New York City Council Members - Brad Lander (D39), Melissa Mark-Viverito (D8), Eric Ulrich (D32), and Jumaane D. Williams (D45). The process began with Neighborhood Assemblies in October 2011. From the Neighborhood Assemblies, budget delegates volunteered from each district to condense neighborhood ideas into proposals, researching costs and feasibility. In February 2012, budget delegates presented draft proposals at another round of neighborhood assemblies, encouraging questions, criticism, and feedback through interactive and visual presentations. Budget delegates then used that feedback to develop final project proposals for inclusion on community ballots. Each district generated hundreds of ideas for projects in their community and then selected projects for inclusion on a ballot. Ballots had anywhere from 8 to 24 items and residents could vote for up to five of the projects. Funding was allocated to projects receiving the most votes; projects received funding until all monies were spent. Across four districts, approximately 6,000 people voted over a two-day period, allocating a total of \$5.6 million to 27 different projects. <http://pbnyc.org/content/about-new-york-city-process> The 2012-2013 cycle included 8 city council districts allocating a total of over \$9 million and a 2013-2014 cycle is currently being planned.

Though PBNYC may constitute a fraction of the total city budget, it opens up a path for broader participation in other aspects of municipal fiscal allocation. Understanding PB as a process, rather than as an end point, helps to understand the qualitative impacts of community organizing efforts. The Urban Justice Project conducted ongoing research and evaluation of the 2011-2012 cycle, reporting that 44% of participants had never before worked with someone from within their community to make a change relevant to their neighborhood. (*A People's Budget*, 2012) At the closing plenary for the PBNYC conference in 2012, Community Voices Heard Executive Director Sondra Youdleman argued that community members that participated in PB gained a greater understanding of the municipal budget and developed more of a grounded foundation from which to make critiques on the broader question of public allocation (PBNYC Conference, March 31, 2012). Youdleman reflected on CVH's campaigns, noting that the organization typically has oppositional relationships with Council members over issues like social welfare and public housing. She argued that it is possible to maintain an adversarial stance and still work together on specific issues (PBNYC Conference, March 31, 2012). PB is one tactic among many in the struggle to democratize urban spaces. PBNYC offers insight into what a radical transformation of the state might look like and how communities might participate in that shift. The RTTC Alliance leadership is invested in using PBNYC as a means to challenge existing structures. At the closing plenary of the PBNYC conference, LaForest stated: "This process divorced from the politics is actually not necessarily what we want, that we don't want a sanitized version of a kinder, gentler democratic participation that maintains the status quo in this country."

PB NYC offers a model for collective processes of allocation while also highlighting the conflicts that arise in collective processes. At the PB NYC conference opening panel, Giovanni Allegretti cited the experiences of women and youth who don't participate as much as men and older people. He argued that while PB has potential, it is not a panacea: "if we don't have methods, we reproduce social inequalities in the PB process" (PB NYC Conference, March 30, 2012). Collective decision making processes do not erase existing and sometimes informal power dynamics, including educational and professional backgrounds, race, gender, and age. As Porter insists, inclusivity does not equal justice (Porter, 2008).

At the same panel, Gianpaolo Baiocchi, professor of Sociology at Brown University, posed critical questions and reminded attendees that "we are facing an economic cataclysm" that "PB alone won't get us out of it. Schools are closing, teachers are being cut and we are asked to choose between this or that, do you want to cut off an arm or a leg? Why are we not asking the question of why we don't raise taxes?" (PB NYC Conference, March 30, 2012) While participating in processes like PB, Baiocchi urges people to simultaneously question the circumstances, asking "What premise do we concede to?" Baiocchi pointed out that PB processes are very popular right now with US politicians, speculating, "perhaps because it puts the decision of what to cut back on the people." Similarly, Rachel LaForest, Executive Director of the RTTC Alliance, described the importance of sustaining PB while also remembering that it just an entry point to asking critical questions, like "why is there a budget crisis? Is there actually a budget crisis or is it a question of prioritizing where the revenue is going?" She asked, "if it's not partnered with that, how valuable is it and how powerful can it really be?" While

participatory budgeting is a tool for collective urban governance, it can also be a tool to contain and dilute participatory processes.

Even though PB is an experiment in broadening democratic participation, it does require communities to select certain projects over others. It is a collective process to allocate finite resources. On March 28, 2013, several people shared Queens-based Addicted2Success' Facebook status regarding the community's PB ballot items: "DO YOU WANT COLLEGE POINT TO GET THE MONEY TO DO THE FOLLOWING THEN MAKE SURE YOU VOTE FOR IT! We need everyone to vote! If not, other communities will get their projects funded, and College Point could get nothing!" (Facebook, March 28, 2013) While it is tempting to dismiss this as an example of a capitalist consciousness – and it is – it is also an example of someone advocating for their community in the context of a very real struggle over limited resources. This quote indicates the need the need to frame the question of participation and allocation in the context of questions of production. Though PB can be a means to deepen community infrastructure and encourage communication, collective problem solving, and self-management, the process is still constrained by material reality. PBNYC relates to decolonization in that it is a question of consciousness – of a collective vs. competitive mindset – as well as it is about the question of democratically and equitably producing and allocating resources.

The relationship between PBNYC and Occupy Wall Street⁵ illustrates the ways in which it can function as one tactic in a larger strategy for radical social justice. At the

⁵ Occupy Wall Street (OWS) emerged as an encampment in Zucotti Park in downtown New York City in November 2011. Rallying around the discourse of the economic 99% vs. 1%, Occupy is an example of a

closing plenary, moderator Yves Cannabes (based in the UK) shared his “fascination” and observed the international interest in Occupy, asking PBNYC representatives to reflect on that movement and the relationship between PBNYC and Occupy. Community member Patricia responded, “I think the link was the people. I can tell you, I would literally go down to Zucotti Park and be in that space where you see new faces and have new conversations calling attention to the issues and then go to the PB meetings which was a literal shift in how to participate” (PBNYC Conference, March 31, 2012). Youdleman, concurred, observing that “Occupy was kind of about visioning and really looking at what the world could be, or should be. And participatory budgeting was really about grounding that in a practical exercise about, how do we remake our democracy and have that be a democracy of the people, rather than by corporations, by wealthy individuals. How do we shift that?” Panelists reported that PBNYC reps, including Josh Lerner, conducted workshops on PB at the Occupy encampment and advised the Occupy budget group on process. Both Occupy and PBNYC have their place in a decolonial movement for social justice and both require transformation of consciousness (from individual to collective) in the service of democratic allocation of material resources.

PBNYC illustrates a tangible step to challenge existing processes of participation and urban governance. The process offers an example of combining community power and state mechanisms to effect immediate change as well as generate qualitative benefits. As an example of implementing alternative and more democratic mechanisms of

right to the city movement, in that it sought to centralize questions a critique of capitalism and its impact on space and social welfare. While a socially invigorating movement, Occupy reveals a colonial bias by using the language of occupation and territorial acquisition. The Albuquerque iteration of OWS voted in a General Assembly to use the name (un)Occupy Albuquerque, in an attempt to centralize the question of decolonization.

distribution, PBNYC reveals both potential and limitations. Internal power dynamics and the question of a competitive consciousness must be addressed in the process of reorganizing material allocation in order to ensure that democratic processes do not recapitulate existing dynamics of domination.

Homes for All: Colonial Discourse and the Question of Land

The housing justice campaigns of the Alliance illustrate the right to the city's critique of capitalism's focus on exchange value over use value. The 2008 recession and housing market crash impacted millions of families and homeowners and has thus become a point of convergence for many economic justice organizers. The question of housing justice offers a contemporary example of dealing with one of the country's pressing problems while also offering an interesting example to reflect on the question of colonialism because it is a basic question of land and physical space. The Alliance's Homes for All campaign reveals an effective challenge to economic injustice, however, it also raises some questions about the relationship between the right to the city and colonial narratives.

The Alliance announced a major organizing victory at the start of the Alliance's LA Urban Congress (September 12, 2012). On the first day of the Congress, RTTC and several allied organizations held a direct action targeting Freddie Mac/Fannie Mae (the largest holder of home loans in the country). The next day, Freddie Mac/Fannie Mae conceded to a principal reduction on foreclosed homes in California, a concession that will result in many people being able to remain in their homes (LA Urban Congress, September 12, 2012). While this represents a quantitatively small victory in relation to the scope of an economic crisis that impacts millions of people, Alliance Executive Director Rachel LaForest reminded attendees that the victory was won through decades of organizing and that a "tipping point" had been reached.

Since the LA Urban Congress, the Alliance has narrowed its focus of mobilization to the question of housing. As of 2013, the "Actions" tab now automatically redirects to

another website: www.homesforall.org. Throughout 2012, the “Actions” tab hosted information about the Alliance housing campaign - Take Back LA and a Transportation Justice campaign. March 2013 marked a kick-off of coordinated actions in 11 cities across the country, including in Boston, Seattle, New York, and Miami, all under the banner of “Homes for All.” Actions were coordinated to balance overarching federal demands – such as the expansion of the National Housing Trust Fund, HUD and Section 8 and challenging banks that profited from subprime mortgages – with distinct, local foci – such as homelessness in NYC and foreclosure in Seattle. (RTTC Alliance press release, 2013).

The Homes for All campaign uses a range of tactics to win their goals of keeping residents in their homes and communities. On January 28, 2013, the Alliance issued an email newsletter (Right to the City Alliance, personal communication, January 28, 2013) reporting on their actions with Fannie Mae and connecting the local and the national. The Alliance presented 96 individual cases to Fannie Mae demanding mortgage principal reduction, the right to rent homes or purchase at fair market value, and the repair of deteriorating conditions. Later in the year, the Alliance also discussed Fannie Mae donating homes or selling for \$1 to non-profit affordable housing agencies and fulfilling their “statutory commitment” to funding a National Housing Trust (Right to the City Alliance, personal communication, May 2, 2013). In addition to reporting on specific reforms, RTTC Alliance messages includes stories of individual families facing foreclosure and eviction, describing how health and employment issues lead families into foreclosure and seeking to shift the debate away from individual to systemic failures (Right to the City Alliance, personal communication, January 28, 2013). The Alliance

uses storytelling to inform a radical analysis, citing financial policies as one the root causes of foreclosure and eviction in an effort to refute the narrative of individual failure of homeowners. Storytelling is called for as a method to recover subordinated histories and as a means to challenge capitalism and colonialist logic that seeks to erase the dignity of the individual with the dehumanized, displacable Other.

The Homes for All campaign engages tactically with available state technologies, such as a strategic use of eminent domain. In the January 28, 2013 email newsletter (Right to the City Alliance, personal communication, January 28, 2013), the Alliance reported on the use of eminent domain to address the foreclosure crisis, proposing that the Brockton City Council in MA seize mortgages (not buildings) at current market value and renegotiate terms directly with the borrowers. An example of using the powers of the state, police powers, as a means to curtail and limit the negative impacts of neoliberalism. Eminent domain is the power of the state to take private property for public use and has often been used to extract value from low-income communities, rather than as a tool to retain power. The strategic uses of urban development tools proposed by the campaign offer examples to planner interested in social justice of how to use state technologies on behalf of communities and the right to the city.

The specific demands of the housing campaign capitulate, necessarily, to certain dynamics of capitalism (such as demanding the right to buy homes of the foreclosed at fair market value). However, using reform approaches can be a tactic to secure immediate material changes for the urban dispossessed and does not preclude radical critique or transformative social change. Homes for All uses the state and reformist approaches to

fight for housing, however, it also uses confrontational tactics. Eviction blockades have become increasingly common, in which activists surround a home slated for foreclosure or eviction. The tactic usually prompts the loan holder to cancel the eviction, rather than use overt violence (rather than bureaucratic violence of eviction).

In addition to reform and story-telling, the Alliance uses research and policy to deconstruct capitalism logic and frame alternatives. The report “We Call These Projects Home” provides an analytical underpinning to organizing around public housing. The authors emphasize the importance of a radical analysis of the current state of housing, indicting federal disinvestment as a root cause while simultaneously proposing both reform-oriented and radical solutions. The report asserts that “building strong communities requires undoing neo-liberal economic policies” (We Call These Projects Home, p. 6) and that this goal will be achieved by strengthening grassroots, investing in low-income communities of color, and devising ground up policies. Crucially, the report calls on organizers to “shift the terms of the debate” (We Call These Projects Home, p. 61). This is a larger question to be further explore – *how do we shift the terms of the debate?*

Another collaboratively written paper helps answer the question of how to shift the terms of the debate. The Alliance co-authored a “Housing & Land: A Need for Transformative Demands,” a working paper that places housing campaigns within a broader struggle towards social justice that has a long historical legacy. The paper highlights the importance of the relationship between consciousness and organizing. Given the current housing crisis, the paper argues that “a growing resistance movement is

fighting back and winning significant victories” and emphasizes the long-term vision of housing as a human right. Grounded in these visions, the authors argue that in order to grow the housing justice movement, social justice organizing must raise consciousness as well as develop, fight for, and win transformative demands (Right to the City Transformative Demands Team, p. 2). In addition to community consciousness, authors call on the housing justice movement to generate and implement both “transitional demands” and “transformative demands.” “Transformative demands “address the root cause(s) of the problem,” ”alter power relations, and cause systemic change” (Right to the City Transformative Demands Team, p. 4) while “transitional demands can be key to making transformative demands possible, but alone these demands do not adequately alter power relations” (Right to the City Transformative Demands Team, p. 4). Transformative demands possess the following characteristics: “solutions that put people’s needs over profit,” “social ownership,” “democratic control,” “scale,” and “consciousness” (Right to the City Transformative Demands Team, p. 3). They define consciousness as seeking greater awareness on the importance of organizing, transformative visions, and awareness of solutions. Transitional demands include principal reduction, making banks pay a fee on foreclosed properties, and using community benefits agreements (Right to the City Transformative Demands Team, p. 4-5). Both transitional demands and transformative demands can and must exist as part of strategy for decolonization.

While Homes for All effectively challenges the impacts of neoliberalism in the service of housing justice for marginalized urban residents through a dynamic and effective use of reform, radical, story-telling, and analysis, it reinforces colonial

narratives in a few key locations. At the same time that the “We Call These Project Home” report effectively outlines the the root causes for the housing crisis, it neglects the question of colonialism when discussing the issue of land. In another report, Harmony Goldberg (an Alliance resource ally) mentions the importance of solidarity with Indigenous and rural communities when speaking about the right to the city movement more broadly, however, she never raises questions of colonialism and its role in the right to the city movement and the rise of the “strategic left.” The absence of this analysis has also been observed by organizers and participants within the RTTC Alliance. At the LA Urban Congress, an audience member questioned the function of the campaign title “Take Back LA” arguing that we “have to remember that LA was stolen from Native American and Mexico” asking “where does that fit in?” Gihan Perera answered that upon the initial founding of the Alliance they had -

Created popular education committee that would build and deepen analysis and that committee had very short-lived life; with all great things we have done, we haven’t actually taken up that question so that we are asking these deeper questions. If we can’t figure out how to do this in a way that is deeper in our organization, we won’t be able to move towards a collectivity. If we can’t have common analysis, we will always fight over what the right strategy is. I think that’s something we should take up again. How can we actually do that work? What’s the best way to do that? (LA Urban Congress, 2012).

The Transformative Demands working group of the RTTC Alliance has since dissolved and Perea cites the lack of a popular education committee in the struggle to clarify the movement’s decolonial analysis. The Homes for All campaign started out as a Take Back LA campaign and the shift from “take back” to “homes for all” is, perhaps an acknowledgement of the colonial aspect of the original language. However, its tagline is still “Reclaim. Remain. Rebuild our Cities” (www.homesforall.org). This tagline serves a

strategic function in framing the struggle of urban residents against private interests that control the development of city spaces, however, it relies upon colonialist discourse to do so and obscures the history of stolen land of Indigenous communities.

The Homes for All campaign has won material victories, including eviction and foreclosure prevention, education and self-advocacy for renters, homeowners, homeless urban residents, and people who live in public housing. The campaign effectively illustrates the implementation of a range of tactics and organizing methods to mobilize community members and secure material gains while also putting into practice theoretical critiques of use value vs. exchange value. However, the campaign illustrates the ongoing tension between winning material victories and relying upon colonialist discourse to do so. While there is a strategic function to using dominant narratives in the service of radical organizing, the Homes for All campaign reveals the ever-present possibility of retrenching settler colonialist norms.

Bank vs. America: Urban Frontiers and Gentrification

Following the 2008 recession, the role of banks in facilitating economic instability and wealth disparity became more widely scrutinized. A number of banks failed and needed government bailouts after engaging in risky credit swaps (McCraw, 2011). The issue became a rallying point, leading to critique of the ways that banks profit while millions of people struggle to survive. In 2012, the RTTC Alliance joined a coalition to convene a series of actions and events at the Bank of America shareholders meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina on May 9, 2012 with actions taking place through May 7-10. Dubbed “Bank vs. America Showdown in Charlotte,” the demonstrations included in-person actions, street theater, story telling, protests, and social media to raise the profile of RTC anti-foreclosure organizing and highlight the role of banks in the ongoing housing crisis, as well as Bank of America’s involvement in the coal industry (Echo Justice and Unity, p. 9).

Using the phrase “Bank vs. America” (a play on Bank of America), organizers hosted a boxing match (a story reported by a number of media outlets reported and which received thousands of unique views online) and succeeded in winning a range of favorable press on the issue of banks and mortgages. The campaign is a very interesting example of the use of narrative to launch critique, mobilize resistance, and gain a following by illustrating a creative message and interesting visuals. At the same, the campaign highlights the problematic potential of relying on existing narratives. What stories get told and re-told? Even when a critique is being launched, what existing narratives go unquestioned in the process? One of the event posters (image on following page) reveals a reliance on colonial tropes to communicate resistance, a problematic

approach.

The poster plays off of the Wells Fargo logo of a horse and cart and positions Wells Fargo as the pioneer with the 99% as protesters on the bottom. On the one hand, the image functions to critique banks and the lack of regulation as parallel to histories of the Wild Wild West. The poster situates the protester as the colonized. As Sandoval argues, processes of colonization apply to all postmodern subjects and the urban dispossessed constitution the subject of processes of neocolonization. However, contemporary processes of neocolonization do not grant organizers *carte blanche* to ignore historical and contemporary processes of Indigenous colonization. The imagery recalls historical processes of colonialism, but with no clear links to a decolonial analysis, thus obscuring settler privilege and erasing ongoing Indigenous struggles for land and recognition.

The discursive construction of the city calls up a variety of tropes; the city is variously constructed as a frontier, a concrete jungle, an ecosystem. It is no slip of the tongue that gentrifiers are often referred to as urban pioneers and newly discovered neighborhoods as frontiers (Smith, 1996). Gentrification and blight narratives of empty, underutilized space enable and justify the erasure and displacement of existing communities. The term ‘urban pioneer’ is therefore as arrogant as the original notion of ‘pioneers; in that it suggests a city not yet socially inhabited; like Native Americans, the urban working class is seen as less than social, a part of the physical environment” (Smith, 1996, p. 3).

The Right to the City Alliance works with the Center for Story Based Strategy

(formerly smartMeme) to develop stories about organizing. In an interview with Bill Moyers (Moyers, 2013) LaForest argued that stories work better than data to mobilize people and stressed the importance of narrative in economic justice organizing. The role of narrative is an important part of developing a counter story to colonialism, however, without a decolonial analysis, storytelling can retrench dominant narratives. There exists a strong and, as of yet, undeveloped theoretical and practical connection between the right to the city and Indigenous resistance, both critique dominant modes of power and economy through the lens of space and seek to change both material reality and social consciousness. Exploring and strengthening this connection could be a means for the right to the city to challenge and transform existing structures of state, economy, and culture. The Right to the City Alliance mobilizes the urban subjects of neo-colonization. Linking this base to existing Indigenous resistance movements could yield a profound and formidable coalition for radical social change.



<http://theunityalliance.org/bank-vs-amer> 1

An example of the work between gentrification and colonization can be found in the RTTC working group in Montreal (unaffiliated with the US-based RTTC Alliance). Their website frames their anti-gentrification work as “part of a much larger and on-going project of decolonization, affirmation and realizing of indigenous sovereignty and agency, and continual unlearning and accountability on the part of settler-allies.” (Urban Spatial Justice. August 15, 2012). RTTC Montreal also contributed a section on

criminalization and homeless to a report from the Aboriginal Justice Research Project (Montreal Urban Aboriginal Strategy Network, 2012). The RTTC Montreal offers one example of drawing explicit connections between cities, neoliberalism, and colonialism.

Ongoing urban colonization and ongoing indigenous colonization are not collapsible processes, but they are interlinked and mutually producing. The emergent Indigenous movement Idle No More (INM) offers an example of an explicitly decolonial movement that challenges neoliberal economics and ethics and provides an interesting opportunity to forge an alliance around the questions of rural, urban, and Indigenous justice. Idle No More's organizing vision "calls on all people to join in a peaceful revolution, to honour Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water" (The Vision, 2012). INM launches a strategic engagement with the rights of the state, claiming the inherent right of Indigenous sovereignty and land claims. INM also critiques neoliberalism, citing the wealth of Canadian mining and logging companies and the consequences of pollution and degradation of natural resources on Indigenous communities. Assuming the RTTC Alliance continues to grow and add more member organizations, INM offers an example of how the Alliance could use strategic collaboration to expand and make explicit a decolonial analysis. The RTTC Alliance organizes effective challenges to neoliberalism and capitalism in city spaces. The Alliance economic justice and community-based principles of unity are vibrantly on display, as illustrated by the preceding analysis. However, the principles of unity of Indigenous and rural justice are comparatively underdeveloped. Collaboration with community-based Indigenous and rural groups is one way to strengthen these principles and work to build a flexible and resilient web of resistance.

FIERCE: Love as a Social Movement

Colonialism is both a question of territory Indigenous sovereignty, as well as of consciousness and spirit. While the Homes for All and Bank vs. America campaigns reveal somewhat problematic omissions in terms of a decolonial analysis, the member organization FIERCE illustrates decolonization as a process of liberating one's mind and spirit and resisting the saturation of neoliberal and colonial logic in organizing space and community relationships. Organizing to free urban inhabitants from the limitations of surplus and exchange value includes strengthening relationships and community networks, an enactment of the idea that transformative social justice is an act of love. Gihan Perera reminisced about the founding of the Alliance at the 2007 US Social Forum and recalled the party that followed: "We had an awesome party till 5 am and I was like, oh, that's right to the city." (LA Urban Congress, September 12, 2012). The member organization FIERCE and the community building efforts of the Alliance illustrate this principle in action, including their organizational emphasis on leadership development, consciousness raising, cultural expression, and community mobilization of LGBTQ youth of color. FIERCE intervenes in dominant and hegemonic narratives of space that rely on and reproduce systems of gender and racial violence in part by strengthening community networks of love and support. Queer and marginalized communities create community networks out of necessity and survival and can thus be inspiration for organizers.

Located in the West Village in downtown Manhattan, FIERCE's history is deeply connected to the public spaces of LGBTQ communities of color in New York City and the relationship between community networks and public space. In recent years, development efforts on the piers have led to increased regulation and criminalization of

activities on the pier. City administrators and private developers have entertained various plans to redevelop the pier with large and expensive attractions. Dubbed “Vegas on the Hudson,” FIERCE and other community activists participate in governance structures to resist excessive plans. Organizing victories include eliminating the \$25,000 fee charged to mobile service vans, stopping the proposal to close the pier at 10 pm, securing free LGBTQ programming, and developing a relationship with the Hudson River Trust and Community Board 2. They are still organizing for affordable food vendors and public bathrooms available until closing time, a reduction in police presence on Christopher Street, and a 24-hour LGBTQ youth center near the Christopher Street pier. In a blog post on July 11, 2012, Krystal Portalatin, Co-Director of FIERCE, argued that the primary goals of the campaign were to expand community access to public space and increase community involvement in decision-making processes (Portalatin, 2012).

In addition to questions of governance and participation, FIERCE’s organizing events adds a further dimension to the question of space and community. For example, FIERCE’s initiative Queer Pier 40 Years is “an arts-based initiative that explores the intersections of archiving, cultural history and public space in community-making and social change” (About Queer Pier 40 Years and FIERCE) organized for “access to public space in the West Village, a historic site of community-making and liberation for queer and trans youth of color” (About Queer Pier 40 Years and FIERCE). Located in the West Village, an area in downtown Manhattan, the West Village piers historically served as a community site for youth, people of color, and LGBTQ community members. An area known for cruising and open socializing has since been targeted by increased state policing through policies like the Quality of Life Act and forces of economic

gentrification, displacing deviant bodies in a process of the sterilization of social space. The Queer Pier 40 years project challenges exclusion in the name of capital accumulation and seeks to preserve community histories by contesting the use and regulation of public spaces.

FIERCE has organized a number of public events on the piers, the range of which illustrates the use of public space in convening community. Events include a 2009 screening of the film “Paris is Burning,”⁶ a 2009 Global Warming Ball (the first ball held in public space and took place on Pier 46.⁷ (Baez, 2010), self-defense classes, healing from trauma workshops, Stop and Frisk protests, and queer youth of color talent shows. FIERCE events illustrate the everyday resistance that is both possible and necessary and the capacity for beauty, love, and resilience in the context of a very real struggle for physical survival. A Know Your Rights Ball held on August 11, 2012, featured dance battles as well as education about legal rights. At the event, the deejay switched between emceeing dance battles and giving people information about what to do when stopped by a police officer. He reminds attendees, “You have the right to be safe, and you have the right to be free, know your rights” before introducing the next dance round (Know Your Rights Ball 8). The event format demonstrates the intimate relationship between cultural expression, public space, physical safety, and community networks. Cultural expression

⁶ A historical and well-known documentary of queer black dance halls credited with starting the mode of performance of “vogueing” at “balls.” Balls originated within urban LGBTQ communities of color and feature competitions - “battles” - featuring drag, dance, and vogueing performances. The film was screened on Pier 46, simultaneously honoring community history and claiming public space for today’s community.

⁷ Organizers link climate change to the gentrification of the pier to the displacement of queer people of color, citing increased policing, curfew changes, and noise complaints as means of surveillance and the ways in which space is policed in the service of capital accumulation (ie: residents of luxury high rises are more likely to win police and policy protection than queer people of color).

and community cohesion (however fleeting) are tools of survival for urban residents marked as “different” or “other” who must negotiate heavily regulated urban spaces.

FIERCE’s organized resistance to NYC’s Quality of Life Initiatives⁸ and the increased policing enabled by Stop and Frisk⁹ illustrates their resistance to the perpetuation of colonial narratives about the dangerous Other. City administrators, as well as residents and business owners, actively sought to increase the police presence in an effort to “clean up” the area, including stopping and searching FIERCE members who were going on in and out of the office. (FIERCE, June 3, 2011). Additionally, announcements of a new homeless shelter in the area activated residents’ fear rooted in stereotypes. The *NYTimes* reported on a local resident who argued that their child would “never” be able to walk home from school with a homeless shelter in the area because of “the volume of homeless people and drug-addicted people on the street.” “Even with security, there is no control after they leave,” said another mother. “These people will be roaming around looking for another bottle or mugging someone for drug money” (Sicha, C. 2011, May 24). FIERCE responded to the criticism by advocating at the policy level, as well as issuing press releases and responses via social media. In a press release, Joy Toole, director of the Queers for Economic Justice Shelter Project was quoted as saying: “We’ve seen a wave of residents and community groups who are perpetuating negative stereotypes of queer youth, homeless people, and people of color. These stereotypes feed

⁸ “The term “quality of life” is thought to have first been used in a policing context in New York City in the early 90s, during the Giuliani administration. It refers to a practice of heavily policing a number of normally non-criminal activities such as congregating and/or drinking in public spaces, as well as minor offenses such as graffiti, public urination, panhandling, littering, and unlicensed street vending in public spaces because, the argument goes, if left unchecked, they will lead to an explosion of serious crime.” http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/6279_toolkit-zerotolerance.pdf

⁹ “Officers can stop, question and sometimes frisk people on the street when they have reasonable suspicion of a crime.” (Barrett, D. and Gardiner, S.)

a culture of intolerance and violence toward our communities who have been most impacted by city, state and federal budget cuts to services that we rely on” (FIERCE, 2011).

The presence of the colonial narratives of fear of the deviant Other influences policy, media coverage, and community policing. As a result, FIERCE’s multi-pronged strategy includes advocating for policy that impacts LGBTQ youth of color, educating people about their rights so that they can be safe while existing out in public as a member of a non-dominant identity, creating and sustaining community and cultural spaces of celebration and resistance, and developing a new generation of community leaders through education and consciousness raising (FIERCE Leadership Development, 2013). FIERCE is one example of the ways in which RTTC Alliance member organizations challenge colonial narratives of the subjugated Other. They beg critical questions: Whose story is being told? Whose narrative and experience is considered dominant and natural and who is considered deviant and unnatural? These are not merely abstract questions, but have material consequences when community spaces are taken over in the service of economic accumulation. Constructing communities as deviant and dangerous justifies regulation and displacement to clear the way for sanitized spaces for consumption. This is one of the ways in which the continued collusion between the state and the capital economy enacts the processes of neocolonization.

FIERCE is an example of radical love as larger than a romantic or sexual relationship between two people, but as a community process and creating and sustaining networks of community support. For example, after Hurricane Sandy in November 2012, when much of NYC was without power or basic amenities, FIERCE posted a blog post

titled “Community Love in a Time of Need,” outlining where people could find food, power, and shelter (FIERCE, 2012, November 5). Though FIERCE does not necessarily use the term decolonization, the organizing activities move in and through decolonial principles and illustrate one way to organize in love. Specifically, FIERCE challenges narratives of the Other, fights cultural obliteration through community building and artistic expression, uses trainings like the Education for Liberation Project to support members’ development of a political consciousness and a structural analysis, and resists the neocolonizing process of the gentrification of public urban spaces.

Social Justice Foundations: Funders as Facilitators

One of the harsh realities of organizing is the question of funding. While liberal and conservative foundations and think tanks are criticized for their role in perpetuating narratives that support capitalism and colonialism, the institution form can be used to support and strengthen social justice resistance. The literature argued that, historically, left foundations have not allocated funding strategically, often funding issue-specific campaigns over ideology and narrative based work. The RTTC Alliance receives funding from several foundations that implement strategic funding practices, however, they reveal a persistent lack of convergence around the question of decolonization. Funders are in a unique position to challenge their grantees. While this is a position of power that could be abused, it could be leveraged to challenge common failure of organizing efforts, in this question the question of decolonization.

The 2012 RTTC Alliance Annual Report (Right to the City Alliance, 2012) indicates that the Alliance received 92% of its total income in 2012 in funding from the following foundations: Akonadi Foundation, Access Strategies Fund, Common Counsel Foundation, Ford Foundation, Hill-Snowdon Foundation, Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, Marguerite Casey Foundation, and the Open Society Foundations. With the exception of the Ford Foundation, every foundation listed explicitly links its work and grantmaking to the issue of social justice organizing. They offer interesting examples of how to strategically fund social justice organizing. For example, the Akonadi Foundation uses an approach called “ecosystem grantmaking”, an approach that funds not just individual organizations, but according to networks. The Foundation funds movements that are allied and seeks to strengthen relationships, not just individual organizations

(Shaylor, 2013, p. 2). They fund large and small organizations that bring different research, strategy, skills building, and that are inside/outside of an issue, for example in the issue of organizing domestic workers, funded Mujeres Unidos y Activas to provide space for day to day needs and support people “develop their own analysis of power” (Shaylor, 2013, p. 3), as well as the National Domestic Workers Alliance working to pass a bill of rights, as well as Data Center that did research and analysis and smartMeme (now the Center for Story Based Strategy) in generating communications, media, and narrative strategies. In 2012, the Akonadi Foundation made the decision to focus all energies on organizing in Oakland, a strategic attempt to concentrate and maximize their investments locally (Shaylor, 2013).

The Hill-Snowdon Foundation and the Marguerite Casey Foundations (Marguerite Casey Foundation, 2013) both list funding allocated for Native American organizing while the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation (Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, 2013) prioritizes environmental justice work on or in conjunction with tribal lands. The Hill-Snowdon Foundation lists a “Native American Initiative” in its 2012-2015 Strategic Plan (Hill-Snowdon Foundation, 2012), which is described as the need to “formalize and expand support for community driven approaches to addressing persistent issues and needs in Native American communities” (Hill-Snowdon, 2012). Organizations funded under this initiative include Black Mesa Water Coalition, Indigenous Environmental Network, and Honor the Earth. The Hill-Snowdon Strategic Plan also mentions Native American Rising and Seventh Generation Fund as places to support policy advocacy and sovereignty movements. The Marguerite Casey Foundation funded Tewa Women United, Potlatch Fund, and United Indians of All Tribes Foundations, Dine Citizens Against

Ruining Our Environment, and the American Indian Center. As was discussed in the case study section, it is important to not erase the places where funders are supporting indigenous resistance, however, it is equally important to critically question the areas where further analysis could deepen existing social justice movements. This is something that should be explored further and by more think tanks.

The social justice foundations that fund the Alliance understand the need to fund strategically, as well as the importance of narrative. What is missing is an understanding of the question of colonialism. Decolonization operates on several analytical planes: it seeks to address both the realities of historical and ongoing process of indigenous colonization, as well as the question of consciousness. What would it look like to not just have initiatives that relate to the indigenous, Native American communities but a decolonial analysis running through most social justice funding mechanisms? How could social justice think tanks and foundations better support the decolonial consciousness raising of the right to the city movement?

One of the ways that foundations are able to give millions of dollars in grants a year is by investing capital. If the goal of a think tank is to dismantle the systems that neoliberalism has created, how can a foundation depend on those very same systems for its survival? At the opening plenary of the LA Urban Congress, Panelist Gilda Haas (one of the Alliance's founding members and the executive director of member organization SAJE) mused, "how do we have level of control and discipline to shut down an entire city without flattening the brilliance and autonomy of local movements required to do that?" She did not offer a prescription but argued that we "have to be smarter about economics and have to understand them, have to be confident that our version of the

economy will work, have to believe that it's better for us to make mistakes than them” and that “we have to build more knowledge about the possibilities of democracy” (LA Urban Congress, September 12, 2012). She added that “we’re not going to have a successful movement, unless we build alignment, whether that is through a frame, a strategic alliance, a tactical alliance. We’re not going to get anywhere if we don’t have a long-term view of where we’re going” (LA Urban Congress, September 12, 2012). Gilda Haas’ inquiries remind us of the complexity of seeking to aggregate fractured local social movements into a global convergence. In the realities of a market-based system, generating autonomously-controlled resources is, for better or worse, essential for the long-term viability of social justice movements.

The Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) is an example of a social justice funder that follows a think tank model, rather than a foundation model. The differentiation is that IPS funds existing organizations and movements, however, it also funds research to further its progressive goals. Its stated focus is on ideas, not necessarily issues or campaigns (Institute for Policy Studies, 2013). The think tank model is one that has shaped the contemporary US political landscape, however, it has largely been avoided by radical, anti-capitalist organizers. Though there is a danger inherent in participating in market-based institutions (which think tanks are), the argument here is to appropriate what has been an effective model for generating and disseminating ideology and narrative to shape consciousness – think tanks. The IPS is one such example of using the think tank model to challenge the logic of neoliberalism. This thesis proposes following in those steps and using the think tank model to challenge not just neoliberalism, but colonialism.

Social justice funders are in a unique position to support existing struggles and to use their position of influence with a range organizations to centralize a decolonial analysis. Funders and organizers are already implementing ideas about the role of consciousness, narrative, and discourse in creating radical social change. Thus, this is one potential location to deepen both the analysis and its implementation.

Case Study Conclusion

Organizing case studies illustrate some of the functional aspects of the principles of the right to the city - participation, appropriation, and use value – in framing social justice campaigns that resist the impacts of neoliberalism. Anti-neoliberalism is an essential component of contemporary struggles for social justice because it impacts so many aspects of life, saturating not just economic policy but shaping the logic and processes of everyday life. However, both literature and organizing practices illustrate an omission around the question of decolonization. It is important to note that several RTTC Alliance member organizations work in solidarity with Indigenous groups and, like FIERCE, many implement a decolonial analysis in form, if not in name. For example, Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment (MORE) organizes in solidarity with Dine, Hopi, and the Black Mesa communities around mining companies and climate justice. Safe Streets/Strong Communities in New Orleans organizes with the local indigenous communities on their Decriminalization of Culture Campaign.

Indigenous justice is represented in several member organization campaigns and a critique of the neocolonizing forces of culture and economy are on display, however, the RTTC Alliance has not, as of yet, made explicit links between the production of urban space and colonization. The critiques contained in this thesis are made with respect for the difficult work of radical community organizing and are not meant to dismiss existing organizing practices. The goal is to support the right to the city movement in advancing its vision of a transformed city by addressing the root causes of urban injustice. In sum, this thesis argues that the right to the city effectively challenges neoliberalism as a root cause of injustice and that the Right to the City Alliance operationalizes a decolonial

analysis of the Other. However, neither the literature nor the Alliance explicitly centralize the question of decolonization and the relationship between colonization and urbanization, thus obscuring existing Indigenous struggles and land claims.

Recommendations

This thesis argues that a lack of explicit decolonial analysis within the right to the city is a problematic omission and that a convergence on this question could and should be facilitated, in part, by social justice funders and think tanks. Funders can and do aggregate research and evaluations on social justice organizing and are in a strategic position to facilitate conversations across organizations movements. Following the lessons from the successes of conservative think tanks, social justice funders should seek to address the questions of ideology and consciousness through the entry point of discourse and narrative and follow guidelines for strategically funding movements and ideas, rather than focusing exclusively on specific issues or campaigns.

Following the model of the Institute for Policy Studies, I recommend that RTTC Alliance funders begin to function more like think tanks than like foundations. The key difference is to not just fund organizations, but to convene a multi-tactical approach to a common ideological question. Specifically, funders should approach the question of decolonization from the perspective of consciousness and narrative and appropriate the lessons learned by conservative think tanks by funding strategically, as well as generating and disseminating a critical narrative. For example, social justice foundations could develop a process to share work and aggregate grantee evaluations gathered throughout the year in an effort to identify broader categories of what is or is not working for organizations. Foundations could also host and organize summits and facilitate a convergence of members of the social justice organizing community to develop strategies and improve communication networks across grantees. Funders retain the power to fund specific projects or ideas and should wield this power in the service of decolonization,

where the process of decolonization refers to questions of land, culture, economy, and consciousness.

The foundations that fund RTTC Alliance and its member organizations already implement some strategic funding methods, including long-term strategy, developing long-term relationships and visions, and funding organizational operating budgets. However, the long-term strategy and vision for radical social justice is not a coherent or monolithic one. While this is an incredible strength because it contributes to a vibrant and diverse radical left, it can result in a dilution of organizing efforts. Think tanks and foundations can and should be strategic points of entry for transformative change and social justice foundations could be challenged to facilitate a convergence on the question of colonialism through the lens of consciousness. Social justice foundations should act more like think tanks and generate internal research processes to act to support the ideological infrastructure of a radical and transformative social justice movement.¹⁰

Sample research prompts for a think tank oriented towards radical action and decolonizing consciousness might include:

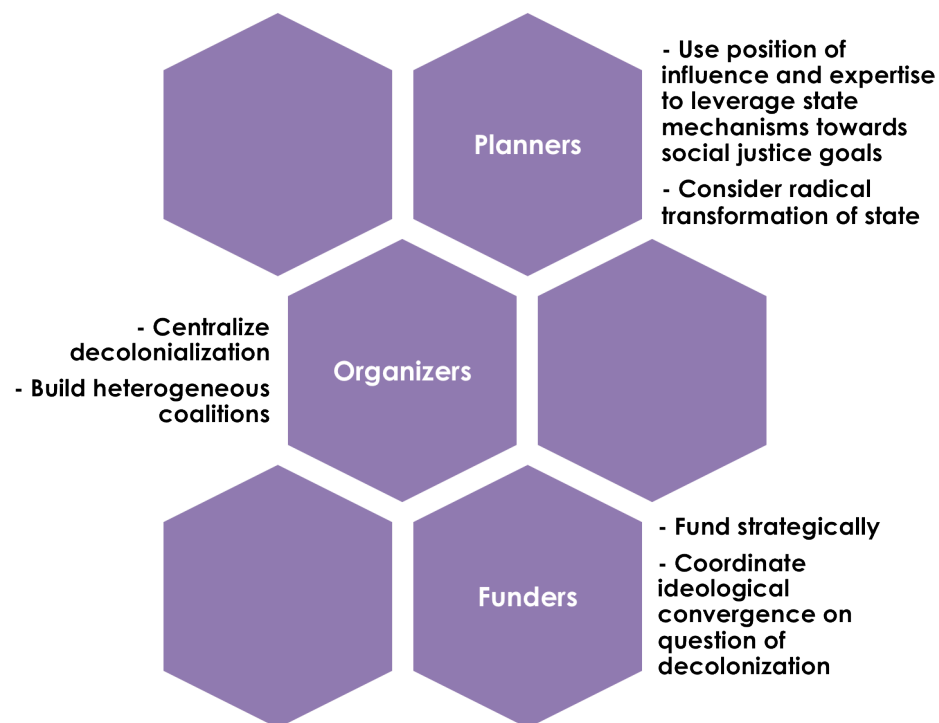
- Religious institutions have perhaps the historical dominance over consciousness and ideology. How does this function today? How do churches and religious institutions get people to follow them and believe in their stories? How has this worked historically and how does it function in the contemporary context of the United States? What should social justice organizers reproduce and what should be challenged?

¹⁰ Earlier drafts of this thesis called for the creation of a radical think tank – called the Think Radical Tank – that would be created for the primary purpose to fund research and organizing efforts that explore and challenge the relationship between colonialism, capitalism, and consciousness. Further research, however, revealed a number of social justice foundations already in existence that address the issue of radical consciousness-raising in a number of different ways. I was hesitant to recommend the creation of a new entity when there are already a number of existing and well-established social justice funders. Thus, this thesis is a call on existing social justice funders to centralize the question of decolonization, though the creation of a radical think tank does merit further exploration.

- One of the actors of the globalized economy are multinational corporations that can provide cheap goods quickly (Target, Wal-Mart, H&M). These businesses respond rapidly to on the ground demands and seek to meet those demands efficiently. What are the elements of today's flexible, successful business? What methods should social justice organizers appropriate and what should be challenged? How could social justice movements better balance a broad, overarching vision of decolonization with localized and responsive actions?
- Google is often held up as an example of an innovative and responsive contemporary business model in the 21st century. What, if anything, can social justice organizers learn from Google?
- Henri Lefebvre argues, "Change space! Change society!" If we accept Lefebvre's insistence that without changing space that nothing has really changed, where does that leave us? What are specific spatial interventions that enable and expand community building? What are specific instances of a radical space and how did/does it function?
- Decolonization is a process that calls on everyone to unlearn lessons of competition and selfishness. It stresses a shift from the individual to the collective. What are specific ways (such as, but not limited to, educational programs, art exhibits, reading groups, trainings) that communities or organizations have implemented a way to raise collective consciousness and radical analysis?
- Where are the points of convergence between Indigenous sovereignty and urban social justice and how could these be strengthened in both academic literature and organizing practice?
- The right to the city movement insists upon the relationship between transforming the self and transforming the city. What must be changed about the contemporary self in order to change the contemporary city and vice versa?
- Alfred argues that it is "the belief in the superiority and universality of Euroamerican culture, especially the concepts of individual rights as the highest expression of human freedom, representative democracy as being the best guarantor of peace and order, and capitalism as the only means to achieve the satisfaction of human materials needs" that must be challenged for decolonization to occur. What are specific ways to apply his call to contemporary urban social justice movements?

This thesis calls on social justice funders to use their position as a nexus across movements and organizations to facilitate a convergence on the question of decolonization. The process of decolonization extends to the questions of space, the economy, and of our own hearts and minds. In order to transform cities, we must also be willing to transform ourselves. This is a question of consciousness, specifically of

catalyzing a cultural shift from the capitalist/Eurocentric consciousness of individual based competition and unsustainable growth to a collective consciousness that values ecology, community, and culture. Economies and states are not monolithic, but are made up of people, therefore, addressing consciousness is a means to address systemic change.



There is no single path. Decolonization is a process that will never be fully complete in this lifetime. However, planners, organizers, and funders all inhabit strategic and specific locations and can each support the goals of decolonization in a variety of ways. This thesis is an attempt to illuminate a fraction of the possibilities of action in the service of radical social change and transformative social justice.

Conclusion

Capitalism can be understood as a process of economic colonization whereby people are separated from the means of production and people and natural resources are exploited in the service of endless accumulation. The colonization of the United States was, in part, driven by the search for new resources and opportunities for economic expansion. Land became private property and was used to generate and accumulate wealth. Today, capitalism continues to assert itself through colonial discourses of land and the ideology of neoliberalism, such as when communities are displaced in the service of economic growth, a process enabled by colonial discourse and narrative of the Other. Colonialism is a narrative and ideological process, not simply a question of land. Therefore, decolonization must be a process of the heart and mind as much as it is of the state and economy.

Case studies from the Right to the City Alliance illustrate an effective operationalization of an anti-neoliberalism analysis as well as the effectiveness of the right to the city framework in agitating for expanded participatory mechanisms as well as securing material gains necessary for survival. Though the question of Indigenous justice remains underdeveloped in the Alliance's organizing efforts, the member organization FIERCE illustrates an effective resistance of the construction of the Other and the ethic of decolonization, offering one example of what it means to organize in and through love. Coloniality (Quijano, 2000) conceptualizes contemporary globalization as Eurocentered capitalism. It argues that neoliberalism is a function of white supremacy and thus, as an organizing concept, has much functionality for the RTTC Alliance – a coalition convened by working class, low-income communities of color to address the issue of urban

displacement and dispossession. There is tremendous potential for linkages between urban displacement and Indigenous dispossession. The movements launch significant and formidable challenges to the questions of space, state, economy, and consciousness.

This thesis has argued that the right to the city movement needs to assert a superior decolonial analysis to counter the right's narrative and that centering the question of the relationship between decolonization and consciousness by social justice think tanks and funders is one way to approach this issue. Planners and funders should act as facilitators, conveners, and pollinators on the question of decolonization and transformative social justice. The question of decolonization can and must be taken up by *everyone* and this is possible in part by engaging with love as a guiding ethic.

It is impossible to foresee the future. Today's struggle may be tomorrow's victory, which may, in turn, become a new site of struggle. Organizers and planners alike respond to existing physical realities and attempt to account for constantly shifting conditions. Cities don't sit still. The social justice organizer/planner must accept a certain amount of futility – the complex interconnectedness of the world means that any single plan or vision will never be fully realized. Human beings have been fighting over land for centuries and, yet, human societies have retained the ability to celebrate beauty and to disavow rational individualism in the service of love, connection, and creation.

Love is not only an ethic of compassion and a desire to connect socially, it is also the willingness to question one's very being in the presence of another. Organizing in love, falling in love, moving through the world with love forces each of us to ask the deepest questions about ourselves: what are the pieces of myself that are core and

essential to my being and what are the pieces that are created by domination and an internalized hunger for power? What am I willing to cede in the service of connection and what must I retain? Love is a process of constant self-annihilation and reassembly and is as devastating and painful as it is joyous and productive. Love is the practice of constant, unceasing deconstruction and resurrection in the service of radical transformation and the belief in something larger than oneself. It is the only thing that has the power to recast the task of self-transformation from an obligation to a delight. “To ignore the presence of love is surely to disavow our own humanity. Equally, to ignore the possibility, agency and power of love is to fail liberation” (Porter, 2010, p. 158).

*Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.*

*Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion – put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?*

*Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is highest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.*

- Wendell Berry, Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front

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