

Whirlwind

Montes de María, Colombia

Ferguson, Missouri

Gaza City

Eddie Ellis

Poetry



From the Editors

This edition of *Whirlwind* is the second iteration of a literary installation designed to be a space for the voices of graduate students and everyday students of life. It is also an artistic medium, both in its inclusion of imagery and poetry, but also by way of the imaginations given form in the ideas curated in this collection. This zine feels a bit dated. I say that because it doesn't reference what's happening in the here and now: the uprising of Ethiopians in Israel are not mentioned, neither are Sandra Bland, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, or the Charleston 9. But at the same time, this zine is relevant because our people remain subject to unwarranted assaults and murder. Everyday can be said to be an anniversary of the premature death of someone we loved, admired, and/or never knew .

These writings bring to our attention the pressing issues of state violence, the spatial containment, and marginalization of populations deemed as collateral. This is apparent in Eloisa Berman's work on Black peasant resistance against violent spatial politics engendered by agro-capitalist economies in Afro-Colombian communities of the Colombian Caribbean. Hadeel Assali's work on the ruins of Gaza's al-Saraya prison and its repurposing into a museum illustrates the devaluation, containment, and violent oppression of Palestinians. Despite these histories of state-sanctioned repression, suffering, and trauma, both Eloisa and Hadeel draw our attention to the power of memory to recreate life-affirming spaces in the present and future.

Further, these works demonstrate how – in varying ways and contexts and in the midst of dehumanizing projects – being human again is revived and manifested in praxis, by way of redefining the rationale directing our collective embodiment. Orisanmi Burton's eulogy for the late Black theorist and formerly imprisoned intellectual, Eddie Ellis, speaks to this form of reinventing of self and society.

Last, we include responses from Jeanina Jenkins and Shannon Garth-Rhodes, whose perspectives provide insights into ways in which anti-Blackness presents itself as state sponsored and state sanctioned violence in Ferguson and St. Louis, Missouri. These passages detail the toll these events took on their family and those who stood together to protest the killing of Black wo/men and children and all other attempts to extinguish Black life.

Stiff Resistance,

Willie Jamaal Wright, Editor
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Geography
UNC-Chapel Hill

Contributors

Hadeel Assali
Doctoral Student
Department of Anthropology
Columbia University

Eloisa Berman-Arévalo
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Geography
UNC-Chapel Hill

Orisanmi Burton
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Anthropology
UNC-Chapel Hill

Shannon Garth-Rhodes / Los Angeles, California

Jennifer Jenkins / Ferguson, Missouri

Kangsen Feka Wakai / Washington, D.C.

beau-willie / Durham, North Carolina

Cover Art: "Tower" by Robert Pruitt

Design: Jennifer Oladipo

For bitter or sweet

Kangsen Feka Wakai

Last Friday,
She carried a day's work
Balled in the foamy arches of her tongue;
A flame that slitters through his veins.
Her words burn like droplets of acid.

This Sunday,
He closed his eyes to the lines,
Summoned by her rage,
Crisscrossing the contours of what was once her smiling face.
He knows when to keep his lips sealed.

On Monday,
He barely recalls her voice,
As he decides on what mask
With which to face the day that awaits him.
He hardly knows himself these days.

Mike Brown is the latest in a long line of young men killed for being Black in America. We know he won't be the last. But despite being told over and over again that we're disposable and our communities don't matter, we know better, and we have a deep understanding that we must continue to put one foot in front of the other because we are fighting for the Fergusons all across America.

Until August 9, 2014, most people would not have been able to point to Ferguson on a map. It's understandable because until Mike Brown was killed, Ferguson was pretty well forgotten, and Mike Brown was just another anonymous neighborhood teen. But since our small city was turned into what feels like a war zone, and Mike Brown's name was added to the long list of young Black men needlessly killed by police officers, the world is finally paying attention to the lives of the people who live here.

And people should pay attention, because what happened in Ferguson is happening in a lot of places. I'm not only talking about the police killing yet another unarmed Black person. No, I'm talking about the fact that despite what we think of as the great victories of the Civil Rights Movement, much of Black America remains poor, unsafe, and unwanted. I'm talking about the connection between the economic problems that plague us and the fact that police showed up to Mike Brown's vigil in full riot gear—not to protect his grieving family, but to keep mourners “under control.”

Our community has long been neglected by lawmakers. Because we have little political power, we're treated like our lives are worth less. Not completely worthless—just worth less. We're told we're worth the minimum wage, but not worth a job that pays enough to make ends meet. We're worth policing but not worth protecting. But nine days ago, a white police officer decided that a Black teen's life was not worth the benefit of the doubt. In a country that tells us that we're worth less, it takes a lot of strength to keep going.

Despite all this, I know Ferguson as a city full of people who are working their hardest to give their kids a chance at a good life. We are a resilient and hopeful community that is trying to build itself up. There is hope in my church, which sent people to the peaceful marches to protest police brutality. My mom gets up every morning with hope that she will find work after being laid off from her job at a nursing home two years ago. I see hope at my workplace, where my coworkers and I are part of a national movement of fast-food workers speaking up for decent wages and fair treatment. The young men who led the cleanup crews to pick up rubber bullets and unexploded pepper balls off the street did so because they have hope for the future.

We know our lives have value and potential. That's what kept Mike Brown in school even though he lived in a country that was more likely to put him in jail than to put him to work.

Jeanina Jenkins, Ferguson, MO

My Uncle, al-Saraya, and “Khara-tov” Cocktails

I was taken to a prison on my birthday. It was August 7, 2013, the last day of Ramadan, and khalee, my uncle¹ Abdel Salam, had insisted on hosting my mother and I for dinner and made us swear to it the evening before. He picked us up a couple hours before sundown from our flat in Gaza City, and before we headed south on the main road toward the camp,² he told us that he had something to show us. “Make sure you bring your camera,” he said, and drove us to the heart of the city.



al-Saraya Prison Museum

Abdel Salam is the youngest living sibling of 18 children. The youngest, Fadel, was killed in 2002 by the Palestinian Authority (PA) as they were targeting members of Islamic Jihad. My uncles claim the PA had used Israeli bullets, the kind that explodes into several pieces of shrapnel upon impact. Abdel Salam was in the car with him when it happened, and he is now the most politically active of the siblings.

As we weaved through the rush of downtown traffic, everyone it seemed was out to beat the sun, gathering the needs for the final Iftar (Ramadan meal) and Eid (the holiday of the feast the next day). We arrived at the ruins of what turned out to be a former prison – not just any prison (although, is there ‘just any prison?’); it was the (locally) infamous “al-Saraya,” a prison with a legacy of

prisoner abuse. He parked his car, the guards quickly waved him through, and we struggled to keep up with him as he headed toward the entrance. Doing my best to keep the camera stable as we walked over uneven ground, I managed to grab a shot of him walking into the building for the first time since his imprisonment nearly 30 years ago.

Al-Saraya was turned into a museum in 2013. On the front is a banner announcing, “The Prisoner” and next to it a smaller sign reads, “Today on the ruins of al-Saraya prison and tomorrow on the ruins of Nafha prison (a prison in Israel).” Built in 1936 during the British Mandate by a Jewish-owned company called Simplea, al-Saraya was used to imprison Palestinians fighting British authorities and rising Jewish immigration.³ The Egyptians then used it when they administered the Gaza Strip from 1948–1967. In 1967 the Gaza Strip came under Israeli occupation, and the prison became infamous for torture and interrogation techniques. After the Oslo Agreement in 1993, the Palestinian Authority ran the prison until Hamas took over the Gaza Strip (and the prison) in 2007. Al-Saraya was bombed by Israeli fighter jets in the 2008 bombardment of Gaza.⁴

Khalee served as tour guide, taking us through the entire imprisonment process, narrating and re-enacting – in a seemingly disaffected tone – how he and others were tortured and interrogated in the “slaughterhouse” and how they were forced to sleep in extremely tight quarters. He then arrived to the crescendo of the tour: the story of the jailbreak of 1987 by the Islamic Jihad five, whom he helped to escape. They became legends in Gaza. He explained how it all transpired, speaking with great admiration of the leader, Musbah al-Soory:

“The martyr Musbah met with [Israeli] David Maymun in September of 1985, and at that time there was a security guard named Avi. Avi told David Maymun – who was the supervisor of the prisons – that Musbah al-

¹He is actually my mother’s maternal uncle, so my maternal great uncle. Khalee means “my uncle.”

²He lives in al-Maghazi refugee camp, in the central part of the Gaza Strip.

³<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/5740-gaza-central-prison-reopens-as-a-museum>

⁴“Gaza Operation Investigations: Second Update.” The State of Israel, July 2010, p. 20.

Israeli Defense Forces report confirming the bombing of the prison, which they determined “did not violate the Law of Armed Conflict.” “Gaza Operation Investigations: Second Update.” The State of Israel, July 2010, p. 20.

Soory tried to escape prison three times. He tried to escape from Majdal prison twice, and he tried to escape from Beer-sheba prison once. So David told Musbah, “You have a head and we have a head. Think about how you want to escape, and we will think about how to stop your escape.”

Although khalee was part of the planning and execution of the jailbreak, Musbah al-Soory did not allow him and the others to leave because their prison sentences were much shorter.⁵ The five men escaped through a kitchen window, snuck through the prison grounds, climbed eucalyptus trees to scale the prison walls, and on May 19, 1987, they were free. On October 6, 1987, they were killed by the Israelis.

When I asked how it made him feel to return to al-Saraya, khalee insisted that he felt a sense of victory. “This is a source of pride for the Palestinian people. Through our resistance, we have been able to remove the occupation from Gaza, and God willing, we will remove it from the rest of Palestine.” The purpose of preserving the jail as museum, he explained, is for it to serve as testimony to the legacy of the suffering and “sumood” – steadfastness – that took place here.

What does it mean to preserve the ruins of a prison as museum in this context? While tourists mill around the world admiring ruins carefully preserved for public consumption – like the Pyramids in Egypt, Machu Piccu in Peru, or the Parthenon in Greece – al-Saraya is rarely visited by anyone outside of Gaza, for obvious reasons. Khalee knew full well that he took us to a prison within a prison,⁶ and despite his talk of victory and pride, perhaps he saw potential in my camera to address the oppressive conditions in which he and the rest of Gaza remains. Or perhaps he saw potential in the ruins. “The celebrated ruins are attired in cultural dress that creates symbolic meanings,” writes Robert Ginsberg in *The Aesthetics of Ruins*, referring to the tourist sites mentioned above.⁷ Although al-Saraya was dressed with banners, indicating the importance of the space as an educational tool meant for self-empowerment, it is also a space of remembrance – not just of a painful past, but of ongoing



(Top) Abdel Salam walking into the prison. (Middle) demonstrating interrogation and torture techniques in the “slaughterhouse”. (Bottom) demonstrating sleeping method for 12 men in a tiny cell.

harms in the present. I was there as an anthropologist deeply concerned about the siege and the oppressive conditions in Gaza, as a filmmaker with an eye for story and the aesthetic, and as a niece in exile preserving kinship ties and the narratives that come with them. I wonder if there is a concomitant role for the aesthetic and the ethnographic to help chip away at the barriers surrounding Gaza. What could my questions and my camera do to the stories khalee

⁵Khalee left that part out of the interview with me, but mentions it in the interview here: <http://saraya.ps/index.php?act=Show&id=31570>

⁶Gaza is under an Israeli siege, effectively rendering it a large open-air prison.

⁷Ginsberg, 154.

shared as he walked us through the ruins of al-Saraya?

Ginsberg defines a ruin as “the irreparable remains of a human construction that, by a destructive act or process, no longer dwells in the unity of the original, but may have its own unities that we can enjoy.”⁸ His central argument is that “ruins, though old, broken, and saddening, may have new unity that is fresh, invigorating and joyful. The ruin can spring forth as an unanticipated aesthetic whole.”⁹ The “aesthetic quest,” then, is to figure out how ruins “may generate our appreciative responses, engaging us in valuable experience.”¹⁰

*Aesthetics is persistent exploration that opens us to deeper experience. It helps us gain more of ourselves, as we move through the world. No superfluous ornament, elite specialty, or useless musing, aesthetics, in the long run, contributes to our better life, our fuller Being.*¹¹



“The Martyrs of the Battle of al-Shuja’iyah” Mosbah al-Soory is in the middle.

It seems to me as ethnographer/filmmaker the ethical choice I must make is on which aesthetic to focus the lens – and while the ruins of the prison might have been illuminating, I chose to focus on him. I attempted to pay close attention to his re-living the past, to his gaze and his language. In one memorable moment, I stopped him, mid-sentence, as he described the torture and abuse endured by

prisoners in al-Saraya.

“How do you know all this?”

“Didn’t I live here?” he responded, smiling slightly as if satisfied that it was finally sinking in. “I was brought here twice,” he said, referring to the “slaughterhouse,” the second torture/interrogation for his part in the prison break. There was something in this exchange, the entire day, in fact, that was deeply meaningful to him – as if he were finally able to vent a heavy experience to someone who might empathize and carry that experience into new possibilities. That day, in the ruins of al-Saraya prison, story and aesthetics might indeed bear the potential to be mobilized, as Ginsberg suggests, into the political project of contributing to a “better life.” That day, despite the ruins of my uncle’s past, was in fact replete with joyful affirmations of life – and not just because it was my birthday. I saw tenderness in a hardened man that I have grown to admire and respect, and our encounter and exchange opened new worlds and modes of thought for both of us. The potential of the aesthetic, however, was deeply tied to the potential of the ethnographic, which I will attempt to explore now.

In *Objects and Objections of Ethnography*, James Siegel tells of a debate in France that occurred when the ethnographic section in one museum was being closed and its collection was to be transferred to a new museum, which many anthropologists disapprovingly viewed as an art museum. The context differs significantly from that of al-Saraya in Gaza; however, the parallels I seek to draw out here pertain to the value of the aesthetic and the ethnographic in a colonial (or “post” colonial) context. Siegel slyly points out the severing of the objects of former colonies, for example in West Africa, from the people of West Africa. The objects can stay in France, but the people cannot; a common sight in Paris is one of police targeting sans papiers of African descent. Likewise, in the Gaza Strip, archaeological discoveries were quickly snatched away and displayed in Israeli museums while the people of Gaza were contained in what many call the world’s largest open-air prison.¹² Whether as ethnographic object or aesthetic art piece, in both cases, the “other” remains faceless, severed from both history and political possibilities – as a West Af-

⁸Ibid., xvii.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., xviii

¹¹Armaly, 52. In an interview with Swiss curator Marc-Andre Haldimann on the theft of over 50 sarcophagi among other objects found by the Israelis in the 1970s and 1980s archaeological excavations in Gaza that are now housed in the archaeological museum.



Abdel Salam on his roof, al-Maghazi refugee camp.

rican in France or as a Palestinian under Israeli occupation.

Bataille, however, saw potential in the ethnographic endeavor, and while the archaeological artifacts of Gaza are out of reach, I will attempt to think with Ba-

taille on that which an ethnographer in Gaza might have access. Bataille saw the museum producing a crowd effect that leads viewers to lose their identity, thus leaving them vulnerable and open to identifying with (and potentially humanizing) the “other” of the ethnographic object. For Bataille, this had revolutionary potential, one that might overturn social hierarchies; however, for Siegel this potential could not be realized without the gaze of the “other” looking back at the colonizer, inducing shame and forcing recognition. “It is in this manner that the ethnographic museum could upset European cultural hierarchies.”¹³ It is by this logic, then, that any ethnographic / aesthetic / film project exhibiting that day at al-Saraya with khalee must include him speaking directly to the viewers.

This potential of the ethnographic museum and the gaze of the “other,” Siegel tells us, were linked to ideas of the museum object as a sort of document, or “the ‘proof’ needed to put peoples in evidence.”¹⁴ Anthropologists treated the “document” in terms of its use value, which translated into their singularity.

“The idea leads easily to the notion of context,” which is where Siegel suggests that things get slippery.¹⁵ The object as document is not a representation, but it refers to its origin; it cannot be substituted; yet its very authenticity is impossible to validate. For all we know, the story of al-Saraya could be entirely made up or I could be embellish-

ing his story. And so there are no guarantees, not for khalee as the one demanding recognition, nor for the ethnographer / filmmaker (or the ethnographic museum, for Bataille and Siegel) as mediator / storyteller / producer of aesthetic pleasure, and not for the potential viewer to lose their own sense of self into the “other.” Nonetheless, to operate in-between the aesthetic and the ethnographic, between those demanding recognition and those who would rather look the other way, is to operate in a difficult and tenuous space, but it is also to operate in a fluid, borderless space of potentiality.

It was quite clear that khalee was not just speaking to me as he narrated the prison experience and the legend of Musbah al-Soory. His Arabic was not the quotidian dialect spoken off-camera; his extensive use of passive verb tenses indicates the most formal Arabic, which is often employed in the lexicon of political speeches, journalistic work, scholarship, and classical literature. When he spoke directly to me or my mother, he slipped into the colloquial, and when I did not understand certain words, he poked fun at me, once telling my mother, “explain that to her in American.” Despite his formality, his speech was saturated with Gaza-isms, if one can call them that, and anytime he spoke of his wife, his language softened dramatically. No translation can easily capture these nuances, but close attention to his speech’s heteroglossia, which Mikhail Bakhtin describes as a multiplicity of social voices, would enable an ethnographer to discern which utterance is meant for which audience. It would also lead to more informed decisions in translation, despite the limitations. To be attentive to these grammatical and dialectical nuances is to be attentive to their ideological underpinnings. “We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a worldview, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life.”¹⁶ When asked about his political allegiances, the formality returned in khalee’s speech with full force, but not before a moment of slight hesitation. After explaining the charges for which he was convicted and imprisoned at the time, one of which was activity with Islamic Jihad, I asked him, “And now who are you with?”

¹² Armaly, 52. In an interview with Swiss curator Marc-Andre Haldimann on the theft of over 50 sarcophagi among other objects found by the Israelis in the 1970s and 1980s archaeological excavations in Gaza that are now housed in the archaeological museum.

¹³ Ibid., 133.

¹⁴ Ibid., 129.

¹⁵ Bakhtin, 271.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Laughing, he responded, “Me? I’m with God. [pause] Who do you want me to be with?”

“No one, but who are you with?”

“In all honesty, I am with Islamic Jihad as an organization. But my allegiance before Islamic Jihad is to God and to Palestine, to the land, and to her liberation from the occupation and its return to Islam, the return to Jerusalem, so that we can become the soldiers who are favored for the liberation of Palestine and its return to Islam, and that we will all pray in al-Aqsa and the Muslims will return to Palestine – as the Doctor Shafaqi said – Palestine has three stages...”¹⁷

At the time, I knew very little about the ideology of Islamic Jihad or the founder Dr. Fathi Shafaqi, who was assassinated by Israel in 1995. Like most ‘secular’ Arabs, I tend to tune out religious rhetoric, but I know now that I should have been listening a little closer to what my uncle and Shafaqi had to say rather than shying away from what the West perceives as “militant Islam” and what I also pre-judged. This habit is completely opposite to what Jacques Lacan calls “openness to alterity”.¹⁸ Stefania Pandolfo explains, “A temporality of understanding in the complex field of Islam today cannot spare the work of engaging the risk of alterity.”¹⁹ Perhaps khalee sensed this risk when he first asked, “Who do you want me to be with?” My mother and I were clearly much less religious than he. We arrived in Gaza bareheaded and fully Americanized, easily discernible from miles away – clearly we were a potential liability. In a sense, he too was engaging in “the risk of alterity”. The second day after our arrival, khalee very kindly asked us if he could bring us headscarves, and despite every cell in my body protesting, I empathized with his position as a visible member in the Islamic Jihad organization²⁰ – and so I compromised, “Only if you bring me a nice abaya (robe) to match”.

Or maybe he understood an even bigger risk, one that could put both of us in danger. Islamic Jihad is a member of the U.S. government’s exclusive list of terrorist organizations, and his hesitation and his careful choice of words (among other careful decisions) point to an aware-

ness of the seriousness of the matter and to the forces at play in our mere presence there. “Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear”.²¹ The intelligence agencies of the U.S. government and Israel, the deep convictions for a liberated Palestine arrived at through vastly different ideological registers, and familial ties that have withstood the test of time and distance were all present in that encounter. And perhaps they were condensed in that moment of hesitation.

Stefania Pandolfo offers a productive example of an approach to writing against both dominant Western stereotypes of Muslim beliefs on death (in particular, the fixation on martyrdom and suicide) and dominant analytical frameworks (i.e. biopolitics), both of which render the diversity of Muslim imaginings invisible. Hers is an attempt to take seriously an ethical debate within an Islamic framework in a local Muslim-Moroccan setting. In doing so, she makes apparent the absolute compatibility of subjectivity and religion, which transcends even the work of her cited Middle Eastern psychoanalysts who “seem to encounter an impassable limit, foreclosing their own ability to recognize the possibility of different life forms”.²² Pandolfo, following in the tradition of Talal Asad and others’ “attempts at restituting visibility and intelligibility to forms of life that are otherwise unrecognizable from the standpoint of secular vocabularies naturalized in public debates,” without which, she suggests foresees the danger of creating yet another generalization that would sweep individual subjectivities and the “complexity and singularity of lifeworlds” away in the process.²³

Her ethnography is a different kind of listening to and reading of this lifeworld, one guided by an empathetic listening²⁴ – to both her living interlocutors and the Muslim theorists of the past so rarely heard in Western discourse, one which might pose a challenge to dominant tendencies of ethnographic inquiries of a colonial past (and present) – if anyone is listening.²⁵ Pandolfo’s mode of ethnography opens a space for a conversation to be heard that would otherwise be ignored along with all else that is inaudible and invisible to those of us not privy to the worlds of social

¹⁷My very unsure translation.

¹⁸Pandolfo, 332.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰He is pictured second from the left, one of the leaders of Islamic Jihad at a conference organized in the honor of Musbah al-Soory. <http://paltoday.ps/ar/post/180046/> الجهاد بالمغازي - تنظيم ندوة سياسية على شرف الشهيد مصباح الصوري

²¹Bakhtin, 272.

²²Pandolfo, 331.

abandonment.

Therefrom, we can presume that an ethnography in Gaza and the attempt to understand a lifeworld in a place of intense social abandonment would require careful, empathetic listening and taking seriously the ideologies and ethical debates guiding its inhabitants' beliefs and decisions. Gaza is not only victim to the structural violence of the Israeli siege and dominant stereotypes casting the population as faceless terrorists, but the flip side of the same coin is the well-intention but misfiring liberal / leftist / activist tendency to cast the same population as the ultimate victims, robbed of subjectivity and living in extreme destitution and despair. In both cases, the people themselves become instrumental only for the justification of State policy or activist tactics (and a flourishing NGO industry). There simply is no room for those who have been or have the potential to be labeled terrorists by the U.S. State Department – not with the State or with activists who might suffer extreme consequences for “aiding and abetting terrorism” if they risk engaging with any Palestinian (who is a terrorist is of course decided by the State). So better for activists for the Palestinians to be victims, but Theodor Adorno once said, “In the end, glorification of the splendid underdogs is nothing other than glorification of the splendid system that makes them so”.²⁶ Activist groups' attempts to “break the siege” on Gaza have unfortunately done little to demystify the people, their daily lives, their allegiances, and their stories. Since secular activists tend to shy away from political Islam, the ethical and political debates remain obscured along with the people themselves. To render the compatibility of subjectivity and religion evident, to mediate between (our own and others') preconceived notions and those demanding recognition, to find beauty and joy and indeed life amidst the ruins – just might yield surprising results.

During that short visit I fell in love with khalee. This man, who blushes when he speaks of his wife, who took me for ice cream when I had a rough day, this man who hardly knows me, who instantly came to our rescue as we were stranded on the other side of the border, forbidden by the Egyptian authorities to enter Gaza in the above-ground

border crossing, this man would likely be considered a terrorist by my government.^{pa} This same man had arranged a feast to celebrate my birthday once we arrived at his house. Having noticed my deep love for tomatoes, he ensured the spread included several types of tomato salads alongside the “mashawi,” assorted grilled meats. Afterwards as we were sipping tea, all the uncles and aunts gathered around telling us sidesplitting stories about “khara-tov cocktails.”

“We used to hit the Israelis with khara-tov cocktails!” another one of my uncles told us, “Boom, takh! Kharatov!” Everyone was rolling with laughter, but I was the dumb American again, so my mom explained, “Molotov – Kharatov!” (khara means shit in Arabic). We all laughed together, I tried to picture Israeli army jeeps coming into the camp and encountering an onslaught of shit bombs. Another uncle recalled, “The Israelis would announce on the microphones, ‘Don't throw kharatovs, throw molotovs!’”

Me: “So that's why the Israelis left Gaza?”

Them: “Yes, why else do you think they left?”

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²⁶Adorno, 28.

²⁷“Palestine Islamic Jihad” is among the “terrorist groups” listed on The National Counterterrorism Center's “Counterterrorism 2014 Calendar.” The National Counterterrorism Center is within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, which operates within the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government. <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/index.html>

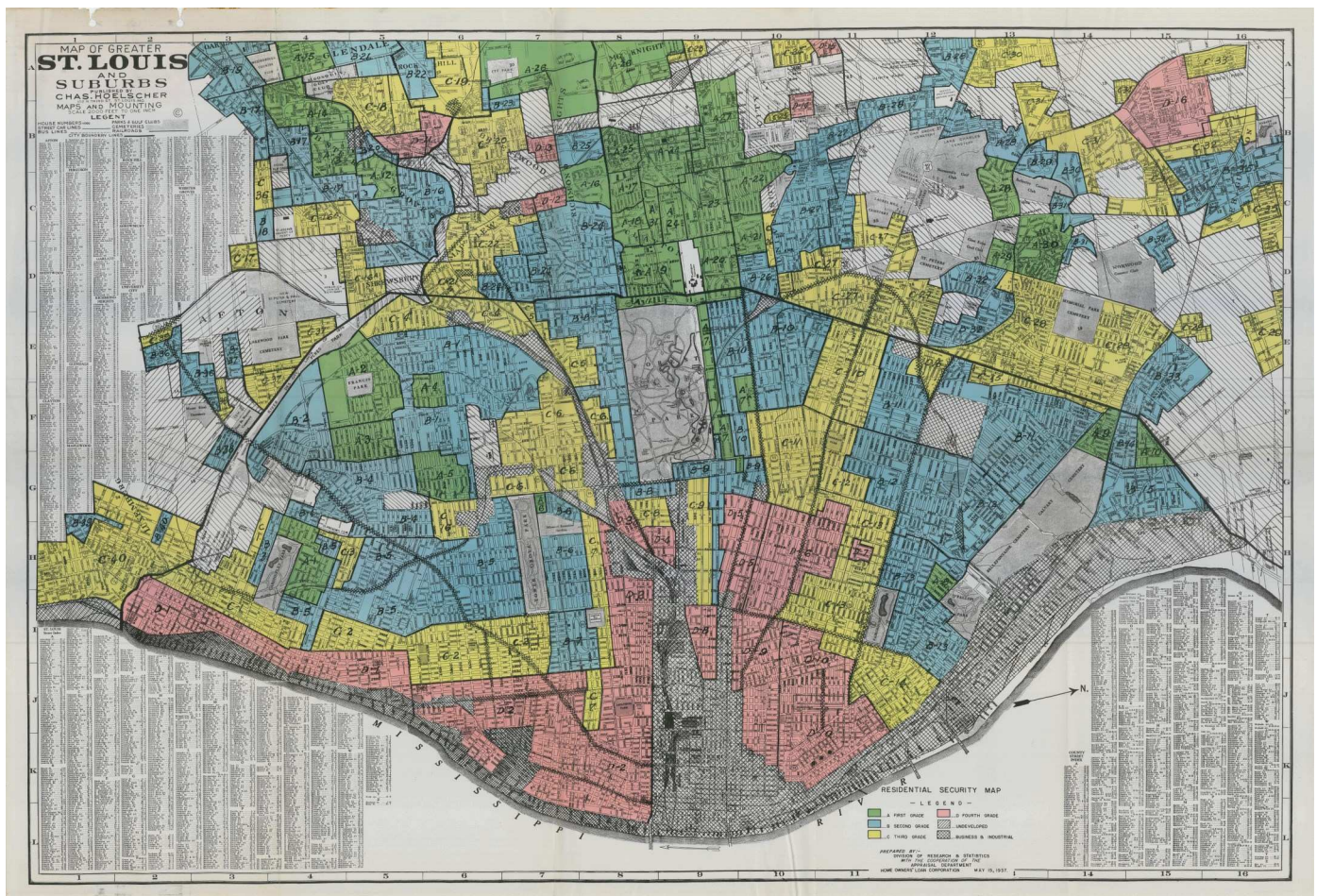
I was sitting at my kitchen table when I first saw the picture of Mike Brown's stepfather holding the sign, "Ferguson County Police just executed my son." "What?!", I thought. I scrolled through more of Tef Poe's pictures and saw a video of police and people standing off on what looked like a street corner. The police formed a second circle around the group. I sat fixed to my Twitter feed for hours because there was nothing in the

news about the shooting at all. There it was, trending: **#mikemike**, then **#mikebrown**, **#justiceformikebrown**. Vines of Mike Brown's mother, Lynette McSpadden, crying with dozens of people all around her began to appear throughout the internet. Mainstream media staggered to keep up: "black boy" "black 18 year-old man" "black teenager." One Channel 4 reporter said she was at her engagement photo shoot when she heard what hap-

pened and ran to cover it.

#blacklivesmatter

A friend of mine once wrote, "Black people from St. Louis see St. Louis as the South. White people from St. Louis see St. Louis as the Midwest." I'm from St. Louis. I grew up in a city-suburb right outside the St. Louis city limits – five miles from Ferguson, Missouri. My city was so fragile before Mike's murder – decaying neighborhoods, low wage economy, school clo-



tures and state takeovers. Nearly three million people live in the surrounding St. Louis County, which consists of dozens of suburbs ranging from poor to opulent. The significance of these suburbs is based on their geographic and demographic relation to St. Louis. For example, the population of North County has changed dramatically over the past three decades, a phenomenon one observer bluntly described as ‘ghetto spillover’. Once the suburban haven of white flight, these towns are now the destination of black spillage, as struggling African-American families seek a safe and good life outside the crumbling terrain of the inner city. As residents of St. Louis leave the city, those that remain are defensive about the city’s reputation as one of the most dangerous in the U.S., and for good reason. St. Louis is civic-minded and family-friendly, and violent crime is rare outside certain areas — where it is rampant. The truism that St. Louis is “not dangerous” belies a darker truth: the people for whom it is dangerous do not matter.

The day after Mike’s murder was quiet until the evening set in. The police came in their riot gear. People often ask the question of whether more security makes people feel safer. I think they got their answer that day. Photojournalists

tweeted pictures inside the stores of people with faces covered and black arms exposed. And, I wanted to be there. Or at least have someone here — I currently live in Los Angeles, California — that I could talk to. Most people on this side of the country didn’t even know that there was a shooting in St. Louis County or that Ferguson even existed until four days after the killing. Tuesday is when I started receiving texts from friends all over the country. Tuesday is also when I started to see the head tilts when I told people where I am from. The Monday prior, I bought my ticket home.

“It might make you feel worse to see this shit up close,” my friend, who had spent every night on W. Florissant, warned me. “Yeah, but I can’t be here,” I responded. I touched down in St. Louis that Friday, weary from my red-eye from Los Angeles and sleepless nights crying or laying in bed scrolling through Twitter feeds until it got quiet. In Ferguson, everyone was doing his or her best to stay busy. It had been almost a week, and folks were exhausted. Late nights had been spent dodging canisters of tear gas and rubber bullets, bailing protestors out of jail with donations to the jail fund, and accommodating request by the media to uncover the Ferguson that created a racial climate that caused such a tragedy.

St. Louis residents were hyper-aware of the people that had flown, bussed and carpooled into town for the “Ferguson experience”. I wasn’t sure how I would be received. I scratched around in community groups I worked with when I lived there, and milled about attempting to lend a hand in some way. But, I spent the majority of my time with family, in particular my younger brother. He and I paid up for fall classes, College Algebra and African American History and I made him mashed potatoes. That Thursday marked a ‘victory’ in Ferguson, a concession was made by Governor Nixon to withdraw the St. Louis County Police of their duties and replace them with the Missouri State Highway Patrol. People marched and the atmosphere was peaceful for the first time in days.


When I made it to Ferguson that evening, there were cars backed up all the way to Chambers Street. Bodies sticking out of windows with their elbows bent and palms facing outward. Folks walking down the street would greet each other accordingly. “Hands up!” “Don’t shoot!” Horns blowing. “Honk for Justice for Mike Brown.” This all culminated at the burned down Quick Trip on Canfield and W. Florissant.

*Shannon Garth-Rhodes
Los Angeles, CA*

Uh stirrin'

**Oh Loooord, deliver me!
For my eyes done seen,
that mine hands
and mine feet
done brew da jes grew.**

-Beau Willie

A background image of Eddie Ellis, an older man with glasses, looking slightly to the right. The image is in a warm, sepia tone and is partially obscured by white text boxes.

A Eulogy for Eddie Ellis: Scholar and Theoretician of Human Justice

By Orisanmi Burton

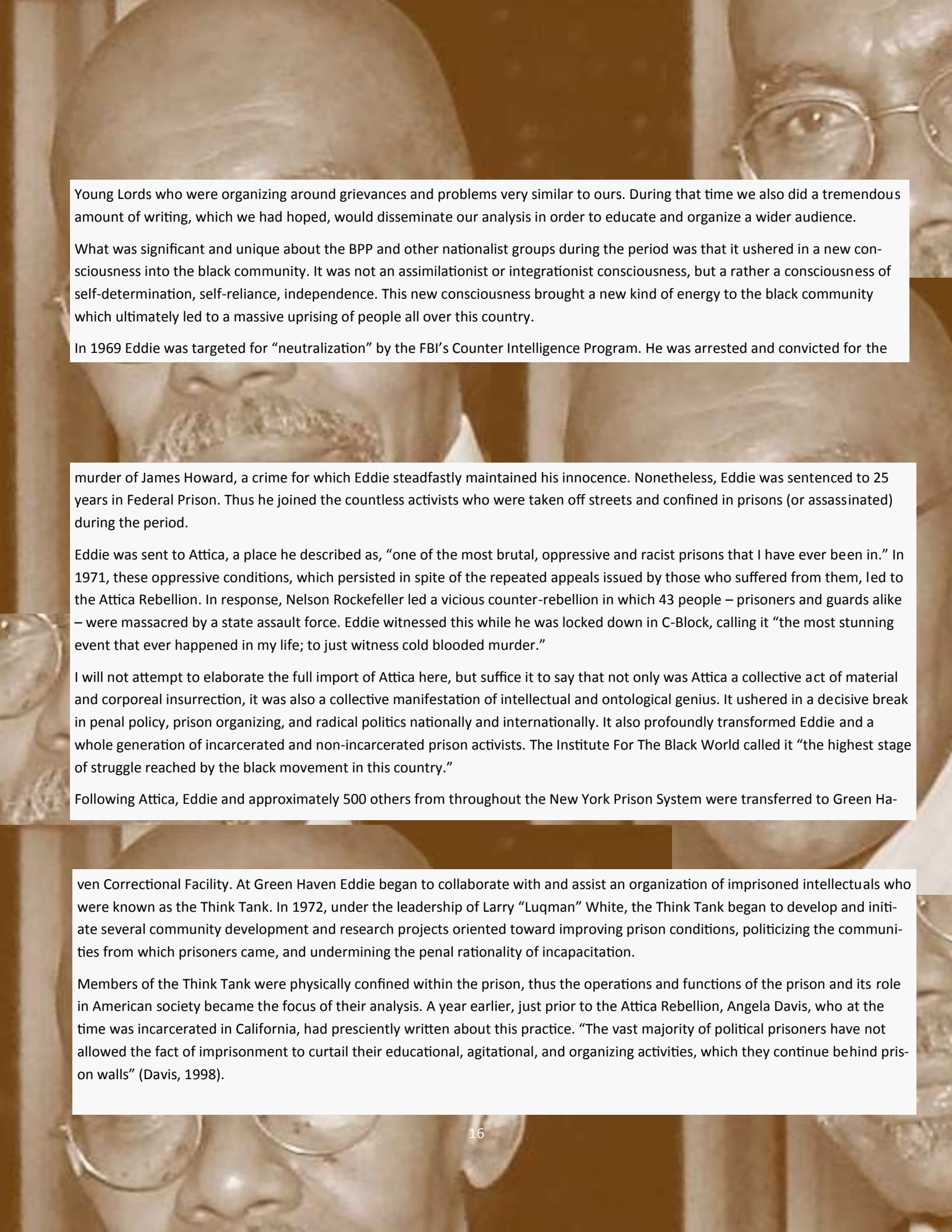
With the passing of Eddie Ellis in July of 2014, another giant of the black freedom struggle has joined the ancestors. Eddie features prominently in my dissertation research on prison-based organizations and study groups in New York. I was fortunate enough to get to know him over the past two years and his impression on me in that brief time was tremendous. As anyone who has encountered him knows, Eddie was a masterful communicator, guarded about his personal life, but immensely generous with his ideas in any sort of intellectual exchange. Over the course of his life he has been associated with luminaries like Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka, Malcolm X, Queen Mother Audley Moore, James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansburry, Yuri Kochiyama, Stokely Carmichael, James Foreman, and Derrick Bell, yet when he and I spoke he would, at times, ask about my opinions and listen carefully to what I had to say. For this I was honored.

Eddie's life was rich, and often painful, but it seems to me that his vital talent was his ability to draw on his personal experience and the experiences of those around him in order to analyze a given situation and create possibilities that otherwise would seem impossible, not just for himself, but also for those around him. He brought out the brilliance in others. In what follows, I will try to honor Eddie by providing a few political "snapshots" that illustrate this point.

In the mid 1960s Eddie traveled from Harlem to Lowndes County Alabama with several members of the nascent Revolutionary Action Movement. Their goal was to observe and examine the strategies being employed during the SNCC campaign to develop an independent black political apparatus. Inspired by what they learned, Eddie and his consorts returned to Harlem, a place where blacks had a numerical majority but very little political power, and established the first Black Panther Party. The group immediately began working with an ongoing campaign for control of community institutions. I have included what I think is Eddie's clearest articulation of this moment from an unpublished 1992 interview with Dr. Muhammad Ahmad:

At the same time that we were organizing the Party in New York, we were right in the middle of the struggle for community control of the schools. One of our first major initiatives was to support that campaign. We lent or organizational resources to those people at IS201 in Harlem and Oceanville in Brownsville, Brooklyn who were organizing in this area. We knocked on doors, held community meetings, sent out press releases, and passed out leaflets. We talked about voter registration and the importance of getting involved in the struggle around community control of the schools. There was a city-wide school boycott in 1964 or 1965 and we played a major role in educating parents on the reasons why their children should not be sent to their schools under the kinds of conditions that existed at the time.

Out of that struggle we began to look at how we could broaden the base of the party by involving Latinos on the East Side, the



Young Lords who were organizing around grievances and problems very similar to ours. During that time we also did a tremendous amount of writing, which we had hoped, would disseminate our analysis in order to educate and organize a wider audience.

What was significant and unique about the BPP and other nationalist groups during the period was that it ushered in a new consciousness into the black community. It was not an assimilationist or integrationist consciousness, but a rather a consciousness of self-determination, self-reliance, independence. This new consciousness brought a new kind of energy to the black community which ultimately led to a massive uprising of people all over this country.

In 1969 Eddie was targeted for “neutralization” by the FBI’s Counter Intelligence Program. He was arrested and convicted for the

murder of James Howard, a crime for which Eddie steadfastly maintained his innocence. Nonetheless, Eddie was sentenced to 25 years in Federal Prison. Thus he joined the countless activists who were taken off streets and confined in prisons (or assassinated) during the period.

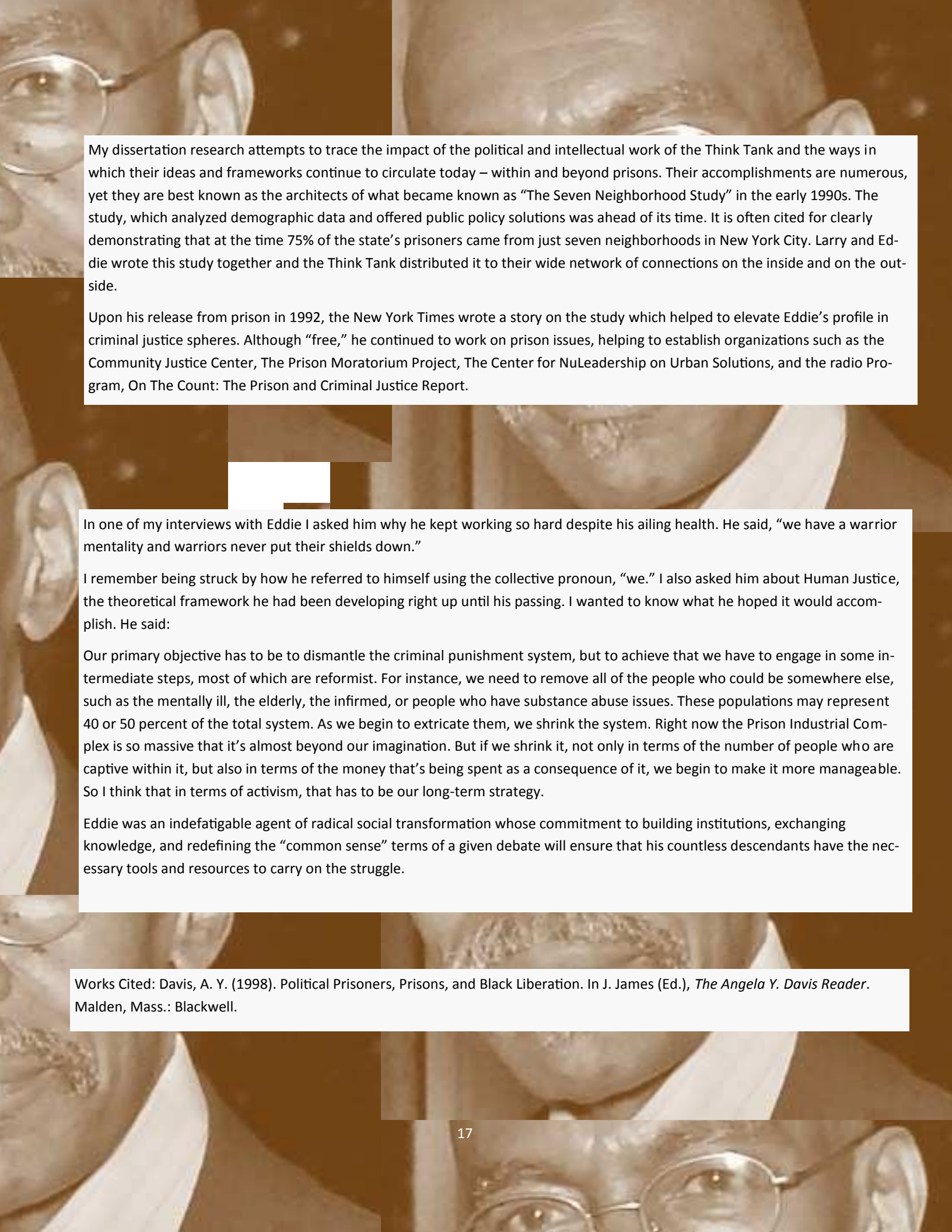
Eddie was sent to Attica, a place he described as, “one of the most brutal, oppressive and racist prisons that I have ever been in.” In 1971, these oppressive conditions, which persisted in spite of the repeated appeals issued by those who suffered from them, led to the Attica Rebellion. In response, Nelson Rockefeller led a vicious counter-rebellion in which 43 people – prisoners and guards alike – were massacred by a state assault force. Eddie witnessed this while he was locked down in C-Block, calling it “the most stunning event that ever happened in my life; to just witness cold blooded murder.”

I will not attempt to elaborate the full import of Attica here, but suffice it to say that not only was Attica a collective act of material and corporeal insurrection, it was also a collective manifestation of intellectual and ontological genius. It ushered in a decisive break in penal policy, prison organizing, and radical politics nationally and internationally. It also profoundly transformed Eddie and a whole generation of incarcerated and non-incarcerated prison activists. The Institute For The Black World called it “the highest stage of struggle reached by the black movement in this country.”

Following Attica, Eddie and approximately 500 others from throughout the New York Prison System were transferred to Green Ha-

ven Correctional Facility. At Green Haven Eddie began to collaborate with and assist an organization of imprisoned intellectuals who were known as the Think Tank. In 1972, under the leadership of Larry “Luqman” White, the Think Tank began to develop and initiate several community development and research projects oriented toward improving prison conditions, politicizing the communities from which prisoners came, and undermining the penal rationality of incapacitation.

Members of the Think Tank were physically confined within the prison, thus the operations and functions of the prison and its role in American society became the focus of their analysis. A year earlier, just prior to the Attica Rebellion, Angela Davis, who at the time was incarcerated in California, had presciently written about this practice. “The vast majority of political prisoners have not allowed the fact of imprisonment to curtail their educational, agitational, and organizing activities, which they continue behind prison walls” (Davis, 1998).



My dissertation research attempts to trace the impact of the political and intellectual work of the Think Tank and the ways in which their ideas and frameworks continue to circulate today – within and beyond prisons. Their accomplishments are numerous, yet they are best known as the architects of what became known as “The Seven Neighborhood Study” in the early 1990s. The study, which analyzed demographic data and offered public policy solutions was ahead of its time. It is often cited for clearly demonstrating that at the time 75% of the state’s prisoners came from just seven neighborhoods in New York City. Larry and Eddie wrote this study together and the Think Tank distributed it to their wide network of connections on the inside and on the outside.

Upon his release from prison in 1992, the New York Times wrote a story on the study which helped to elevate Eddie’s profile in criminal justice spheres. Although “free,” he continued to work on prison issues, helping to establish organizations such as the Community Justice Center, The Prison Moratorium Project, The Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions, and the radio Program, On The Count: The Prison and Criminal Justice Report.

In one of my interviews with Eddie I asked him why he kept working so hard despite his ailing health. He said, “we have a warrior mentality and warriors never put their shields down.”

I remember being struck by how he referred to himself using the collective pronoun, “we.” I also asked him about Human Justice, the theoretical framework he had been developing right up until his passing. I wanted to know what he hoped it would accomplish. He said:

Our primary objective has to be to dismantle the criminal punishment system, but to achieve that we have to engage in some intermediate steps, most of which are reformist. For instance, we need to remove all of the people who could be somewhere else, such as the mentally ill, the elderly, the infirmed, or people who have substance abuse issues. These populations may represent 40 or 50 percent of the total system. As we begin to extricate them, we shrink the system. Right now the Prison Industrial Complex is so massive that it’s almost beyond our imagination. But if we shrink it, not only in terms of the number of people who are captive within it, but also in terms of the money that’s being spent as a consequence of it, we begin to make it more manageable. So I think that in terms of activism, that has to be our long-term strategy.

Eddie was an indefatigable agent of radical social transformation whose commitment to building institutions, exchanging knowledge, and redefining the “common sense” terms of a given debate will ensure that his countless descendants have the necessary tools and resources to carry on the struggle.

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History and Territory among Black Communities in Montes de María, Colombia:

Seeing Hope in a Post-conflict Moment

Eloisa Berman-Arévalo

Though once an Afro-descendant 'frontier of resistance' against colonial rule, and centuries later, a national epicenter of radical peasant struggles, in the past 20 years the agrarian region of Montes de María in Colombia's Caribbean coast has become emblematic of the abject connection between paramilitary violence, the de-mobilization of social struggles and the expansion of agrarian capitalism.¹ Today, negotiations between the state and armed actors have reduced armed confrontation and opened a purported 'post-conflict' scenario. Upon this contested emergent terrain Black peasant organizations struggle to reverse historical dispossessions and defend agrarian modes of life amidst liberal state-making and agro-capitalist expansion.

My research explores the material and symbolic dimensions of Black agrarian struggles over territory and rural livelihoods in a contested post-conflict moment. I am particularly interested in how histories of agrarian modernization, state-making, violence and resistance are brought into the present as lived collective experiences that inform emergent political projects – this includes how 'territory' becomes a site of resistance to projects of state rule and agrarian capitalism.

Looking for hope

Researching rural politics in Montes de María today confronts me with a complex (and perhaps disheartening) puzzle: the intensification of state presence, now through a project of 'liberal peace' (Richmond, 2009), focuses on the social welfare of victimized populations, yet de-politicizes community organizing by privileging 'victims' as passive subjects of state recognition. Programs for land restitution and reparations to victims occur amidst the rapid expansion of oil palm plantations over lands inhabited by Black communities, lands that are dispossessed by economic or physical coercion.² Members of local community organizations who remained throughout the violence³ articulate claims to territory and agrarian justice and confront structures of political clientelism that protect agro-capitalist economies. These organizations envision the possibility of accessing ethnic territorial rights, but are constrained by the (violent) administrative, anthropological and cartographic requirements of state multiculturalism.⁴ They are also confronted with the difficult task of promoting ethno-racial consciousness in the immediate aftermath of war.⁵ Given this scenario, one would think there is little reason to be optimistic about the futures of rural Black communities in Montes de María. Yet as a politically engaged researcher who collaborates with local organizations, I follow Sousa Santos' (2011) call to perceive and in fact 'symbolically enlarge' the knowledges, practices and voices that allow us to envision the 'conditions of the possibility of hope' (p. 241). This is why I focus on how history and territory become key dimensions for meaning-making and resistance, through which local people craft a

¹Five decades of armed conflict between leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitaries and national military forces violently transformed Colombia's rural spaces. Since 1980, in territories inhabited by indigenous, Black and mestizo peasant communities, 1,982 massacres were perpetrated (CNMH, 2013), approximately 5.5 million people abandoned their lands (IDMC, 2012) and more than 6.6 million hectares of small-holders' land were dispossessed (CNRR, 2010, p. 50). Recent victimizations are a continuation of the historical dispossession of bodies and spaces involved in state-making and agro-capitalist expansion in rural Colombian spaces (Rojas 2002; Escobar 2008; Zamosc 2006).

²See CNRR (2010) for a detailed account of economic and non-economic mechanisms of dispossession in Colombia's Caribbean region.

³Referred to locally as 'los resistentes', 'the resisters' are those who resisted forced displacement and stayed in place throughout the war.

politics of hope.

In what follows, I narrate a history of the north-western flanks of Montes de María, which I choose to call the 'Black piedmont'.⁶ As with all historical accounts, this is but one among many versions, a 'selective history' that is constructed according to contemporary concerns (Kosek, 2004, p. 332). It reflects both the everyday stories and memories narrated by friends in Montes de María, and my own recounting of the 'real history of events' (Kosek, 2004, p. 331). This history opens a brief reflection on the role of 'territory' as an emergent notion used among local communities to make sense of historical experiences and re-define present political positions.

Spatial-political histories

The region of Montes de María has historically been an epicenter of agrarian struggle and territorial disputes. The Black piedmont, where my research is focused, constituted a colonial 'frontier of resistance' (Helg, 2004) where maroon settlements and racially mixed – but predominantly Afro-descendant – 'rochelas' remained at the margins of colonial domination until the early 19th century (Helg, 2004; Navarrete 2003). Whereas in mestizo-indigenous areas of Montes de María, agricultural and cattle-ranching estates have rapidly expanded since the early 19th century (Hernandez, 2008), the north-western piedmont inhabited by Afro-descendant populations, remained a relatively isolated and *de facto* autonomous population until the mid-20th century.

Despite the undoubted importance of this colonial history, it remains at the margins of contemporary politics among Black communities in the piedmont.⁷ Thus, more recent lived memories and collective experiences of resistance, dispossession and conflict over the past 50 years take precedence in informing 'post-conflict' political positionings. While the absence of a 'long-duree' analysis helps to obscure the racialized dimensions of violence and exclusion in Colombia, I suggest that local analyses of a 'mid-term' history point to a radical re-positioning of Black communities with respect to state and agro-capitalist expansion. The period of state-led agrarian modernization between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s, a moment of unprecedented state presence, is interpreted as the starting point for these trajectories.

With the construction of an 11.873 hectare irrigation district, the introduction of credits and technologies for commercial rice cultivation and the individual titling of lands, agrarian modernization radically – and often violently – reconfigured social, economic and spatial relations among Black communities in this region. The irrigation district displaced several villages and fragmented traditional patterns of settlement along streams and rivers, as well as socio-spatial relations between communities of the piedmont. Despite short periods of economic success, commercial rice growing projects failed due to local refusals to adopt cooperative schemes and the opening of the agrarian economy to the global market in the early 1990s (CINEP 2012).

Parallel to such developments, during the 1970s and 1980s the region became a stronghold of the Na-

⁶By 'state multiculturalism', I mean the assemblage of state laws, institutions and practices that together regulate the political definition, classification and treatment of ethnic minorities by the state (del Cairo, 2011). State multiculturalism is based on the political recognition of cultural difference and the aim to incorporate collective ethno-cultural actors into the Nation through the recognition of differentiated rights (Van Cott 2000). Latin Americanist have pointed to the exclusions and limitations of multicultural recognition. For, it requires a neat correspondence of social groups to essentialized understandings of indigeneity and afro-descendancy (Hale 2004).

⁷Scholars critically discussed the limits and possibilities of ethnic territorial rights for Afro-colombians. Critiques to state multiculturalism and the ethnization of Blackness can be found in Restrepo and Rojas (Ed.) (2004), Restrepo (2013), Hoffmand and Rodriguez (2007), Wade (2009). Cunin (2003) and Helg (2004) offer insightful analyses of the dynamics of race and ethnicity in the Colombian Caribbean, the ambiguo-

●● That's the reservoir. The house on the island is from a guy from Cartagena, it's a mansion, with guards and all.

You can't get too close, but we fish around there. When the water is low you can see the tombs of the old cemetery. The whole village is still down there. ●●



Figure 1. Playón Reservoir



Figure 2. Guard tower for mansion

tional Association of Peasant Users (ANUC), a peasant organization created by the state, which pressured the implementation of agrarian reform through hundreds of land occupations. ANUC's history is ambiguous: it exerted popular pressure in favor of what was, in fact, a project of state-making and spatial ordering through agrarian modernization, while at the same time using radical strategies of massive occupations that threatened regional agrarian orders. Towards the mid 1980s, the majority of the population had received individual titles, credits and technological inputs, turning this region into a 'successful case' of land reform (CINEP, 2012).

In the mid-1980s, the presence of armed left-wing guerrillas intensified in the region, initiating a period marked by tense and often coercive entanglements between peasant organizations and guerrilla forces. Guerrilla actions against large and medium landowners prompted the emergence of regional paramilitary groups in the mid-1990s, whose strategy of 'scorched earth' involved retaliation against communities and individuals thought to be 'guerrilla collaborators'. Former ANUC members and land occupiers, as well as communities taken over by guerrilla forces, became the targets of over 30 massacres between 1996 and 2005 (CNMH, 2014). Over 215,500 persons were displaced (CID-UN, 2010).

In the midst of paramilitary violence the majority of lands acquired by land reform, many of them carrying decades-long debts, became an easy target for dispossession by economic or physical coercion (CNRR, 2010). Supported by paramilitary violence, a new agrarian elite began rapid appropriations of land for agro-industrial production, effectively materializing an agrarian counter-reform (Sánchez, 2001) and symbolically conjuring the dramatic closure of peasant land politics.

Emergent notions of 'territory'

Bringing these histories to the present helps communities critically re-define the 'post-conflict' conjuncture. In everyday stories and local political conversation 'territory' emerges as an axis of historical analysis that highlights the violent spatial politics driving these histories. Narrating lived collective experiences in terms of *territorial conflict* helps people make sense of the political and economic drivers of the dispossession of lands and bodies, and situates the immediate past of armed conflict within longer trajectories of agrarian modernization, state-making and capitalist expansion.

Territory in the present is also articulated in relation to the future: at a moment during which there is a re-emergence of Black peasant politics, territorial claims constitute the possibility of grasping spatialized power, thereby reversing trajectories of dispossession and encroachments by the state and capital.

I cannot assert that territorial notions and claims are co-emergent with a specifically 'Black politics'. What I suggest is that territorial discourses are responding to local re-articulations of histories of place and collective experience among Black communities; today, they surreptitiously emerge through everyday stories and praxis, in order to position Black peasants as collective historical and political subjects that challenge the socio-spatial orderings attempted by state and agro-capital in a 'post-conflict' moment.

ity of 'race' as a social marker and platform for mobilization, and the limitations of multicultural recognition in this context.

⁶The municipality of Marialabaja, which covers most of this region, has a 97% Afro-descendant population. While my research includes a broader region, this article is based on fieldwork in the 'veredas' and 'corregimientos' of Marialabaja that are located on the mountainous piedmont.

⁷This information is based on interviews and conversations with community members, June-July 2014.

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