30 Days notice
Contesting Displacement and Building Alternatives
in Albany Park, Chicago

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Introduction

I came to Albany Park because I had been told that a community organization, named Centro Autónomo, was looking for an intern to work in their anti-gentrification organizing and community land trust project. It was my advisor who told me. And I took her up on the possibility at the first mention. In May 2015, I moved to the Springfield house where Centro Autónomo first started. Most of my housemates were organizers and professors at Centro Autónomo, which also runs a master’s program and offers study abroad opportunities in Cuba and Mexico.

On the very first day of my internship, Antonio Gutierrez, internship program coordinator, took us on a tour of Albany Park. He showed us buildings which were emptied out and undergoing renovation. I was not surprised at all. Having recently completed an independent study on housing in the U.S., I knew that displacement by gentrification is the common story in city after city from east to west coast. The walk around energized me to pursue the questions preoccupying me at the time: 1) what techniques are corporations using to displace tenants? 2) what’s the extent and impact of gentrification in a diverse neighborhood? and 3) what strategies are community organizations using to fight gentrification? After three days of orientation, our group of interns began working to document the process of displacement in Albany Park.

Tracking, canvassing and collecting gentrification stories made it seem that planning education was socially meaningful. But organizers and community volunteers at Centro Autónomo reminded me that merely documenting displacement is not enough. Through multiple collective conversations, it became clear that I was trained to use sophisticated tools to discern systems of oppression and tell these stories, but not exactly equipped to contest oppression.

And so I had arrived in Albany Park to document and tell stories of housing struggle. But, telling stories alone and detecting oppression in the everyday still leaves intact the world of material marginalization. Worse, these can be ways to consolidate social capital. I meditated on this impasse, which has been worrying me since a long time, during several walks around Albany Park. The collective conversations at Centro Autónomo were also spaces where interns, organizers, and volunteers discussed decolonizing our minds, our social relations. These conversations reassured me that it was crucial to give an account of our dispositions within spaces of struggle. It wasn’t simply enough to claim that I wanted to work for and with the folks struggling. I needed to reflect on how I was encountering the people I was working with and why in those ways—the reasons were tied as much to my histories, their histories, and the interlocking circumstances that we found ourselves in.

All this led to my work veering more into producing actionable intelligence about ongoing real estate purchases, identifying developers, canvassing units, mapping the frontiers of gentrification, talking to other organizers, producing multimedia stories with community members, thinking strategically and contributing in any way I could to the anti-displacement resistance now afoot in Chicago. The flexibility and caring patience of my academic advisor
kept me connected to the university in these times of changing dispositions and methodologies.

Between May 2015 and May 2016, I worked mostly on-site and remotely for a semester with Centro Autónomo. During this time, I witnessed another city under the shimmering towers of Chicago—in hospitable, discriminating, cruel. A city where organized collective response to eviction is rare. The respect for law, which is respect for private property relations, has corroded this city’s sense of outrage. That no law is just which leaves the most disadvantaged homeless, that laws are always reconstituted through new iterations of justice, is simply inconceivable.

I bodily felt how this inconceivability is produced under coercion. Midway through summer we organized a protest for housing rights. We walked from bank to bank in downtown Chicago. Foreclosed homeowners publicly shared their grievances. With balloons, banners, musical instruments, lots of people marching and singing, it was a media spectacle. When we reached the Fannie Mae building, guards in black suits approached us and ordered us not to cross the “line” that separated the front courtyard of the Fannie Mae building and the sidewalk.

Now standing on one side of the “line,” I was holding a cloth banner and the wind blew part of my cloth banner over the “line.” One of the guards ran towards me angrily and yelled at me for “crossing the line.” I was amazed at the materiality that this imaginary line had taken on. A few minutes later, another guard yelled at me because the back of my shirt was touching the plant standing on the other side of the “line.” I would have never perceived my body as an extension of where the wind blows my banner or up to where my shirt touches another object. But this is precisely the self-perception that I was coerced into adopting. In case after case, I came across these instances of symbolic coercion backed up by threats of repression, arrests, prisons etc. It still strikes me as incredible that an 11” by 8.5” letter size eviction notice is such a powerful technology of displacement.

During the summer of my internship, we discovered that the house I was living in had been sold to a corporate developer. Soon enough we received an eviction notice. In response the residents decided to organize a tenants’ union and contest their displacement. The fight is still continuing. The work of anti-displacement resistance, in this way, also became a living room and bedroom conversation in my life. I wonder at times if the knowledge of grassroots resistance I produce in the shadows of a neoliberal university will make the people’s movements more vulnerable. At the same time, I have spoken to many organic intellectuals around the country who find the recounting of other struggles empowering and inspiring. I chose to resolve this tension by only highlighting those aspects of anti-displacement work which I believe applies more broadly to our experiences of fighting for shelter in a neoliberal housing market. The writings on anti-displacement I produce here come out of conversations and collaborations with organizers, Alejandro Monzón, Antonio Gutierrez, Bárbara Galeano, Nicole Maldonodo, Felix Acuña, Krista Shugart, Lilly Lerner, Thomas Hansen, João Paulo Flor de Maio, Ariana Feldman, Hannah Bernard, Noah Moskowitz, and so many others.
At the end of the day, I feel the loudest aspect in my work is the silence of the displaced in these chapters. Thousands have been displaced from Albany Park. Centro Autónomo organized with a handful who said “no” and fought. The rest of those displaced linger as ghosts between these lines. So I end this introduction with something I wrote while walking and recollecting the stories I heard of people who had moved away:

After noon, you can hear construction workers hammering, sawing, replacing window frames, tiles, and plumbing. They are gut-renovating an empty apartment building. Not too many m/noons ago, there were 34 households in this building. All of them: evicted. If you are not too new to this neighborhood, you can hear in your memories children playing in the courtyard. These are the sounds of displacement.
The Making of Albany Park

Today, walking down Lawrence Avenue I find it hard to take my sight away from children playing in the streets, men talking politics in Hindi under trees, Korean bakers counting pastries, Latinx street vendors selling tamales, Marathi women singing together, Chinese clothes sellers, Mexican panaderias and grocery stores with mole sauce ads. The dizzying colors of skins, objects and old buildings making up this working poor neighborhood keeps me on my foot. For an entire summer I walked Albany Park’s streets swallowing these sights and mapping gentrification. Only when I returned to campus, I looked backwards and tried to put together a version of Albany Park’s past.

Before the administrative districts of Metropolitan Chicago were redrawn in 1889, Albany Park and its surrounding areas in Chicago’s northwest side were known as the Jefferson Township. If we dig far back enough we learn that English, German, and Scandinavian farmers originally settled in this suburb. The repetition of this story across multiple sources made me near certain that this was the definitive history of Albany Park, that before Albany Park there was Jefferson Township and before Jefferson Township the site was terra nullius. Months later it struck me that Native Americans who lived in the Chicago region were missing from this narrative. A less amnesiac history would then begin in calling into account how the Chicago region was home to Native nations such as Potawatomi, Miami, and Illinois. Colonial conquest and diseases followed by a series of treaties coerced Native Americans to “cede their lands to the American government.”1 These lands were then opened up for European settlers, though Native American presence continued to be concentrated in Chicago’s north side. For settlers, cheap land was a determining factor in their decision to establish farms in Jefferson Township. William Spikings, a settler, "built a brick farm house with his own hands and lived in it for over 70 years, watching the city grow to him."2 Since Jefferson Township settlers mostly worked in farming and agriculture, the township remained rural even as late as the 1880s. The most connection Jefferson Township had with the city was when wealthy Chicagoans “took day excursions to watch horse racing and enjoy the bucolic environs” of the area.3 Between late 1880s and early 1990s, real estate developers turned their eyes to Jefferson Township.4 The city of Chicago annexed the town, and streetcar magnate DeLancy Louderback named a subdivision Albany Park after his New York hometown.5

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Albany Park, Chicago

From City of Chicago Data Portal

Fig: Albany Park, Chicago
As Jefferson Township dissolved into the compendium of maps archived in the present day fourth floor of Cook County Recorder of Deeds office, the construction boom in the 1920s set Albany Park in motion—the ‘L’ came to town, large apartment buildings thickening and thinning out in proximity to transportation nodes, bungalow and two-flats enclaves popping up, commercial corridor of Lawrence Avenue forming the artery of hustle-bustle, expanding bus lines and school districts. Land that was $52 per front foot in 1909 bumped up to $2,750 per front foot by 1929.6 The real estate development boom of early 1900 was also justified as critical redevelopment in areas with crime issues. For example, the City of Chicago’s North Branch Riverwalk Concept Plan cites “gangs... active in the area” as a significant safety and security concern.7 Keeping up with real estate development, the population increased in leaps and bounds. From 7,000 inhabitants in 1910, the population jumped to over 55,000 people by 1930.

The population increase during World War I was due to Albany Park drawing middle class Jews who “moved when they achieved sufficient economic mobility to leave such West and Northeast Side neighborhood as Lawndale, Humboldt Park, and Logan Square.”8 By 1950s, with synagogue and churches, businesses and community centers, the Jewish population made Albany Park synonymous with Chicago’s Jewish life. Post-WWII, in a socioeconomic climate of new highways, booming auto consumption, government subsidies for homeownership and developers finding new regions suitable for sprawling profit, Albany Park’s Jewish residents began moving to Chicago suburbs such as Lincolnwood and Skokie. This population shift happened within the broader context where suburbia accelerated and Chicago metropolitan area spatially expanded “at a rate more than four times faster than the rate of population growth.”9 Federal policies, race, and class played critical role in this expansion. The second Great Migration between 1940 to 1970 brought approximately five million African Americans from the deep South to the industrial North.10 The lines of segregation created in response to the first Great Migration (1914-1930) were redrawn and hardened. The suburbs were whiter, richer, more dispersed, and depended on service economy. The inner city was congested, post-industrial, and were left to migrants and immigrants of color. “Civil and racial strife, the retrenchment of heavy industry, and “white flight” reached calamitous proportions...”11 giving rise to what Hirsch calls the “second ghetto.” In the case of Albany Park, the suburban exodus meant falling property value,

vacant storefronts, and a growing reputation of a slum troubled with drugs, gangs, and prostitution.

Betancur has detailed the intermittent flows of Latino workers of Mexican and Puerto Rican origin into Chicago and shown a pattern of clustering, displacement, and reconcentration in their spatial movement between 1930-90. In a larger context, this migration is linked to the mashing and molding of national economies—from Chile to Bangladesh—into neoliberal appendages by monopoly capitalist, backed by U.S. imperialist forces. This neoliberal restructuring in country after country led to the dispossession and displacement of millions of people. The local effect of these global shifts was the in-flow of immigrants from global South-East to global North-West. The result: Albany Park resurfaced as a port-of-entry neighborhood with foreign born population jumping from 37 percent in 1960 to 52 percent by 2000. Beginning in the 1980s, Albany Park experienced a flow of immigrants from Asian and Latin American countries. In McMillen’s study of Chicago’s economic subcenters, “areas outside the traditional central business district with employment levels large enough to have significant effects on the overall spatial distribution of jobs and population,” Albany Park shows up as part of a major subcenter cluster in 1980s Chicago. 55 percent of the jobs are in manufacturing and 29 percent are in finance, insurance, and real estate.

The immigrant population, many of them undocumented from Mexico, breathed life back into the streets of Albany Park. The labor conditions for immigrant workers, primarily Latinos, have been deplorable since the beginning. Historically Chicago imported Latino workers between 1916-28 and 1942-64 to work in railroad, steel, and connected industries. Some of them stayed behind or returned as undocumented immigrants, creating a pathway for others to escape what Eduardo Galeano called the “open veins of Latin America,” centuries-long nightmares of pillage and plunder. In Chicago, it was convenient to employ undocumented workers because they were easily disposable, could be threatened with deportation, and kept away from unionizing. They worked as minimum-wage workers in the manufacturing sweatshops and low/un-skilled service sectors. Betancur provides a despairing list of employers’ exploitation: “wages below those prevailing for similar work; transfers without notice; long hours; deduction of recruiter fees and transportation costs from their paychecks; poor housing and lodging.”

The Albany Park Theater Project, a collective of local youth artists initiated in 1997, documented the lived experiences of workers by producing plays highlighting the sweat and blood of immigrants that went into the making of Albany Park after WWII. These plays show dramascapes of workers digging ditches, demolishing and constructing homes, “getting hurt

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14 U.S Census Data via socialexplorer.com
on the job, working without insurance, and being called names.” 16 In these stories, even as immigrant laborers make the city, they are excluded and expelled from living the city like everyone else because they lack Social Security digits. The character of an undocumented immigrant worker in the play Aquí Estoy is caged in by a spirit in cream color suit that closes all doors of opportunity to him. The character says: “I feel like an American. I’m certainly not Colombian. I am an American. I am an American. I am an American.” The character’s assertion of dignity by reclaiming American identity, though to be Colombian is also to be American in one sense, materializes in the streets of Albany Park when workers organize against their exploitation and wage theft.

Such stories are also documented by academics such as Satomi Yamamoto, who tracked the follow up to when Chicago Police Department arrested jornaleros (day laborers) at various points during 2001-02. The jornaleros were going to be relocated so that they wouldn’t be publicly visible anymore. Against this force of invisibility, the jornaleros of Albany Park worked with Latino Union of Chicago to organize a workers’ rights campaign. Their resistance led to the creation of Albany Park Workers’ Center in 2004. The center functioned as a safe site for hiring jornaleros who came from “Central and Latin America, from such countries as Columbia, Ecuador, Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru, and they are indigenous natives of their country whose first language is Quecha, not Spanish.” 17 Mostly Caucasian or Asian contractors hired jornaleros from the Center for tasks such as “landscaping, moving, roofing, and wall-painting.” 18 Exploitation, however, finds ways of seeping through the barricades of resistance. Though organized jornaleros were able to resist their expulsion from the commercial corridors, they received wages below union wages, did not receive safety equipment at work, and ironically worked to make politicians and contractors feel like they are “doing good for the sake of the undocumented because they offered jornaleros the opportunities to earn meager wages.” 19 The immigrant workers who live in Albany Park not only subsidize the revitalization of Albany Park and surrounding areas, by extension Chicago, but also subsidize the conscience of those who exploit them.

Gentrification, the loss of affordable homes, began to plague Albany Park in the early 2000s. The housing crisis of 2007 ushered in gentrification at a previously unknown level as speculators bought properties at firesale prices while evicting owner-occupied buildings. Foreclosures ruined many small property owners who bought during a rising market, but were forced to sell or face foreclosure. Many immigrant families lost their entire life savings. The foreclosure crisis of 2006 was another blow for the immigrant groups that revitalized Albany Park. In 2007 alone, 13,872 foreclosures were filed in the City of Chicago. 20 A report by National People’s Action put Albany Park in the top 10 list of community areas hit by

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18 Yamamoto, “Fair Price for Whom?”
19 Yamamoto, “Fair Price for Whom?”
foreclosures with 181.8 foreclosures per square mile. The working poor families of Albany Park were left with no means to regain footing. Centro Autónomo’s foreclosure report, based on 15 years of anecdotal evidence, claimed that foreclosure “radically reduced housing options (either doubling up with family or friends for long periods of time, or moving to a smaller rental unit), loss of wealth, and a life of increased poverty.” Furthermore, a lot of foreclosed families were also scammed by “legal representatives” who charged large amounts of fees between $1,200 to $15,000 promising loan refinancing. When tenants and homeowners moved out of foreclosed properties in Albany Park, the buildings stayed vacant. The banks and the owners did not take care of the houses and the yards. Properties were vandalized and at times turned into drug party houses, undoing “a generation of work done by immigrant families to turn a previously crime-ridden neighborhood into a safe place to raise a working class family.” In the wake of this socioeconomic devastation, investment companies who own property all over the city are quickly scooping up properties in Albany Park, evicting tenants, rehabilitating the properties, and sparking a process of gentrification.

Today the Albany Park neighborhood is at the end of the Brown line on the Chicago Transit Authority and is connected by convenient bus routes. Albany Park has 18,004 of housing units of which 19 percent single family, 14 percent condominiums, 33.2 percent 2-4 units, and 33.8 percent large multiunit buildings. The majority of the housing stock was built in 1930s. A rich historic architecture, extensive park system and proximity to downtown combined with a rising housing market only a few train stops from gentrifying neighborhoods are all characteristics that create an ideal investment opportunity.

Albany Park is bordered on the north by Foster Avenue, on the south by Montrose Avenue, on the east by the Chicago River and on the west by Pulaski Avenue. The north and southeast borders rub against wealthier neighborhoods. The neighborhood to the east already underwent gentrification and is now a hip place. The neighborhood to the south has been undergoing gentrification long before Albany Park’s own displacement started. Currently, Albany Park’s population is more than 50 percent people of color and majority Latinx, mainly from Mexico, Central America and Ecuador but including residents from virtually every country in Latin America. In 2013, Albany Park’s foreign born population decreased to 45 percent of the population for reasons we will explore soon. Though, 45 percent is still more than double that of the foreign-born population in Chicago (21 percent).

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23 Centro Autónomo, The Housing Crisis and the Working Poor.
The trajectory of Albany Park’s gentrification parallels the gentrification of many other neighborhoods. In Chicago, with real estate prices rising and plenty of low interest loans available – for the investor class – gentrification took off in 2012. Across the city, average household size decreased to 2.5 per unit. Despite some new construction in Albany Park, the first of any note since the 1930s, the number of rental units declined from 11,295 in 2000 to 10,411 in 2013, and the number of occupied units declined from 17,842 to 16,609 as newly arriving LLCs converted apartments to condominiums.

In 2013, the population of Albany Park was 54,018, a decline of nearly 12 percent from 2000. This is a reflection of condominium conversions that reduce the number of available units, combined with a reduction in average household size, both hallmarks of gentrification. Average household size in 1990 stood at 2.5 people, increasing to 2.7 in 2000. The decade was characterized by a declining number of vacant properties (from 1,240 in 1990 to 760 in 2000) as immigrants from virtually every corner of the world settled in the neighborhood, reversing a trend of serious decline in the 80s. The number of rental units also increased during this period, from 10,466 in 1990 to 11,295 in 2000.

![Average Household Size 1990-2010](image)

*FIG: Average Household Size, US Census Data*
Household income also reflects the process of gentrification. From 1990 to 2000, median household income in Albany Park was consistently below that of Chicago overall, but this trend reversed in the early 2000s as wealthier middle class residents displaced working class families. In 2013, median household income in Albany Park was $50,085 versus $47,270 for Chicago as a whole, and this despite increased unemployment and stagnant wages for immigrant families.

Albany Park is characterized by a low percentage of owner occupied housing units (37.3%) compared to the rest of Chicago (45.3%). Eighty-two percent of housing units are found in multi-unit buildings, and 62.7% of residents are renters, indicating a relatively high percentage of building owners (20%) who reside alongside renters. These are generally individuals or families who own 2 to 4 unit buildings. Low income renters in Albany Park face unique housing struggle. While the median household income in some tracts are as high as $72,865, in others it is as low as $36,786. Not to mention, 13 percent of households have no earnings. When we apply the race/ethnicity lens, the reality is even more intolerable. The median household income for Blacks and Latinxs fall as low as $20,208 and $27,418 respectively. Centro Autónomo reports encountering community members who make an average of $1,290 a month while paying an average monthly rent of $712. With household sizes of 3 to 5 people, their landlords suck out more than half their monthly income.
Population Characteristics, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Albany Park</th>
<th>City of Chicago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>54,018</td>
<td>2,706,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Households</td>
<td>16,609</td>
<td>1,028,746</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Household Size</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Change, 2000-10</td>
<td>-11.90%</td>
<td>-6.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age*</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 2000 and 2010 Census, 2013 American Community Survey five-year estimates
*Note that all CCA medians were calculated based on Grouped Frequency Distributions

FIG: General population characteristics

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share of Total Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>28,622</td>
<td>57,655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>1,681</td>
<td>2,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>11,939</td>
<td>10,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7,010</td>
<td>12,491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,860</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent Change between 1990-2000: 16.5% - 6.3%
Percent Change between 2000-2013: -0.2% - 7.6%

*Source: U.S. Census 1990, 2000, and American Community Survey 2013 5 year Estimates via Social Explorer

FIG: Racial composition Albany Park

Median Household Income, 1990-2013

FIG: Median household income trend
### Housing and Tenure, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Albany Park</th>
<th></th>
<th>City of Chicago</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupied Housing Units</td>
<td>16,609</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>1,028,746</td>
<td>86.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied</td>
<td>6,198</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>466,089</td>
<td>45.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Renter-occupied</td>
<td>10,411</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>582,657</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant Housing Units</td>
<td>1,404</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>164,044</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2013 American Community Survey, five-year estimates

**FIG: Albany Park housing and tenure**

### Housing Type, 2013

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<th>Albany Park</th>
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<th>City of Chicago</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Family</td>
<td>3,394</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>346,709</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Units</td>
<td>3,305</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>177,158</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or 4 Units</td>
<td>3,028</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>195,521</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more Units</td>
<td>7,347</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>470,528</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2013 American Community Survey, five-year estimates

**FIG: housing types**

Between July 2014 to December 2015, at least 200 families and possibly as many as 600 families—between 1,000 and 3,000 people—were displaced from their homes in a geographic area of 3 square miles. If this happened in a war zone or was the result of a natural disaster, emergency aid would be rushed in, resettlement plans would be in the offing and political leaders would demand humanitarian responses. Instead, this infrastructural warfare against the working-class is simply business as usual in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood of Albany Park on Chicago’s northwest side. The human toll speaks volumes about Chicago’s more than 20 years of official plans to “expand affordability” for renters in all neighborhoods. In Albany Park we see how developers displace immigrant populations, particularly Latinxs, from their homes, replacing them with mostly white, middle class residents.

In many cases, poor working class families leave quietly, so quietly that researchers have been unable, or unwilling, to document the extent of this human tragedy. Urban planner Tom Slater (2006) describes the challenges:

In 2001, I remember being told by a community organizer in Park Slope, Brooklyn, that the best way I could help with local efforts to resist gentrification was to ‘come up with some numbers to show us how many people have been and are being displaced’. He was not impressed when I explained what a massive undertaking this is, if indeed it was possible at all. Atkinson (2000) has called measuring displacement ‘measuring the invisible’, whereas Newman and Wyly sum up the quantification problem as follows: ‘In short, it is difficult to find people who have been displaced, particularly if those people are poor . . . By definition, displaced residents have disappeared from the very places where researchers and census-takers go to look for them’ (Newman and Wyly, 2006: 27).

The political class, the media, and, most certainly, the gentrifying developers who enrich themselves in the face of irreversible human suffering, exacerbate the “quantification problem” of displacement through their indifference. The displaced are forced to move somewhere else, with no public accounting of lost community ties, destabilization of families, the impact on youth education, increased rent, lost jobs, psychological stress—the problems are legion, but largely invisible. For many, the movement of renters is simply voluntary action within the housing market. But having to leave one’s familiar community and neighborhood due to rising rent or eviction is only as voluntary as someone jumping out of the way of a speeding truck.

Since summer of 2015, I have been working with Centro Autónomo. This is a community center in the Albany Park neighborhood, on the northwest side of Chicago, made up mostly of Latinx immigrant families. Their housing work includes formation of tenant unions, eviction defense, organized struggles against foreclosure, and development of a community-run land trust, Casas del Pueblo. Part of my summer work with the Centro Autónomo was to quantify gentrification, and develop a report in an effort to generate dialogue and collective action around displacement by gentrification.

The range of talk on gentrification varies. Some highlight how gentrification “improves”27 a blighted neighborhood through “rising home values, beautification and new amenities,”28 and some lament the entrance of white young urban professionals, hipsters, and the like, identifying them as the cause of displacement for long-timers and loss of neighborhood’s authenticity. To explore the media frames used for gentrification, Brown-Saracino and Rumpf analyzed 4,445 articles published in 7 U.S. cities of one million or more populations between 1986 and 2006. They found that “nearly 37% of sample articles singularly criticize gentrification. Another one-third offers more than one perspective, pointing to risks and benefits. A total of 17.4% are unabashedly supportive of gentrification, and 12.9% neutral.”29 Throughout these articles, gentrifiers are seen as newcomers, affluent or not, to a neighborhood. In other words, these descriptions take the neoliberal housing market as a given and place the responsibility of gentrification on the shoulders of housing consumers.

In conversation after conversation at Centro Autónomo, organizers and tenants parted ways with the notion that renters or homeowners drive the urban process of evictions, renovations, and displacement. Organizers and tenants collectively defined gentrification as a systematic displacement of propertyless tenants by rentier capitalists—i.e. capitalists who make their profits through rents and price appreciations on the market. In the process, rentier capitalists manipulate legal procedures (such as evictions) and use various extra-legal measures (such as threats). Gentrification, in this sense, is a continuation of class warfare by other means.

For example, Centro Autónomo organized against gentrification as the eviction of 64 Latinx families receiving 30-day notice to leave their apartments. Many of those tenants lived there for 25 years. Eventually, 10 Latinx families stayed in Albany Park, 19 Latinx families relocated to other Chicago neighborhoods or suburbs, and 35 Latinx families are now living in conditions unknown. In another instance, Centro Autónomo organized against gentrification as 18 tenants in a multi-unit building received 30-day notices because they could not renew their leases the new owner offered. The new lease application had strict requirements that the tenants could not meet; the tenants’ lack of social security numbers and/or specific ways to prove income are some important examples of how the status of being undocumented is leveraged in the process of displacement. When tenants tried paying rent despite the lease application, the new owner refused to accept rent from the tenants. Despite many agreeing to pay the rising rent, the owners refused to let them reside in the building, using the excuse that the increased rent was above what’s considered officially affordable, i.e. 33 percent of their income. According to the cold logic of this corporation, refusal to accept the rent was for the tenants’ own good.

This is part and parcel of capitalist domination—where the rich do what they please with their property, regardless of the human cost—which is particularly pronounced in capitalism’s current stage, neoliberalism. Today in neighborhood after neighborhood, rentier capitalists reinvest in strategically disinvested neighborhoods that are gentrifiable because the difference between the current rental income and potential rental income, i.e. the rent

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gap, is significantly high.\textsuperscript{30} Now in its fourth decade, neoliberal capitalism is characterized by low or stagnant economic growth while profits are skyrocketing and wealth is being redistributed to the top. A large proportion of that wealth is being appropriated through rents and real estate speculation leading to mass dispossession and mass displacement.

To document displacement by gentrification, I worked with Centro Autónomo to collect data on all property sales in Albany Park from July 1, 2014 to December 31, 2015, and data on displacements resulting from these sales. From the total sales, the collective parsed the data by individual owners, Limited Liability Corporations (LLC), and financial institutions (including Bank Owned properties, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac). They focused largely on LLC purchases, which represent the majority of rental units in multi-family properties, and subsequent evictions.

**Real estate sales in Albany Park**

The real estate data is based on public records obtained in the Cook County Recorder of Deeds office by Centro Autónomo, as part of their larger anti-gentrification strategy to know, in real time, when buildings are purchased in the neighborhood. Every two weeks, a team from Centro Autónomo would physically visit the Cook County Recorder of Deeds office in Chicago downtown and make their way to the computers in the basement. Although there's an online portal that has the same information, it doesn't have the same flexible filters that organizers can use to sort through large volumes of property transaction data. Organizers would divide the task of sorting by months and work for about an hour to pin down properties sold in Albany Park. Afterwards, organizers verified the result of each transaction through canvassing the properties door-to-door and talking to building residents. The conversations organizers had with building residents are also part of the data archive they created for this purpose.

From July 1, 2014 to December 31, 2015, there were 430 property transactions in Albany Park.

310 buildings with 474 units acquired by an individual owner (72%)
81 buildings with 327 units acquired by an LLC (19%)
39 buildings acquired by financial institutions\textsuperscript{31} (9%)

Almost all the buildings acquired by financial institutions are foreclosed properties, a market-manufactured crisis.\textsuperscript{32} Organizers focused our attention on Albany Park renters who live in properties acquired by individual owners and LLCs. The LLC purchases tend to be larger, multi-unit buildings. While LLC purchases account for 19 percent of real estate sales, they account for 41 percent of total units acquired by individual owners and LLCs. Commonly, it is in these LLC owned units that longtime residents are undergoing displacement so that real estate investors can renovate the units and put them back on the market with significantly higher rents. In other words, we are looking at the displacement of at least 1,144 people if we conservatively consider the mean household size in Albany Park.


\textsuperscript{31} Note: The financial institutions include Banks, Trusts, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and generally represent changes in ownership because of foreclosure. Presumably, these properties will enter the real estate market in the near future.

Closer to the ground we may be talking about the displacement of close to 3,000 residents from Albany Park in a little more than one year.

FIG: Sites of displacement

**Number of Buildings Acquired in Albany Park, July 2014 - December 2015**

- 310 total buildings
- 81 owned by LLCs, Corporations etc.
- 33 owned by Individual owners
- 156 owned by Banks, Trusts, Fannie etc.

FIG: Number of Buildings
As shown in figures below, comparing LLC transactions within Albany Park to LLC transactions in the City of Chicago reveals an even more dramatic picture of speculators targeting low-income communities in order to make a profit.\textsuperscript{33} For example, in 2011 and 2013, the share of single family acquisitions by LLCs in Albany Park was greater than their share of transactions in the City of Chicago as a whole. From 2010 onward, proportional LLC

\textsuperscript{33} These figures are based on data from Institute of Housing Studies data portal.
purchases of condominiums in Albany Park has been consistently higher than in the City of Chicago, at times the difference in share reaching 10 percent. And from 2010 onward, LLC purchases of 5+ units buildings in Albany Park is proportionally higher than in the City of Chicago, with the difference in share reaching a peak of 25 percent in 2011.
As LLCs begin to control more multi-unit buildings, they have influence over more working class families than before. Using renovation and remodeling as a pretext, LLCs displace longtime residents in order to raise rents, and in turn making housing unaffordable for existing community members. Tallying only two bedroom apartment rents, one study found that from 2012 onwards Chicago’s rents have increased in every neighborhood. In Albany Park, the yearly rent increase has been 5% according to this study while wages continue to be stagnant and national inflation rate has been decreasing over the same time period. Many community members report rent increase from 30 to 50 percent, especially for larger apartments. Additionally, the intersection of unlivable wages and undocumented status of tenants creates further vulnerabilities. In tenant union meetings, organizers reported many undocumented tenants conflating housing law and immigration law, and becoming less willing to resist eviction for fear of deportation—making community members even more vulnerable in the hands of exploitative LLCs.

Displacement due to LLC purchases and subsequent evictions

Centro Autónomo organized with tenants in three of the five properties with 16 or more units acquired by an LLC in 2014. A total of 82 families were evicted by the new LLC owners, though not without a fight that lasted eight months in some cases. Residents organized collectively, but in all three cases, the owner or his property manager used illegal tactics to "convince" tenants to move. “Someone” destroyed locks on outer doors, leaving the buildings insecure. They turned off heat and electricity. In one case, an unknown assailant entered a building and attacked a tenant who was at the forefront of the struggle. In another case, unknown perpetrators broke exterior windows and soiled hallways. Many tenants left out of fear but most found they couldn't afford the rising rents in Albany Park. Those who stayed and struggled were eventually evicted en masse through court proceedings. Many left to live with other family members, some moved to the suburbs of Chicago, some lived temporarily in automobiles, and only a handful were able to find apartments in Albany Park.

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Even those who found apartments in Albany Park were often paying more for less. Typical rents for a two-bedroom apartment in the buildings cited above were $650 to $700 per month. In one case, a Latinx family of six moved to a cramped basement apartment about eight blocks away. They now pay $750 per month, but live with holes in walls and ceilings, a leaky toilet, no heat and a landlord who refuses to make repairs. The family is in a catch-22. If they complain, they risk another eviction and the difficulty of finding adequate housing in Albany Park. In another property, located at Argyle Avenue and Troy Avenue, the LLC increased rents $200 per month, and anyone earning less than $2,100 a month is not eligible for residency. This corporation wanted to “ensure” that tenants weren’t paying above what’s considered an affordable rent—30% of their income—and utilized this standard as a pretense to not renew their lease and evict them.

These Limited Liability Corporations appear as the leading force of gentrification in one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the US. But LLCs are only the fragmented legal faces of larger real estate corporations, who use this legal instrument to minimize accountability. Let me explain. LLCs are preferred in real estate business because “of the lack of corporate formalities, decentralized management structure, and partnership pass-through taxation.” In simple terms, owning properties through LLCs means that “investors in a corporation should not be personally liable for bad things the business does.” So for instance, if someone were to be injured in an LLC-owned house due to unsafe housing condition (for example, a broken staircase), the injured won’t be able to file a lawsuit.


against the corporate owner directly. The corporate owner would be insulated from any direct legal threat to all their assets, and the case would proceed only by exposing the assets of the specific LLC to potential lawsuits.\(^{37}\) For corporations owning thousands of properties this means a potential lawsuit in one property won’t jeopardize their business in all properties, even though they may be violating various ordinances in multiple buildings. LLCs are infamously common faces in property transactions in Chicago neighborhoods. Using LLCs as the flexible ownership base, corporations harass tenants, keep them in poor housing conditions, finally evict people of color, then double and sometimes triple the rent while reserving most of the newly remodeled apartments for those with higher incomes, which happen to be, in the vast majority of cases, white, middle class tenants as can be seen in the community areas Nathalie P. Voorhees Center identified as undergoing increased gentrification.\(^{38}\)

**Gut Rehab**

Arturo Chavez was one of the tenants at 3001 W Lawrence Avenue, a courtyard apartment building with 32 units. In August of 2014, new owners bought the building and immediately began evicting tenants. The plan was to gut rehab the units and turn them into upscale rentals.\(^{39}\)

“I go around in a car, looking for places,” he said. “I see ads, and I call the numbers. Some places were being remodeled. I was told they were going to rent it, but later they told me they had already leased it to family members.”\(^{40}\)

Chavez is a car mechanic who has been fighting for workers compensation since he was injured last year on the job. He used to pay $700 a month in rent. In a December 2014 interview he stated he would like to stay in Albany Park, but everything he has found is too expensive. “The rents are too high and that means people are being separated and they are moving to areas farther away.”\(^{41}\)

Chavez had to move to Humboldt Park with his partner’s family, while his former unit was renovated and put back in the market for a monthly rent of $1,525, more than double his previous rent.

For tenants like Chavez the stress and work of moving adversely affect their performance at workplace. In this cycle, housing instability and employment instability fuel each other.\(^{42}\) The effect is chronic when we take into account studies that show “evicted families continue to have higher levels of material hardship at least two years after the event.”\(^{43}\) Moreover, follow-up conversations between evicted tenants and Centro Autónomo organizers show and

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\(^{40}\) Yousef, "Rents May Be Going Up, but Residents Say They're Not Going Anywhere."

\(^{41}\) Yousef, "Rents May Be Going Up, but Residents Say They're Not Going Anywhere."


studies confirm that “even after controlling for a host of important factors, families who experience a forced move relocate to worse neighborhoods than those who move under less demanding circumstances.”

**Mass Eviction of Refugees**

Gentrification in Albany Park is also displacing refugee families that resettled in the neighborhood. In December 2015, housing organizers at Centro Autónomo were contacted by a local refugee organization that resettles newly arrived families. The organization expressed concern for the safety and security of refugee tenants in a building where they have been living for over three years. The new owner, an international luxury development company utilizing a smaller local management company, purchased the building with the intention of vacating and renovating the building, in the same vein as the case described above. This is a recurring strategy organizers see among gentrifying developers. In this case, vacating meant displacing 30 low-income working-class families from the 30 unit building, translating into the displacement of more than 150 people from their homes in Albany Park.

The low-income tenants are all mothers, fathers, children, adjusting to their new lives in the U.S. They come from diverse countries including Burma, Bhutan, Sudan, Congo, Eritrea, and Iraq, and were forced to leave their home-countries for a variety of reasons such as religious persecution, government-instilled violence, and ethnic “cleansing.” Now the tenants are once again being forced to flee their homes and leave behind friends and extended family, community centers and churches, children’s schools, and community relationships built over many years. One mother who was initially determined to stay and fight eviction in the building eventually decided to move because her 8-year-old daughter grew distressed in fear of being homeless if the company kicked them out. She related to organizers working on the case how company employees would pound on the door, tell them information in English, hand them documents in English when it was quite clear that the tenants did not speak the language. The situation was similar for most of the tenants in the building. If scared tenants did not open the door or were out of the house, papers were left outside in the hallway.

Intimidation reached new levels when company employees started illegally entering the apartments without bothering to knock. One tenant related to organizers that it was late afternoon or evening when she heard someone unlocking and opening her apartment door. She thought it was her husband. Soon enough a stranger poked his head into her room and said something akin to “wanted to see if someone was still here.” One week away from her due date of giving birth, she was terrified and felt harassed, telling the stranger that she was still living in the terms of her current lease and he was violating her rights.

For mothers, evictions can be devastating in the long term. “Even after years pass, evicted mothers are less happy, energetic, and optimistic than their peers.” It is not surprising that the hardship of losing homes at difficult socioeconomic times leads to life threatening situations. “Suicides attributed to evictions and foreclosures doubled between 2005 and 2010, years when housing costs soared.” Furthermore, “the substandard housing and

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Unsafe neighborhoods to which many evicted families must relocate can degrade a child’s health, ability to learn, and sense of self-worth.”  

Collectively the tenants demanded that the new corporate owners allow them to stay in their homes until June 30, 2016, six months after their termination of tenancy notice. This would give tenants adequate time to relocate to another property within Albany Park, for their children to finish the school year, and for families to remain in a stable home during the cold Chicago winter. Community organizations including Organized Communities Against Deportations (OCAD), Fight for 15, SOMOS Logan Square, Lawyers Committee for Better Housing (LCBH), Chicago Burmese Community, Grassroots Illinois Action, Tenants United for Justice, Right to the City, Inquilinxs Unidxs, Pan African Association, and One North Side signed on in support of the tenants demand for the June 30th move out date. The corporation consistently refused to collaborate with the tenants association, and instead focused on their plan to vacate the building. Agents of the new corporate owners harassed tenants mercilessly with intimidating letters and eviction notices nearly every week. Often these letters provided false information to the tenants. For example, tenants who still had active leases for many months ahead received 30-day notice letters, and tenants who have been paying rent consistently received 5-day notice letters. The corporation wrote letters to tenants claiming that tenants owned a lot of money when not all tenants were behind in their payments. Tenants also received eviction notices claiming court summons had been filed against them. But in reality no such court summons had been filed. Regardless, letters


like that terrorized tenants who barely speak English and are terrified of impenetrable legal institutions in the United States. Experimenting with other illegal ways to compel tenants to leave, the corporation sent letters telling tenants that if they move immediately they will receive their security deposits back but if they stay until the end of their leases then the corporation will hold on to the security deposit.

When these illegal tactics succeed, they produce further miseries. Recollecting what happened to tenants during and after displacement, an organizer said,

...many tenants live far away and are no longer able to see or come in to our community center. It was incredibly difficult for tenants to find new apartments and were discriminated against in the process. Because the tenants are low income and working class finding a home that was affordable for them was difficult, also with low credit, no credit, or bad credit this made it very difficult, and with language barriers this was another struggle. Moving was a difficult process in almost every way for the tenants of the Ainslie building and some tenants took the first place that said yes and for some this meant moving 1-2 hours away from Albany Park. For one tenant, her husband, and four children this meant moving schools with 2 months left of the school year. She is from Bhutan and was very sad that she would be leaving Albany Park where she knew and was able to speak with friends from the same area as her. She was going to have to start new and it was very difficult for her and sad for her to leave her community due to this forced displacement.

Another tenant was forced to move in a rush after months of searching for an apartment. When he finally found one he moved quickly with his wife and two children, and they moved all their boxes and things themselves. His wife was in her third month of pregnancy and after the stress of the move, carrying heavy boxes and moving so much started bleeding. They took her to the doctors and one week later she found out that she miscarried.

Taking Away People’s History

The apartment building at 4834 N Springfield is another case of eviction underway. The building is the historic birthplace for Centro Autónomo, a place where community members came to learn English and organize to defend their rights as immigrants and workers. Centro Autónomo moved out of the building in 2007, but several of its students, organizers and professors continued to live there. Some of them have lived in the building for over 16 years. A new corporation, whose motto was that they are “right at home with Urban Renewal,” acquired the building in June and since then the tenants have been asking for overdue repairs and a one-year lease. Speaking of the experience, Bárbara Suárez Galeano, one of the tenants, said,

I feel very frustrated and upset. When they sold it, there were many things that needed to be repaired so we decided to bring an inspector in to have all

those things written down, and brought them to the owner as issues we were facing in our apartment. The owner was non-responsive. The one time they communicated with us, they said, “Oh, we're not going to take care of anything that is just cosmetic repairs.” What ended up happening was that they did two repairs: they put in peep holes in our back door, and they put in a railing in the basement. All of this was done super poorly, doors were left open, everything was left dirty, and then the owner did not communicate with us further after that. So then none of the actual repairs that were code violations were addressed and we tried to contact the owner. We never got a response, and finally we got a 30-day eviction notice.

The tenants organized the Springfield Autonomous Tenants Union and demanded that the new corporate owner give the tenants a one-year lease at comparable rent. Galeano said,

They didn't even negotiate with us or talk to us about it. What they decided to do is just kick us out of our community. Kick us out of the building we've been in for a long time. Since we found out that we are being evicted, we've been organizing different sorts of actions and trying to reach out to our neighbors to talk about gentrification and talk about this process that's not just “oh some landlord bought the building and just wants to renovate it,” but it's a general trend. The corporation that bought our building has multiple buildings in the neighborhood and is carrying out the same process. They've already kicked out many families; most of them are brown families, Latinxs. They are lower income folks and they're [the corporation] bringing in higher income people without thinking about the history of this neighborhood, without thinking about the history of these families.

Albany Park’s gentrification is removing residents who tirelessly work to build community in the neighborhood. The bustling multiethnic commercial corridor of Lawrence Avenue, which is now seeing more vacant store fronts and scattered openings of upscale spots like art gallery and coffee shops, is a testament to the contribution of immigrants in revitalizing Albany Park. As many studies document, immigrants revive commerce in declining neighborhoods, provide products and services needed for particular populations, create new businesses and jobs, increase public safety and attract new customers to the neighborhood.  

Speaking more specifically to her contribution, for instance, Galeano said,

I moved in to stay here for the long term. Currently in my apartment I live with five other roommates. We're all actively involved in the community. All of us do community work. We teach classes. We do outreach work for tenants. So we are actively involved in constructing community... if I'm pushed out of the building, it's very likely that I won't be able to afford to live in Albany Park anymore. I have a very limited income and the reason I live here is because my school is here, my work is here and my community organizing work is here. I would be torn away from everything that is known to me here and everything that's family and home.

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Like thousands of other residents of Albany Park, this won't be first time Galeano would be displaced.

As an immigrant I was pushed out of my country originally because of political violence and now I'm being pushed out because of economic violence. This is not just the situation I'm going through. Many of the folks who come to the community center, many of them are students in the adult high school and all of them have been displaced through economic forces. Some of them were farm workers in their home countries and then were pushed out into this country to be undocumented workers and have made a home for themselves in this neighborhood, and again are being pushed out. It's a process of disciplining working class bodies and telling them where they can or cannot call home depending on what they can or cannot afford, which isn't based on equal opportunity.

Imagining another future, Galeano said,

I believe that if folks are going to come in through gentrification to populate this neighborhood then they should be actively involved in defending the right of tenants who want to stay in this community and not treat it as 'Oh, I have the ability to purchase this apartment or live in this apartment, therefore I don't care about what happens here.' There's a lot of cultural history. There
are a lot of roots here. They do not need to be decimated or torn from the ground for this neighborhood to progress. Investment doesn't have to mean just bringing in wealthy white people. Investment could be for and by the community and that’s the kind of conversation that we’re trying to push forward.

**Displacement in the Air**

Longtime residents who are not facing eviction are, nonetheless, under constant threat of losing their community. In 2002, Francisco moved to Albany Park from Mexico. As an undocumented immigrant, finding and maintaining work is difficult. But as he settled in, Francisco developed relationships with other community members and now feels comfortable living in Albany Park. Francisco is currently living in a three-bedroom apartment, paying a monthly rent of $850, which recently increased to $890. His neighbors in the same building complex have to pay $1,000 in rent for the same size apartment. Francisco negotiated with his local landlord to keep his rent low in exchange for maintenance duty, but the landlord did this without offering a lease. Every week Francisco cleans the stairwells and takes care of other maintenance. Bypassing this oral agreement, the landlord has tried to raise Francisco’s rent while still keeping Francisco in charge of the maintenance of the building. Although Francisco’s rent is lower than his neighbor’s, it is still high for his income level. At one point, Francisco had to work two jobs to sustain himself and his family, which is not an uncommon reality for low-income working class tenants. Recently Francisco had to commit to share his family’s housing unit with another family member to share the monthly rent and utilities cost. Francisco’s insecure housing situation is the reality for most low-income residents in Albany Park.

Francisco says Albany Park is changing. People are now starting to sub-lease parts of their units to strangers which is often the only way to afford increasing rents. Single rooms are typically rented from $300-$500. Another change in the community, Francisco said, is that small business owners who used to sell flowers, Mexican board games, and raffles across the street from the CTA Brown Line train station have disappeared and new corporate chain businesses are taking their place. Despite these changes, Francisco can’t imagine leaving Albany Park, where he is comfortable with his family and neighbors. He likes that his daughter has been attending the same elementary school for years, which is only one block away from their current home.

Francisco is highly involved in his community as an active member of Centro Autónomo. Francisco fears that if he is forced to leave, he will have to settle for a smaller apartment with only one bedroom for his entire family. Francisco says, “It is not fair to change someone’s life just because they do not have sufficient money... the current situation is forcing us to make decisions we do not want to make. We may lose everything.”

In broad terms, what we see in Albany Park is displacement in the way Chester Hartman defined it: “when lower rent units are destroyed for profit or converted to higher rent use.” There is direct displacement when occupied units are emptied, and indirect displacement when vacant buildings are taken off the market. Closer to lived reality, immigration status, race, and ethnicity play critical role beside low-income status in structuring the process of displacement. For instance, corporations manipulate the legal vulnerability of undocumented immigrants to intimidate them, while upscale spaces of

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consumption—from taquerías to Brazilian cafes—commodify those same ethnic cultures. In light of how displacement proceeds in Albany Park, we would have to say low-income residents face *differentiated* displacement based on their race, ethnicity, and legal status.

The next chapter delves deeper into how families with children, some living in the buildings as long as two decades, fought the forces of urban injustice.
Anti-Displacement Grassroots Strategies

The anti-displacement resistance at Centro Autónomo and in Chicago more generally is an amorphous urban resistance that grew over time through trial and error, inventions and modifications, mimicry and mutations, and now works along multiple fronts, from tracking gentrification and displacement to barrio organizing to archiving people’s stories to transformative policy formulation to intracity solidarity projects. The composition of the anti-displacement resistance continues to vary—as organizers move between projects, new community members join, move away or are displaced, interns and volunteers change, and citywide coalitions form, dissolve, and re-form. The organizing trajectory of the anti-displacement resistance along multiple fronts, therefore, differs depending on political orientations, organizational capacities, strength of base, personal dispositions, and the resonance of these diverse actors coming together around a collectively decided set of practices.

In reflecting on the anti-displacement resistance documented here, I was drawn to the theme of insurgent practices that runs through the works of Leonie Sandercock, James Holston, and Faranak Miraftab. Sandercock argues that “the official, or modernist, version of planning history is the story of planning by and through the state, part of a tradition of city and nation building. But alterative traditions of planning have always existed out the state and sometimes in opposition to it.”⁵¹ These outside-the-frame and oppositional planning histories are insurgent planning histories which redefine the boundaries of planning and make visible the underlying power dynamic in planning. James Holston contributes to this by emphasizing insurgent forms “found both in organized grassroots mobilizations and in everyday practices that, in different ways, empower, parody, derail, or subvert state agendas.”⁵² These practices, which he calls insurgent citizenship, challenges what it means to be a citizen of a modern state. Extending this theoretical framework, Faranak Miraftab situates her work in the context of post-colonial global south and looks at insurgent planning practices “that challenge the inequitable specifics of neoliberal governance operating through inclusion.”⁵³ In Albany Park, these three interconnected lines of work came together in a complicated way. Majority of the people Centro Autónomo works with were displaced from the post-colonial global south. In a modern city like Chicago that celebrates cultural inclusivity, many of these bodies do not have access to the privilege of modern citizenship. Nonetheless, in their struggle against displacement other bodies, who have access to citizenship, joined them in solidarity to challenge the specifics of housing injustice in a neoliberal political economy where states and corporations work hand in hand to restructure urban spaces for generating surplus. We have here the interlocking of multiple times—the time of the modern state, the time of post-colonial displaced subjects, the time of the modern privileged citizen, the time of bodies marked with race, ethnicity,

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and class, and the time of corporate developers. I study the anti-displacement resistance appearing out of these times and argue that these practices are insurgent planning.

There are two reasons why I make this claim: first, it is impossible to locate any particular person or organization at the core of the anti-displacement resistance. Instead, the anti-gentrification resistance has to be seen as a bundle of practices that a porous collective embodies with context-specific improvisations. This aligns with Miraftab’s claim that there are no insurgent planners, but only insurgent planning practices that, though varying in textures, can be grasped in form.

Second, the anti-displacement resistance in Chicago embodies the themes and motifs that characterize insurgent planning, namely, “transgression, counter-hegemony, and imagination.”54 The work of explicitly anti-capitalist grassroots organizations like Centro Autónomo, SOMOS Logan Square, Citizens United Against Foreclosure and Evictions and others—all of them working under the umbrella of anti-displacement resistance—challenges the neoliberal housing marketplace that simultaneously displaces people for profit and celebrates public participation in the making of affordable housing. The actors resisting displacement historicize their struggles for decent housing, tell stories about their experiences with evictions and foreclosures, recollect the (dis)investments of state and real estate actors, and, in effect, produce what Sandercock calls insurgent historiographies that reveal gentrification as infrastructural warfare against the working class.

The hegemonic notion of inclusivity translates to affordability in the housing discourse. In the introduction of Chicago’s 5 years housing plan, Rahm Emanuel articulates the plan for an inclusive Chicago that has affordable housing for all. The anti-gentrification resistance challenges and points out the unaffordability of affordability in Chicago. In doing so, they challenge the material inequalities that thrive under the symbolic manifestation of inclusivity. In other words, insurgent planning, in the texture of anti-displacement resistance, challenges ordinary notions of supply/demand and affordability in the housing market and thereby creates spaces of counter-hegemonic inquiries. In exercising transgressive imagination, the anti-gentrification actors fluidly move across invited/invented spaces, near/far geographies, reconfiguring the relations between these spaces, and inventing alien spaces—spaces not officially recognized, encouraged or supported—in their flight paths in and out of state-and-market territories.

In the following section, I will highlight five critical aspects of this insurgent planning that contests displacement and builds alternatives in Albany Park, Chicago.

**SLOWING DOWN EVICTIONS**

Since the last two years, it has become predictable to a scary degree that whenever an LLC buys a property in Albany Park, the result is this: eviction and displacement of existing tenants. In property after property, hundreds of them, the previous chapter showcased a

corporate pattern that is now all too familiar. The company takes out a loan to buy the building, evicts all tenants, rehabs the units, and markets those units at double or triple the price. When not resisted, the whole process can take about 6-8 months. Contemporary legal, financial, administrative, and construction technologies have collapsed time in favor of dispossession. The speed at which accumulation by dispossession happens makes it invisible to the untrained eye. To resist displacement translates then to resisting neoliberalism’s velocity, mobility, fluidity.

The anti-displacement resistance’s neighborhood organizing against eviction is about obstructing this smooth functioning of dispossession. Delaying the process of eviction forces developers to lose money, because they end up having to pay back the loans with profits from other buildings. The longer the resistance can delay profits by holding space at the organized buildings, the more money developers lose. In rare cases, the loss can reach such a critical point that developers agree to retract their eviction notices. This battle of holding space against collapsing time is carried out through interlocking maneuvers that carefully manipulate what Faranak Miraftab calls invited and invented spaces of insurgent citizenship.

To use invited spaces is to show up and manipulate existing legal, administrative, and participatory structures to seek redress for grievances. When invited spaces are taken as end in themselves, as is the case with NGOs and progressive civil society groups, selected voices from among the oppressed are lifted up as “authentic” representatives, and neoliberal governance collects accolade for securing inclusivity and visibility of the marginalized. Institutionalized within hierarchical processes, invited spaces are established and maintained by dominant political forces. In a way, invited spaces are the spatial manifestation of hegemonic order and require, if not the erasure, at least the suppression of invented spaces to retain its legitimacy.

On the other hand, invented spaces are alien spaces located in relation to familiar invited spaces. Their foreignness is the result of transgressive imaginations that think outside the legal and political boundaries of existing social relations. Invented spaces are extremely specific to localities and agency of the bodies that produce them. Almost invariably, invented spaces are used in relation to invited spaces to push the processes within invited spaces in transformative directions. As such invented spaces are not founded on erasure, but rather on a principle of complementarity.

Given their specificity, invented spaces cannot be institutionalized and are produced as discontinuous spatiotemporal processes. The play between invited and invented spaces is visible in the tenant unions I document in the anti-gentrification resistance. In Chicago, conventional tenant unions exist to disseminate information about tenants rights and in some cases helping tenants navigate legal processes related to tenancy in a court of law. Forming tenants union does not offer any collective bargaining rights for the tenants involved. Tenant unions as NGOs nested under neoliberal governance, therefore, can operate as invited spaces of citizenship. However, the anti-gentrification resistance deploys the conventional tenant union model but inseminates it with practices that destabilize the conventional operations of tenant unions.
The practices of the anti-displacement resistance try to get around the unjust dead ends inscribed into existing legal structures, no matter how participatory, inviting and inclusive they are claimed to be, by pointing out illegal landlord retaliation, interrupting rehab work, resisting eviction, targeting finance, and creating negative marketing. In the process of inventing these practices, previously disconnected individuals also learn to form collectives, share skills, exchange experiences, and produce collective courage to voice demands that may be outside the domains of contemporary legality.

Under the broad umbrella of Autonomous Tenants Union, the Centro Autónico facilitated the formation of Ainslie Tenants Union (ATU) and Springfield Autonomous Tenants Union (SATU) in Albany Park. The story of SATU is linked with one of the leading gentrifiers in Chicago’s north side working class neighborhood, Barnett Capital LLC. This limited liability corporation purchased two properties in Albany Park, one with 16 apartments and three commercial spaces, and one with three apartments, the latter was discussed in the previous chapter. They evicted tenants from the 16-unit building and renovated the building. When they wanted to get rid of the tenants in the 3-unit buildings, the tenants, who are part of Centro Autónico, formed a union targeting Barnett Capital LLC and other speculators who displace residents. A series of actions—leafletting, call-ins, picketing, protests—were planned to challenge the corporate gentrifiers. The tenants demanded a 1-year lease as well as the overdue structural repairs that violate building code.

One of SATU’s protests was picketing Barnett Capital’s office. Other organizations such as Northside Action for Justice, Somos Logan Square, and many others showed up in solidarity. When the corporation refused to meet with the tenants in person, the protesters demonstrated by singing “We Say No, Don’t Evict, We Won’t Go” in the tune of “Let it Snow” to the gentrifiers. This was followed by a call in campaign and petition signing. The union provided people with call-in scripts and made dozens of coordinated calls and produced over 600 petitions signatures. Another demonstration in November was organized in front of the Springfield house. Street side signs and demonstrations were also planned throughout this period. The Ainslie Tenants Union similarly organized to challenge the developer that wanted to evict them. Additionally, in their case they called 311 to report poor conditions in their units. Tenants in these unions also began collaborating with organizations of lawyers in figuring out their legal situation. In case of another 6-unit building, tenants collectively demanded repairs and issued rent reduction letters.

Tenants unions, as invented spaces where conversations reveal the injustice of contemporary laws, delegitimize the role of elected officials and established laws in mediating evictions and foreclosures. There are nifty specifics in housing laws which can be deployed against gentrifying developers. For example, forming a tenant union ahead of receiving a 30 days notice allows tenants to document that notice of eviction may be retaliatory. In such a case, the site of the tenant meeting becomes an invented space which is deployed in the invited spaces of legality, courts of law, to slow the process of eviction, sometimes as long as a year. Even if this use of invented space does not always stop evictions or slow it to a great extent, it makes the eviction process costlier for developers.

Reinventing tenants unions as sites of subversive practices transforms them from the conventional space where people get to know their rights to places where people are empowered to enforce their housing rights. For example, in many cases corporate developers conduct rehab work while tenants are still living in the building. Usually the time

58 These notices are legal, in the sense that the landlord has simply chosen to not renew the lease. However, tenants can document a legally protected action such as attending a tenant meeting before any notice of eviction is given, and then claim that the eviction is retaliatory, which contests the legality of the eviction notice.
permits aren't posted and work is being done at illegal hours. It might also be that they're doing work they don't have permits for. In such cases, tenant union members make 311 calls, reporting this illegal work. If developers fail the inspection, they have to stop construction work until new permits are issued. Inspection calls can result in fines and work delays lasting months. In the case of poor housing conditions in a tenant’s building, 311 calls can trigger a building court case, another way to slow down time for gentrifying developers.

Once an eviction is filed, if the tenant has an attorney, the process of eviction itself can be lengthened. Tenants’ unions are spaces where knowledge about loopholes are shared. Tenants can choose to not answer the door if they are not expecting anyone. The Sheriff needs to attempt to serve the tenant in person twice. The third time they can mail the tenant’s summons. If a tenant dodges both summons attempts, it usually extends the process by a month. Tenants are legally entitled to a 1-week continuance to find a lawyer. Besides, any tenant can file a Jury Demand, which moves their courtroom and extends the process by an additional 3-4 weeks. Once tenants get a conviction, tenants can get a couple of weeks to move. It is possible to track the eviction schedule of the sheriff on the official Cook County website and plan to live in the unit accordingly.59

As tenants unions formed under Centro Autónomo brought together actors with a multiplicity of knowledges, organizers and tenants learned how to find out which financial institutions hold the mortgages for any of the buildings a developer owns and brainstormed ways to act on this knowledge.60 A straightforward route was that once the tenant union knew who's investing in the gentrifying developer, they pressured them directly to divest. In July 2015, Latinx, Black, and White community members of Albany Park carried out a series of demonstrations outside some of the major banks in Chicago's financial district.61 The action was linked to the We Are the Faces of Eviction national campaign. Community members rallied outside Citibank and then moved from bank to bank in a caravan that protested evictions and foreclosures in their community.

59 Eviction schedules can be tracked here: http://www.cookcountysheriff.com/courtservices/CourtServices_EvictionSchedule.html. The "District#" is the last 3 digits of the zip code.

60 This can be done through the online search engine available in the Cook County Recorder of Deeds website and looking for the bank listed next to 'Mortgage' or 'Assignment' documents. By reading the mortgage documents online tenants can find out how much money the mortgage is for, when it's due, and the name and office address of the loan officer.

Centro Autónomo, Communities United Against Foreclosure and Evictions, and SOMOS Logan Square came together to organize this. At each bank, a spokesperson from a family facing eviction by that bank shared their story, demanding that the bank negotiates with the family to find an option to keep them in their home. Various media outlets covered this event and broadcasted the speakers. The messages of the community members rang loud and clear as Vicky Morales said, “Evictions are not justice,” and Suzette Ancheta ended saying, “I am the face of eviction, we’re still here, and we aren’t leaving.”

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In the case documented, tenant unions also produced negative marketing through picket lines, press conferences, call-in days, etc. This is where tenant unions exercised a great extent of creativity and playfulness. While brainstorming ideas, one organizer shared that once he organized “with a group of tenants who would post fake ads for their apartments on craigslist, including pictures of rats and shit like that. I’m not sure how effective it was, but it was hilarious, easy.” The anti-displacement resistance organized a number of negative marketing actions since summer 2014. When it came to press conferences, tenant unions provided writing workshops where community members wrote housing narratives to share with the public.

While practices within tenant unions are manipulating existing structures to delay eviction processes, the anti-displacement resistance is also connecting tenants’ unions to transformative policy formulation within invited spaces. One front of the anti-gentrification resistance contributes to city and ward level policy formulation. The two primary policies the coalition is focusing on rent control and 35th Ward zoning ordinance. As rent control is a city-level policy, the work on this front is moving slowly as different groups are conducting research and having conversations among their base about the feasibility of rent control in Chicago’s political terrain. For Centro Autónomo these preliminary conversations meant
producing a well-researched report about evictions and displacement in Albany Park. The production of this report gives weight to rent control can as a tactically significant tool.

The 35th Ward zoning ordinance is another story. Carlos Rosa of the 35th Ward drafted CDZD35, a so-called community driven zoning and development plan. The new zoning changes that have been proposed allow for the building of large upscale luxury buildings. The proposals are at the stage where they have to go through a public participation process where community organizations and community members get to share their input. However, the draft gives no authority to community organizations and leaves the final result at the discretion of policy makers who work closely with developers. The anti-gentrification resistance, knowing full well that their input will bear no authority in this participatory sphere, is engaging this arena to place transformative policy ideas on the table.

As of now, Centro Autónomo’s counter proposals are: all new development that requires a zoning change in the 35th ward should have on-site 10 percent affordable housing with a 30 percent AMI or lower but the units must be community controlled units under a mutual housing association or a housing coalition that will manage these units for the 35th ward. Alternatively, Centro Autónomo also proposed that 100 percent of rental units on the new

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development need to belong to tenants’ unions and 30 percent of those units needs to be affordable on-site at 30 percent AMI or lower. Seeing through the smokescreen of inclusive public participation, the anti-displacement resistance’s invented practices lay bare neoliberal injustices within invited spaces of citizenship.

**TRACKING GENTRIFICATION IN REAL TIME**

In our early meetings during summer, the collective wanted to track gentrification in Albany Park by focusing on specific developers. The idea came from *Occupy Our Homes Atlanta* and *The Right to the City Alliance Homes For All Campaign’s* reports on nationwide rental housing trends. While some of those reports focused on Blackstone, a multinational private equity firm, that bought over 1,000 properties in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area and Los Angeles, other reports documented the corporate shift towards securitized rental units in the post-foreclosure housing market. The collective considered producing a report detailing the operations of a comparable corporate developer in Albany Park. Our first target was Silver Properties, a real estate investment and management company, which in our last count had acquired around 40 properties in Albany Park. However, while tracking down these properties through Internet and archival research at the County Recorder of Deeds office, the collective realized that hundreds of other Albany Park buildings were falling into corporate hands.

Since the collective had the capacity to work on more than 40 properties, they expanded their search to all corporate transactions taking place in Albany Park. Within the collective, members shared skills and self-trained to develop a comprehensive database of corporate transactions by parsing data from three major sources: 1) the County Recorder of Deeds, 2) property websites such as Zillow and Realtytrac, and 3) the Lawyers’ Committee for Better Housing’s (LCBH) foreclosure database.64

The comprehensive property transaction database is updated every two weeks, so that the collective can be on the pulse of ownership changes in Albany Park.65 Once the data is collected, members map all properties and canvass them based on the turf model, a canvassing arrangement we will discuss soon. During summer organizers canvassed every property that was changing hands, but once the full-time interns left and the collective had less labor available, they focused on canvassing only LLC-owned properties.

Prior to the formation of this database, Centro Autónomo found out about evictions via word-of-mouth, a process that usually allowed very little room for preemptive organizing. Organizers would usually find themselves facing a crisis scenario with little to no time for building collective consciousness leading to well-organized anti-eviction resistance. Depending on word-of-mouth also meant that Centro Autónomo connected to tenant struggles only when politically conscious tenants brought their cases to Centro Autónomo.

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64 The third source was not available to the collective earlier. Through their citywide coalition work, they gained access to Lawyers Committee for Better Housing’s foreclosure database.

65 Through this work some of the organizers discovered, long before their landlord contacted them, that the house in which many of the organizers and researchers were living in had been sold off to a gentrifying developer.
Several other cases of evictions were passing under the radar. Organizers and tenant leaders at Centro Autónomo often shared stories about how displacement happens without any of them even realizing it. One of them said, “at the same time that we were organizing against two mass evictions, another one happened right in front of our eyes: the mass eviction happened on the route I take to walk work everyday!”66 The data collection from Recorder of Deeds was novel in the way it sharpened the vision of Centro Autónomo organizers and tenant leaders. They are now able to track, in real time, the real estate changes in Albany Park.

There’s also significant differences between property transaction data sources. The websites like RealtyTrac that list recently sold or on sale properties are not very reliable. They are either extremely delayed in recording the information or they are only recording transactions that happen on the open market, that is, when the seller advertises that the property is on sale. The collective found many buildings that were sold off the market, without any listing that declared them to be for sale. The collective wanted to get around this drawback of relying only on online listing and that’s another reason why they opted for using County Recorder of Deeds data. Interestingly, the Recorder of Deeds has a different search engine in their physical computers in the building downtown. This search engine, unlike the one available online, allows for more precise searching options which allowed us to pin down exact properties by neighborhoods. This was a discovery of great delight for all of us.

As the database grew, the collective developed well-defined roles in order to manage, update, and produce analysis from the property transaction database. A complete flowchart of this process is below. Currently, there are 4 roles: data collector (DC), data processor (DP), data mapper (DM), and canvasser (C). A typical iteration of the data flow would be as follows: DC extracts Albany Park data from all three data sources, and shares the up-to-date extracted PINs with the DP. The DP updates the County Recorder of Deeds, Foreclosure, and Property Listings databases accordingly, and collects further information on each transaction, such as new owners, former owners, address, date of exchange etc. The DP then notifies the DM about these changes. The DM extracts the latest data sets with detailed information for each PIN, and maps them on the turf map. The DM also eliminates former map layers in the process and then notifies the C that new canvassing maps are ready. Based on the turf model, the C canvasses every week to collect information about each property and respective tenants. The C then submits all the information collected through an online form which is integrated with the DP’s database. All the analysis is produced from the DP’s database as it integrates and holds all the layers of information collected on each property, tenant, and owner. Centro Autónomo is not a think tank so the data collected and the analysis carried out is for the purpose of a political objective, namely, to organize communities against gentrification in Albany Park.

Making gentrification numerically legible only give us partial handle on the process. The anti-gentrification resistance has to connect with the people that suffer the adverse effects of gentrification. That is why, door to door canvassing is a critical part of anti-gentrification resistance work. This is where canvassers develop personal contact with community members, engage them in conversations about displacement in Albany Park, learn their stories, and encourage them to organize with other community members. At the same time, canvassers verify the result of each LLC property acquisition through this door to door knocking method. All this compounds to another layer of legibility in the documentation of gentrification—the stories that make up and result from displacement by gentrification.

Working within a 3 square miles area makes this door to door verification feasible. In some cases, canvassers discover properties that have been vacated, renovated, and put back into market. In other cases, canvassers find tenants refusing to move or undergoing eviction or suffering poor housing conditions. Depending on current conditions, organizers and volunteers engage tenants differently. Before going canvassing, canvassers are also trained in the legal rights and responsibilities of renters in Chicago.

In the early stages, organizers canvassed in a flexible way. One canvasser would print out all the addresses and then each canvasser would make her own route. Collectively, they would make sure to hit every property by personally communicating about each other’s progress. Sometimes that meant walking as far as 30 minutes from our base of operation. Sometimes they ended up going to the same house twice. After a few months, they wanted to experiment with creating a turf model for canvassing. The turf model comes out of understanding neighborhoods as sites of rebellion. In drawing the lines of their own turfs, the anti-displacement resistance refuses the City of Chicago approved boundaries. They
then weave together these turfs to create a network of people’s neighborhoods. The anti-gentrification organizing happens in this reworked terrain.

FIG: Turfs for three organizers with different colors symbolizing different types of properties

The turf model allows us to break up Albany Park into specific turfs, each containing 3-4 blocks. Every canvasser is assigned a turf based on her home location, ease of accessibility, and any other relevant factor. That canvasser then has the responsibility to canvass only those few blocks every two weeks when the data is updated. The turf model provided more organization to our canvassing and minimized the time and labor spent on each canvassing round. It also reduced the possibility of double knocking a house. At the same time, it created an opportunity for organizers to become regular faces in their turf. Neighbors began to recognize organizers more easily and developed trust that’s impossible to grow when someone random comes around asking about housing. Usually, two people, at least one Spanish-speaker, canvass together. The bi-weekly canvassing is supplemented with informal walk-arounds, where members of the anti-gentrification resistance choose specific areas and walk around to notice signs of critical changes. For example, expensive food shops, hookah bars, coffee shops, vacant shops, large trash containers that signify mass evictions, new constructions etc. Members take photos and videos of these changes and bring them into organizing conversations in follow-up meetings. Our data collection methodology has now spread to other neighborhoods as organizations in the citywide anti-gentrification coalition wanted to develop similar sets of actionable intelligence about their areas. The coalition is currently working on creating an integrated data architecture that will hold information from all the participating neighborhoods.
BUILDING CITYWIDE POWER

The anti-gentrification resistance works with "living urbanities" which are "the plural worlds and multiple stories of irreducible inhabitants whose lives are characterized by relations, expectations, feelings, reminiscences, bodies, voices and histories..."67 The task of such insurgent planning, therefore, is more than collecting qualitative samples to prove the case of displacement. The task of such insurgent planning extends to producing encounters among multiple subjectivities in hopes to highlight the intersectionality of struggles and make possible new subjectivities capable of history making. To this end, the anti-gentrification resistance organized events where different people came together to share what gentrification and displacement looks like from their unique perspectives.

A number of different organizations—SOMOS Logan Square, Communities United Against Foreclosure and Evictions, Grassroots Illinois Action–Humboldt, Centro Autónomo, ONE Northside, Lawyers Committee for Better Housing, Pilsen Alliance, Socialist Party—held anti-gentrification community forums. The aim of these bilingual forums was to build relationships among the different groups affected by gentrification and, consequently, build a base of affected populations, tenants and homeowners. The stories in these forums went in diverse directions: tenants who are facing unaffordable rent hikes, homeowners who don’t want to see drastic changes in the neighborhood, and many who are afraid of being displaced or want to do something about displacement.

Between August and December 2015, the coalition hosted three forums where organizers and community member shared their experiences. The conversations hosted in these forums connected housing struggle with issues of wage theft, wage cuts, health cost and education. From multiple stories, participants moved on to discuss multiple strategies for resisting gentrification: threatening developers by “giving them a lot shit” if they come into the neighborhood, “poking the alderman in the eye” and getting local politicians involved in resisting developers, and formulating collective bargaining strategies through tenant unions. Forums were spaces where tenant leaders spoke about their stories of previous struggles and victories around their housing, leading to a sense of collective courage and power.

The first of these forums, held in October, was publicized as a “Citywide Tenants Meeting where renters can share experiences of struggles, victories, and mutual issues, and get unified around bigger citywide campaigns.” During the meeting, participants renamed themselves as the “No Nos Moveran Community Forum.” Connecting general discontent regarding gentrification with specific cases like that of Orlinda Mejia was a critical turning moment in this forum. Orlinda was threatened with illegal eviction from her Logan Square home. She is a mother of 8 and was living in a 3-bedroom apartment when the building went into foreclosure. Under Chicago foreclosure law, the Bank must offer such tenants either an annual lease at the same rent, or $10,600 to move. In this case, the Bank was Fannie Mae, and their management company, Real Property Management, refused to offer her either. Instead, they offered her $5,000 to move in 30 days. Orlinda, along with Centro Autónomo and Somos, was planning a caravan to protest this and shared her story in the community forum. At the caravan action, many of the community forum participants showed up in solidarity with Orlinda. The caravan action, followed up by phone call campaign, compelled the property management to agree to give Orlinda the $10,600 relocation fee and 30 days to vacate the unit. Though minutely, the coming together of diverse urban dwellers were able to make an impression on the tide of gentrification.
In the second community forum, held in November, several community members from Logan Square shared stories of housing struggles as they live through gentrification. They talked about organizing a multi-unit building against M Fishman and Co., which resulted in a court settlement. They also successfully organized a tenants union in an SRO building that was recently sold. At the same time, they shared the developing story of a 80+ unit property where the Latinx residents decreased from 80% to 20% as they were pushed out. The participants of the community forum collectively decided to canvass this property and invite current tenants to a "Know Your Rights" training planned for that weekend.

Aside from the forums, the anti-gentrification resistance also employed multimedia to remember the stories of displacement. Centro Autónomo organized two different storytelling projects: *We Are the Faces of Eviction* and *No Displacement*.

*We Are the Faces of Eviction* is a national social media campaign launched in July 2015 by the Fannie/Freddie 99 National Housing Coalition. The campaign site includes stories, quotes, and pictures of hundreds of families still facing eviction in the nation.68 For example, Albany Park community members Suzette Ancheta, a 65 year old woman facing eviction from Freddie Mac, and the Morales family, a working-class immigrant family facing eviction from Citibank, shared their stories through this project. The launching of this project was connected to a broader action against the banks that are evicting and foreclosing on people.

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In January 2016, Centro Autónomo started developing another multimedia storytelling project titled *No Displacement* that documents the stories of gentrification in Albany Park. Although the site is currently under construction and the production of stories is underway, this project highlights the multimedia storytelling work of the anti-gentrification resistance. The project is aimed at not only producing stories of suffering displacement, but emphasising why people love their homes and how they embrace their neighborhoods as sites of resistance. The stories are then not just about displacement but also about placement. In a port-of-entry neighborhood through which immigrants pass in thousands, narrating stories of (dis)placement works to produce more place-based consciousness among members of the collective. Working with volunteers, interns, and organizers, community members themselves are co-producing the stories in this project. Sites where exploitation and domination are seen as the norm are in this way reappropriated as sites where people take a stand for collective liberation.

Such storytelling, within insurgent planning is critical, because it lays bare the violent propensities and intensities of accumulation by dispossession, it produces a world not necessarily liberated, emancipated, but a world where capitalist hegemony is weaker, the common sense that “we are all in this together” is made uncommon — we realize that some of us are being coerced and not all of us are in this together, that some of us are more interested in our pursuit of surplus at the cost of the rest of us. Partially, then, the result of insurgent storytelling is the emergence of a world where structures of subordination are more visible and less centered.

**SOLIDARITY COALITION BUILDING**

Neoliberal capitalism is meticulously organized. It’s apparent invincibility arises from its institutionally wide and bodily deep arrangements. To counter its hegemony, social movements require the production of counter-hegemonic institutions, rationalities, bodies. Therefore, looking at anti-gentrification resistance as insurgent planning with discontinuous bundles of practices poses a question that haunts our political imagination today: can we develop a temporal and spatial continuity within and among social movements? In that sense, we need to inquire as to how collectives like Centro Autónomo practicing insurgent planning do not merely use invited/invented spaces, narrate and make displacement legible to disrupt and agitate, but also to create a continuity that outlives the novelty of the interruption they produce.

The anti-gentrification resistance attempts to build continuity within itself by training new members and keeping existing members up to date with new skills, and then connects the collective to other struggles. This latter step is aimed at creating continuity among different social movements.

Training and retraining community members are the sites where the production of counter-hegemony takes place. The anti-gentrification resistance’s work in designing and hosting training modules on specific topics such as tenant organizing, nonviolent direct action, data collection and so on points to the less discontinuous production of counter-hegemony. These
training sites became spaces of education and empowerment for community members, organizers, and volunteers. For example, the nonviolent direct action training covered the history and context of mass nonviolent direct action, the practical meaning of nonviolent direct action, and steps for campaign planning. Tenant organizing training empowered tenant leaders in their day to day canvassing and organizing roles. Tenants rights trainings strengthened the knowledge base of members. Trainings with the Lawyers Committee for Better Housing gave members of the collective in-depth understanding of the legal terrain. Events like TIF Illumination Project workshop, run by Tom Tresser, explained the basics of TIFs in 33rd and 39th wards.

Connecting an empowered collective to other struggles in the city is the next step in the anti-gentrification resistance. Centro Autónomo’s work with Somos Logan Square, Right to the City Alliance, Organized Communities Against Deportation, and others are examples of this next step. Solidarity across neighborhoods and localities take many forms. In some cases, people go canvassing together. At other times, people organize actions and show up for protests.

In solidarity with SOMOS and CUAFE, organizers canvassed the Blackstone properties in Logan Square. While canvassing they usually heard stories about rent going up by $500 and lack of maintenance in the houses. The canvassing led to connecting with tenants who have been evicted by Invitation Homes, some of these tenants came to follow up meetings with members of the anti-gentrification collective to share their eviction experiences. Eventually, SOMOS organized with tenants in Invitation Homes. The group targeted financial investors such as Citibank and Bank of America, banks responsible for foreclosing many of the buildings that this company is now renting out. Tenants delivered notice to Invitations Homes about their apartment conditions and to allow them to lower their rent as is their legal right.

SOMOS Logan Square also organized protests against progressive Alderman Moreno, who claims to support affordable housing. Supporting higher density transit oriented development, Moreno went on record saying that “Those who advocate for affordable housing and don’t advocate for density—they don’t get [affordable housing]. They’re shooting themselves in the foot.” SOMOS argued that upzoning and luxury development do not create affordable housing for the working-class and that instead such development increases housing prices. 

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month for studios and 2 bedrooms. Moreover, they argued that the celebrated 10 percent on-site affordable housing is only affordable for families making 60 percent of the AMI, which is $44,000 per year for a family of 4. This is out of reach for people who actually require affordable housing. The protests pointed out that despite claiming to be progressive Moreno actually prioritizes the interest of developers over community voices. Around the same time, Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel proposed a bill that would take control over zoning away from local Alderman for ‘transit-oriented’ developments, and give it to a Mayor-appointed administration instead. While such a proposal would take away zoning power from anti-working class alderman like Moreno, it would also make progressive aldermen like Waguespack and Rosa to lose control over zoning, their tool for promoting affordable housing. The dynamics of local politics in this manner is contradictory. SOMOS organized against passing that citywide bill. Soon after SOMOS hosted a collective prayer and direct action to demand affordable housing in Logan Square. As construction cranes kept working, the action brought picket lines, news coverage of the deepening unaffordability in the area. Centro Autónomo members, well versed in anti-gentrification insurgent planning, worked in solidarity to realize these efforts.

Another action was regarding the Lathrop Homes. Mayor Rahm pushed to privatize the 1,000 units of public housing there. Lathrop leaders called on their allies—Centro Autónomo and SOMOS included—for an “Interfaith Call to Action” rally at the office of Rahm Emanuel to demand that the Mayor preserve and replace public housing units at Lathrop Homes and throughout the city. A few weeks later, the group followed up with another action when the developers and the local Aldermen announced a presentation of the Lathrop Master Plan to the community. The community denounced the gross mis-priority that such plans reveal.

Centro Autónomo also worked in solidarity with Organized Communities Against Deportation (OCAD). As part of the National Week of Action to End Detention, Centro Autónomo joined with #Not1More Campaign, the Detention Watch Network, We Belong Together, OCAD, Chicago Teachers Unions, Undocumented Students and Allies at IIT Families For Freedom and others to march against detention in July 2015. The coalition rallied in front of the ICE field office in Chicago and hosted a speak out event. Another protest was organized in October 2015 to challenge the detention and possible deportation of Manuel Roman and Maria. Manuel has been in the US since he was 16 years old and is a father of 2 children.


For over a year now, ICE has detained Manuel. Maria fled Honduras with her children to escape from violence and economic instability. She formed a new community in Albany Park. In the eyes of the immigration court, however, she and her family are considered "recent immigrants" who can be deported. In February 2016, Centro participated in another protest organized by OCAD in front of ICE Field Office. While some protesters sat atop ladders and chain locked their hands to block traffic, others read a declaration demanding the end of raids and deportations inside the office building.

Solidarity work with different groups makes vivid the intersectionality of housing, immigration, work, healthcare, and education struggles. For example, many community members who are under the threat of deportation are also faced with the threat of eviction. In fact, this overlapping of oppression in their lives makes them especially vulnerable to both state and private forces that work to deport them from the country or displace them from their homes. The many meetings and conversations that happened in the coming together of such struggles also led Centro Autónomo to work with the Healthy Communities Cook County-HC3 that advocates for low cost healthcare for uninsured population, including undocumented immigrants.

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FIG: Solidarity coalition with Organized Communities Against Deportation
Through these solidarity projects, the anti-displacement resistance connected with diverse groups across the city, gradually forming a citywide coalition. The coalition is a space where resources and experiences are shared through trainings, workshops, and roundtables. Different groups in the coalition have different capacities and sharing resources led to furthering the common struggle against displacement along multiple fronts. None of the coalition members made any city level changes before through their work, so the coalition also empowered everyone to envision a citywide transformation. Combined work of the coalition translates to commitment which respects the diversity of strategies that groups employ. Although Centro Autónomo is forming a citywide coalition, they are still working independently. At times they might pause or slow down their independent projects to work towards the broader coalition objective, but that is worth it. Different projects require different skills and strategies and once collectives have their goals they decide which groups can partner up to form sub-groups. So militant groups do not need to be blunted and reformist groups do not need to be marginalized. This gives multiple edges to the coalition, all of them moving towards a broader level transformation, first Chicago and then a national scale intervention, something that will connect to Right to the City coalition. Following that line of work, Centro Autónomo is co-organizing with Right to the City Alliance a weekend retreat for tenants rights organizers across the nation. In this retreat, organizers will dialogue in person to create a social movement against the mass displacement by gentrification.

COMMUNITY CONTROLLED ASSETS

Social movements against racism, sexism, classism in the U.S. fall into the trap of accepting inclusion into existing systems of power as liberation. As inclusion hardly ever upsets structures of subordination, the maintenance crew of the status quo—politicians, lawyers, police forces and so on—respond to social movements by providing agitated groups seats at the table of oppression, “where the US Border Patrol is 54 percent Latino/a, where the percentage of nonwhite police officers working in US law enforcement has almost doubled from 1987 to 2013, and where the US Army is simultaneously one of the most racially integrated and oppressive institutions in the world.”80 While conservatives accept inequalities as natural, liberals and progressives challenge inequality strictly within the parameters of neoliberal politics. It then falls on radical political collectives to experiment with alternatives that, if working, can be more broadly implemented across society. That is why alongside challenging or mitigating the immediate effects of gentrification, members of the anti-gentrification resistance initiated alternative spaces and programs in the interstices of a neoliberal city. The community land trust and the community garden are two such projects.

The Casas del Pueblo community land trust was started with 70 families facing foreclosure and eviction. The central idea is to provide affordable housing in perpetuity to low income renters in the area. The collective has one building operating within its land trust tenets and

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is planning for ways to expand. The initial idea was to get donations from banks that have foreclosed properties under them, properties that are places of vandalism, crime, and blight. So far financial institutions have not collaborated with the collective. In the coming year, the collective plans to propose donations of the vacant buildings in the neighborhood to the land trust.

Centro Autónomo’s community garden is taking off soon. The inspiration came from the majority of Centro’s community members who are first generation immigrants. They worked the land in their countries of origin. In the community garden, they will use their skills to produce food for themselves but also share many of their skills with their children. It is also a space where locals and immigrants will work together. A vacant lot, that belongs to the Chicago Park District, has been selected as the space of this community garden.

These experiments do not come with guarantee and are inevitably affected by the political economy in which they are immersed. The local government so far has not worked in collaboration with the collective to promote the community land trust. The funds for the community garden are still lower than required. Nonetheless, the sites where planning for land trust and community garden unfold are themselves sites of empowerment, creativity, and dreams. Organizing for a community land trust compels tenants to rethink private property ownership and imagine collective ownership of land. In community garden work, community members get to experiment with collective maintenance of a plot of land. The members who work to make possible these spaces draw inspiration from these spaces to

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continue struggling against gentrification in other sites. These interstitial alternatives give hints of a history that is unfinished, a history still in the making in Albany Park.
Conclusion

Tenant unions slow down evictions, and solidarity is their cornerstone. Organizers and tenants attend meetings, share stories, and debate how to hold corporations and financial institutions accountable. They show up to direct actions with shared purpose. Through these actions, tenants within the same building shared resources including translation, relocating, and hosting meetings. Their solidarity is built through shared action, not necessarily through a human connection based on essentialized ethnic and class identities. Solidarity is not as simple as merely seeing the other’s pain. Many tenants who, despite story sharing and feeling sad for each other, chose to not fight displacement. If solidarity is not to be misunderstood for only empathy, tenants and organizers have to move beyond articulating pain. They must devise practices that imagine the potential of contesting displacement and building alternatives together.

The sheer act of mapping changed the way organizers conceptualized displacement in Chicago. As they tracked gentrification in real time, the collective’s work shifted from challenging displacement learned by word of mouth towards recognizing the extent of citywide displacement. Within this different framing of the problem came different questions, solutions, and possibilities. They organized across multiple sites of displacement, organized neighborhood unions and are working towards citywide tenant unions. Through expanding the dataset on the map, they changed their course of action. Organizing by neighborhood shifted towards organizing citywide tenants power starting with the initial step of anti-gentrification community forums.

Scholars in urban planning have devoted considerable time and energy in defining gentrification. This debate is futile. Gentrification is local. It mutates. It metastasizes. It has material effects. As far as the phenomenon of gentrification goes, all that there is its contingency. We have to understand it in its specific manifestation and manufacture unique interventions to challenge it. In every space, we have to invent new languages to enword gentrification.

Moving forward, I want to compare housing struggle in Chicago to housing struggles in other locales. Specifically, I want to think about the relationship among civil society actors, government, and the private market. Comparing these strategies may illustrate how tenant unions can more effectively move from defending residents against real estate developers to occupying and commoning land. Reinventing our relationship to land matters because it is the very basis of social reproduction.

An important lesson from my work is that tenant union organizers lack understanding about the circuit of real estate capital. They do not know the criteria real estate investors and speculators use to form their decisions. The extent of organizing goes only goes so far as challenging federal and private mortgage lenders. The challenge in moving forward for housing movements is to organize transnationally against global financial restructuring.
References


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