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Research as Organizing: On the Challenges, Precarity and Commitment of Movement Scholarship

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Abstract

Community organizing as a mode of scholarly praxis remains marginal and undermined within academic institutions by approaches to scholarship that have been determined objective and professionally legible (Raphael and Matsuoka 2023). Reflecting on this challenge is a crucial priority among new generations of movement-scholars who encounter institutions that are content with reproducing the neoliberal academic status quo, signaled by growing labour precarity, extractive knowledge practices, and the metastasizing bureaucratization of higher education (Brackmann 2015). To integrate the praxis of community organizing or 'movement work' into one's scholarly practice is often viewed as an affront to the objective distance and command for unbiased approaches to research expected by institutional research ethics boards and peer review processes. Movement scholarship is an approach to research that reinforces the *material* and *political* goals of social movements and spaces above knowledge production, and a stark contrast to traditional paradigms of research. Inspired by a roundtable held during the 2023 AAG, here we take up the challenges of movement scholarship as a paradigm of research that enables a scholarly praxis we conceptualize as 'Research as Organizing'. We focus on: the practice of research as organizing through movement scholarship, the barriers faced to achieving traditional definitions of scholarly success through a movement-orientation, and how movement scholarship can be supported through relational and institutional shifts within academia. We understand this shift as being central to recapturing the "radical geography spirit" (Castree 2000) and commanding space for critical and transformation scholarship within the discipline and academic institutions at large.

Keywords

research as organizing, movement scholarship, early career scholars, schlepping as praxis, critical geography

Introduction

The past 30 years has been a period of frequent debate and evolution within critical geographic scholarship. Over that time, persistent questions of geography's social and public relevance (Blomley 1994; Smith 1995; Boyle and Kobayashi 2024), its ongoing racist and colonial underpinnings (Gilmore 2002; Pulido 2002; Kobayashi 2006; De Leeuw and Hunt 2018; Oswin 2020), and long standing attempts to realise its radical potential (Clark and Dear 1978; Castree 2000; Heynen 2006; Warren et al. 2019) have aimed to upend dominant perspectives in the discipline. Today our political terrain makes the task of critical and transformational scholarship more urgent than ever. As critical geographers engaged in movement-based research – whether in housing justice, anti-policing and abolition, anti-imperialism, anti-racism, or harm reduction – we are compelled to acknowledge these deeply challenging and hostile times for our work. With the forces of advanced neoliberalism and colonial racial capitalism (Koshy et al. 2022) continuing to wreak havoc on academic institutions and to attempt to both drown out and criminalize our work, reimagining the just social worlds a 'relevant' or 'critical' geography ostensibly seeks to remake seems a Sisyphean feat (Chatterton et al. 2010; Hanson and Noterman 2017; Serrano 2023). Universities, long beholden to neoliberal retrenchment, are increasingly vulnerable to attacks from anti-intellectual, fascistic, and even liberal political ideologies, from both outside and within (Kamola 2019), which share a unifying priority to perpetuate white supremacy, cis-sexism, and ableism. All acts of progressive and liberatory political dissent, on and off campus, must contend with the brutal and outsized power held by the brokers of globally financialized and militarized colonial systems (Gould-Wartofsky 2024).

We use the term 'movement scholarship' to describe the work of researchers with active commitments to social movements, and for whom research serves as a means of organizing to build political power. Today, movement scholars find themselves in institutions that seek out and covet 'community outreach' and 'public impact' research, though scholars engaged in community-centred inquiry confront two intertwining suppressive forces (Oswin 2020). First, there is a systemic failure to meaningfully support and include diverse and politically grounded knowledge production and outputs of movement scholarship, denying its legibility to rigid assessments of academic rigor and merit (Bell and Lewis 2023). Second, reactionary forces continue to target student and faculty organizing efforts on campus, whether in anti-war movements, labor organizing, or resistance to harmful university-driven urban development, with hostility and repression. The central question we take up in this paper is, *how do movement scholars navigate academic and social movement spaces that are not only incongruent with one another, but often set against each other by the same forces that wish to undermine them?* While such struggles are not new for movement scholarship, we are at a critical crossroads for redefining, protecting, and advancing it as a praxis.

In this article we seek to address the evolving positionalities of early career scholars, which has shifted from previous generations of early career faculty. Our collective observation and experience is that early career scholars of today who are engaged in movement scholarship are often *from* the very social movements and communities to which their research seeks to contribute. The motivation to enter academia rests on the possibility that such a positionality can build capacity and offer value to their communities and political commitments. Movement scholars use organizing and research as a means of contributing to the material and political advancement of social movement and organizing spaces (Loperena

2016). This makes movement scholarship distinct from scholar-activism, which has historically been advanced as a method for the purpose of knowledge production or mobilization conducted collaboratively between scholars, community members, activists, or movements (Chatterton et al. 2010; Derickson and Routledge 2015).

Ultimately, we assert that protecting critical political organizing efforts on and off campus must be understood as entwined with the future of critical geography's relevance. Critical geography has long attempted to forge a renewed epistemic identity of social justice against its own imperial legacies (Harley 1988; Rose 1993; Harvey 1996; Katz 1996; Gilmore 2002; Pulido 2002; Faria et al. 2019; Oswin 2020). On this front, promising futures remain within sight. The ongoing evolution of critical geography is now being shaped - in part - by new generations of scholars who are engaged in political struggle, with many originating from movements prior to entering the academy and maintaining commitments to political movements within and beyond their scholarly praxis.

Our methodological approach is dialogical, involving a series of conversations over twelve months and the transcription of two recorded conversations. The first recorded conversation occurred during a roundtable at the 2023 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers in Denver, Colorado, which brought together scholars at varying career stages who work within housing justice movements to reflect on the praxis of movement scholarship. While this roundtable discussion was contributed to and observed by more than two dozen session attendees, roundtable contributions from this article's co-authors as well as two senior scholars inspired the co-authorship of this article and the thematic direction of our ongoing conversations. The second recorded and all ongoing conversations took place amongst us as co-authors in the year that followed. We have condensed these discussions and edited them for clarity and cohesion in the sections below, including particularly illuminating excerpts from our conversations, which are offset and italicized. We collectively conducted an open manual coding process to identify the themes that structure the sections that follow. These themes touch on the tensions of political organizing as academics, defining 'Research as Organizing', dislocation from community, 'schlepping' and movement resourcing, living double lives, and longevity in the academy. Each stems from our shared experiences of the current conditions that pose barriers to movement scholarship amid institutional and epistemic legacies of individualism, meritocracy, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, ableism and classism.

We have built intentional relationships with one another based on our shared position as movement scholars focused on housing justice and tenant organizing. Though this thread binds our work, we are positioned vis a vis housing in different ways: some of us within an ancestral impetus of being of systematically displaced peoples, of having family with experiences of homelessness, of living in unstable housing conditions ourselves, or of being in community with people who experience chronic housing exploitation. As we endeavor to assess our positions here, the insights we share illuminate how political commitments, time away from conventional scholarly pursuits and outside of accepted institutional spaces, and the sizable energy devoted to direct organizing work comes at great risk to employment security and professional trajectories. We offer these insights as first steps toward articulating a critical paradigm for movement scholarship in the academy that characterizes an important segment of the next generation of critical geographers and spatial thinkers.

We envision this work as an evolving continuum of contributions toward a form of movement scholarship that we term 'Research as Organizing.' Given the demands of community organizing, movement scholarship may be cynically defined by what it lacks: the absence of numerous solo authored publications, a singular disciplinary perspective, or forms of knowledge produced exclusively for academic audiences. We see the methodological approach and focus of movement scholarship as deploying research (theories, methods, data, tools, resources, infrastructure, etc.) not only in *direct service* to, but as a *direct form* of organizing within social movements, thereby carrying out the paradigm of inquiry we refer to as Research as Organizing. Singularly defining Research as Organizing is impossible, and undesirable, as different movements, positionalities, politics, and places uniquely influence how it is practiced. However, there is a great need for a more defined spectrum of these practices to ward off "the false distinction between academics and wider society" (The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010, 249). This requires leveraging the resources available to us as academics toward our organizing work and positioning research toward deep commitments that extend well beyond traditional 'academic outreach' or 'engagement', toward more material and political goals that can build power relationally and politically. This article addresses the contradictions and transformative potential that differentiates such a practice from earlier path-breaking approaches such as community-based participatory action research stemming from health scholars, action research from North American education scholars, or the knowledge production focus of scholar-activism. To us, Research as Organizing signals a substantive and material shift in how academic research is and can be practiced, ultimately offering a generative and hopeful vision for the academy's political relevance in the face of the formidable forces against it.

The Tensions of Organizing as Academics

Most of us have experience contributing to community organizing efforts, and later pursued an academic path. We are not enamored with the academy but understand it as a place of cultural and societal power that should be fought for rather than discarded as a spoil of neoliberalism. This means recognizing that the academy's inertia towards its foundations as a classist and racist institution must be continually resisted (Meyerhoff 2019). This involves nurturing other kinds of relations and practices, such as taking an "abolitionist approach to the university" (Boggs et al. 2019) and creating informal spaces for activism on campuses that foster alignment with movement scholarship. Such modalities allow us to navigate the paradox of universities by holding our resistance against perpetuating colonial forms of violence while also nurturing space for liberatory action and deep inquiry (Richter et al. 2020).

Engagement with community organizing while simultaneously working within academia means at times being perceived as outsiders - in both university and movement spaces. This dual outsidership requires navigating relationships with those who are invested in maintaining university norms. A group member offered the following reflection about interacting with mentors and addressing academic expectations early on as a graduate student:

> I was told on a number of occasions to never introduce myself or identify publicly as an organizer in academia. It was suggested to me to find ways to downplay that side of my work, if I wanted to get a job. I didn't do that. Academia is either going to work as an institutional realm to go about that intellectual work, and

> the co-construction of new ways of being in community, or I need to find other realms to continue that work in other ways.

In recent years, a much stronger demand from university administrators has emerged for community-engaged and social "outreach" oriented research (Bell and Lewis 2023), both to make higher education more 'relevant' and to fulfill university-community partnership schemes. Yet, many institutional expectations of academic work remain inherently hostile toward genuine and meaningful community relationships. Rarely, if ever, do academic institutions acknowledge social movement spaces as producers of knowledge in their own right (Cox 2015), or question the role of academic practitioners in making this knowledge 'possible'. Efforts to assign meaningful value and integrate community engaged scholarship into research institutions and paradigms, like the development of community geographies (Robinson and Hawthorne 2018), draw from strong traditions of practicing participatory approaches and limited-term forays into community research partnerships (Shannon et al. 2021; Barrett and Bosse 2022). Yet, such efforts have not always been committed to meaningful political or material outcomes that benefit movement or community work, tending to focus on knowledge production over movement building, and thus maintaining an imbalance in what constitutes "legitimate" research activities and outcomes. This dynamic risks reinforcing the academy as the primary purveyor of knowledge and academics as the most legitimate practitioners of "real research."

Research *as* Organizing

We have defined our approach to of placing the priorities and strategies of grassroots movements at the forefront of our research programs, in service to and as a *direct form* of organizing, as Research as Organizing. this approach involves a praxis that paradigmatically shapes how inquiry, analysis, and knowledge mobilization take place in relation to those most impacted by the harmful forces we aim to resist. With this orientation in mind, Research as Organizing aims to go beyond the pursuit of knowledge production or mobilization unto itself, encompassing often-banal contributions in which academic competencies and privileges can make a tangible difference to successes on the ground. This can include ghost writing research or grants with community partners, direct and mutual aid distribution, jail and court support, eviction defense, encampment outreach, distributing harm reduction supplies, non-profit board service, listening, or crafting political education materials. When research priorities are guided by community directives, this praxis often requires that more recognizable academic labour be put on hold to be amongst those we work alongside for the small wins and the frequent painful churn of losses.

Dominant Western research paradigms that feminist, Indigenous, and Black scholars have pushed back against as a counter agenda for decades, are the same forces that present an ever-looming epistemic threat to radical and movement-oriented scholarship today (Massey 1996; Tuhiwai-Smith 1999; Gilmore 2002). Despite crucial efforts to advance this work and reimagine geographic epistemologies (Hunt 2014; Noxolo 2022), traditional research paradigms have persisted in sedimenting institutional expectations of systematic and timely outcomes, academic legibility, professional tones and forms of writing, and assumptions of expertise and elitism which present formidable barriers to movement scholarship (Beauchamps 2021). Scholarly peer review processes in particular, with their stretched timelines, conventionally hierarchical and compartmentalized modes of authorship

and attribution, and limitations imposed by dominant positivist methodological frameworks pose significant trade-offs. This is the paradoxical reality facing movement scholars, as we continue to challenge common silences, egoism, and positivist scientific approaches that dominate colonial, racial and neoliberal regimes of knowledge production (Schiller 2011).

Within this reality, a deep contradiction resides in the way community-based, scholar-activist, and participatory action research approaches are increasingly instrumentalized within conventional academic frameworks (The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010; Jordan and Kapoor 2016). Consequentially, these approaches are limited in whether they may lend themselves to the unpredictable contexts and divergent urgencies of community-focused research that could produce actual necessary change and liberatory outcomes (Neale 2015). Indeed, we see a key distinction between these research approaches and the potential offered by movement scholarship, especially in the high material stakes to be gained (or lost) within the communities that movement scholars are active within. We have experienced this pressure as people who work within and write from spaces where communities face extreme forms of racism, state repression, housing exploitation, economic inequality, and other manifestations of colonial racial capitalism every single day. Working with those whom we fight alongside for their lives, land, homes, and collective futures is an emergent and rapidly evolving process that cannot be predicted or structured in the ways academic institutions, ethics and internal review boards, or funders require. We feel resonance with reflexive approaches to organic public scholarship that necessarily takes place through "broader processes of knowledge mobilization for social transformation in pursuit of social justice and socio-ecological regeneration," which are not conducted from the comforts of one's desk, or exclusively during one's professional or personal time (Anderson 2020, 217; Blomley 1994).

We notice the shift toward movement scholarship is also demographic, especially vis-a-vis the ways in which race, class, gender, and additional identity experiences of 'newer' members of the academy bear less resemblance to predecessor counterparts. While careful to avoid a prima facie claim that more senior scholars have less to contribute to present social movements, it is important to draw attention to the formidable barriers inherent within institutions that have been shaped by, and remain shaped for, a particularly privileged segment of society. Indeed, it is those mid and later career scholars who review and assess our work. When understood through a strictly institutional or traditional lens, that work may appear at times unproductive, counter-intuitive, or disorganized. Yet, the outputs that derive from our time practicing and taking action with each other is direct preparation for the constantly evolving contingencies of struggle on the ground against the real systemic state-led failures we respond to through movement work. Thus, Research as Organizing can be understood as a framework for the prioritization of struggle and survival of people and communities over academic merit and productivity.

Dislocating from Community

Our relationships to *place* as movement scholars and housing organizers are essential to how we understand and relate to housing inequality. What grounds a movement scholar approach to research are the deep dynamics of relational accountability that form in movement spaces. Movement scholars hold long-term commitments that cannot be circumscribed by the typical contours of fieldwork, analysis, write-up and dissemination, and truncated project-based approaches to a research program.

Ultimately, dislocation from place is something movement scholars have to contend with differently than our colleagues who feel the emotional strain of moving away from family or friends (McAlpine 2012). Dislocating from movement spaces and long-term relationships within community organizing initiatives presents a unique pull on political values and commitments as well as a social-emotional strain, particularly when our academic work and organizing are deeply interconnected. Academic institutions have, in our experience, yet to contend with the gravity of this in ways that meaningfully meet the needs of movement scholars in particular.

Very often the work of movement scholars draws the interest of academic hiring committee members who see deeply community-engaged scholarship as meeting institutional goals of deploying and maintaining university-community partnerships, even when a department or a college lacks the experience and know-how to reasonably support such work. We may find ourselves within positions that appear appealing on paper, but that in practice provide few opportunities to continue our movement work in meaningful ways. Consider the following two experiences of authors in their early career:

> Before my 12-month postdoctoral position started, I assessed the $40,000 salary and the distance I would be from my community, and asked if I could work remotely and make visits to campus when needed. I explained that I had a safe and affordable housing option and that my own movement-based research, the reason I was hired for the postdoc in the first place, would be best supported by staying four hours away in my home city. The professor who hired me said I wasn't a graduate student anymore and needed to rise to the occasion and take the job, a conference coordinator role, seriously by relocating.

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> There are two communities that I'm connected to that don't know each other at all. There is a limit to how much I am able to do because of the demands on my time as a new professor. Now in a new job, away from both of those communities, my day to day is very different from my collaborators, and the on-the-ground part of community work occurs elsewhere. One question for me is – When you're in the new workplace, how do you go about finding your people? I have to put a lot of work into seeking them out, relationship building. What responsibilities and accountability do I have to this place where I'm living right now, even as I have responsibilities elsewhere?

When we find ourselves in locations in which we hold only institutional connections while continuing to extend care and emotional resources *back home, we find ourselves emotionally, socially, and politically dislocated* from both home and institutional environments. Relationships that form within movement spaces inform our thinking and theorizing within and beyond the academy. They are relational forms of knowledge building, fully integrated and tethered to our geographic understanding and analysis – and it is this intellectually and theoretically integrated work that the academic job market paradoxically pulls us away from.

Schlepping as Praxis

Traversing the practicalities of movement research within academic conventions often places these two realms – spaces of organizing and spaces of the university - at odds with one another and requires reckoning with stringent university timelines and finite resources, both of which force movement scholars to find paths through those confines. One co-author described how students in a housing research collective invoked the Yiddish term "schlep," often used to refer to a tedious and laborious journey, or to haul or carry. Schlepping is distinct from the popular cultural anthropological approach of Western anthropology in the 1990s of *deep hanging out* (Snodgrass et al. 2024). Whereas deep hanging out is an instrumental field method of informal self-immersion within a cultural or social experience (Walmsley 2016), schlepping is a mode of action and labour that facilitates mutual learning and struggle, most often through ensuring that the basic needs of community and movement spaces are met as a central component of stewarding relationships. This may take the form of running errands, co-navigating social service needs, encampment and eviction defense, addressing group conflict and mediation, or simply preparing food to attend to people's hunger and thirst – each of these demonstrates how schlepping makes research and relationships possible by extending our care and being present to the vulnerable work of fighting for liberation and social justice.

Schlepping emphasizes the significant relationship building and complicated negotiation of mundane tasks that often seem secondary to research but critically tether organizing and research to its context and place. The work of schlepping embodies aspects of the material and emotional work of a feminist ethics of care that seeks to foster a sense of belonging and the conditions and trust needed for movement work to be possible (Naylor 2023). Such an approach must be met with ongoing reflexive practice, to seek clarity and to be honest about who benefits from this work and to what ends (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013). The care work that underpins schlepping as praxis is a radical form of maintaining social relationships that support social movement spaces out in the open, rather than in the private sphere, and centers it in the research process as it becomes the work of the group to care for and maintain relationships together (Lawson 2007; Dowler et al. 2019). One student described the importance of schlepping associated with community-based research in their overall research journey.

> It was a lot of listening, and just trying to figure out – how do I fit in here? What is the story here? So it was kind of an isolating and weird time for me. One of the things that was really grounding was the schlepping as praxis. As a student, we are on the ground, we do a lot of the (schlepping) work, we get the coffee, set up the meetings, take down the meetings, we talk to folks, we spend [a lot of time] – it's a very deep relationality.

When working collectively or among fellow scholars in movement spaces, intention ought to be put into ensuring that schlepping does not become a task assigned to or expected of the most junior researchers, specifically students. Schlepping is not a rite of passage within movement scholarship, but an ongoing action of materially supporting relationships and creating the conditions needed for movement work and to plot a path toward meeting group goals.

Tensions arise for those of us who, by way of an increasingly precarious academic job market, are dislocated from our communities, and thus unable to take part in physical schlepping and material work. However, other forms of labor that contribute to movements from afar may include writing grants to fund a variety of movement needs, reading and interpreting policies to support movement intervention, mentoring (and funding) students on the ground who are carrying out direct support, collaboratively writing political education literature, continuing to support material needs like finding donations or identifying safe housing or social service options as an act of care for movement leaders who need and chose these kinds of support. If schlepping is about making movements possible, there will always be on-the-ground work to carry out, though work from afar is often just as needed and immediate in the long-term relationship stewarding of spaces in which movement scholars contribute.

Resourcing for Direct Organizing

We see the university as being a site of resources, as well as a site of extraction. There is a dominant idea within academia that community or activist work is something that happens off the side of one's desk or for purely academic purposes, as though people who work in academic spaces are not also members of other communities, or that we are always effectively detached from relationships with community because of our ties to the institution. Fellow geographers who engage in scholar-activist work have conceptualized resourcing as a key channel for advancing political projects and maintaining community relationships (Derickson and Routledge 2015). Such approaches have been generative for production and transformation of knowledge. However, we see Research as Organizing as a distinct approach that fosters explicit material and political gains within spaces of struggle.

We understand universities as spaces grounded in the historical and ongoing accumulation of land and wealth from endowments, linked to colonialism, enslavement, student indebtedness, speculative property investment, and growing austerity through the erosion of staffing, wages and benefits (Palmer 2023). Thus, when we gain entry into universities - as students, post-docs, adjuncts or faculty - a critical question to ask is how we can begin to identify, access and redistribute university resources to support organizing work off campus and toward material and political gain in those realms? Universities not only serve as a source of income for movement scholars - albeit an often precarious one - but also as a means of accessing resources that can be redirected beyond campus toward the objectives of social movement spaces (Derickson and Routledge 2015). These resources include sharing funds from public impact or research grants, access to physical space, printing, technology, database and library access, among others. In these ways, inside access to an academic institution can resource the direct organizing that takes place in community movement work. At the same time, as we engage in directly resourcing community organizing work, we need to confront who our written outputs serve and for what purpose. Describing their own graduate school experience, one co-author shared:

> As a Master's student, I negotiated with my committee to have half of my thesis be for an academic audience and half to be public-oriented, because that was the only way I felt comfortable doing the project. And then for my PhD, a significant amount of the work I did during 'fieldwork' didn't end up in my dissertation. I've never written about it, and a lot of it isn't necessarily 'research'

> in a traditional sense – it's writing grants, it's showing up, and doing the practical work of organizing.

Framing our research as a practice of resourcing *direct* organizing shapes how we relate to our employers, how we expand or redirect the time or funding we are given, the outputs we decide to create, and the audiences we 'produce' for. As put by Mayorga et al (2019), "those of us who stay [in academic institutions] can 'lawfully' access the exclusive privileges of academia but then convert it into resources for use of the public/our communities, against the wishes, and independent, of the university" (101). During our group conversations, one co-author addressed their resonance with Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013) who express the sentiment of "be[ing] in but not of" - that while we may be employed or studying in universities, we must resist their colonial, racist and (neo)liberal tendencies. This work requires expanding our understanding of research beyond the cognitive, to be engaged in embodied and affective praxis and everyday life realms (Jones 2023).

Double Lives, Double Agents

In the evolving landscape of academia, individuals who occupy both researcher and organizer identities must navigate the challenge of embodying 'double lives' and acting as 'double agents.' This unique position arises from the privileges and demands to advance scholarly pursuits within institutional frameworks while participating in and supporting grassroots movements for transformative social change. Social justice commitments often starkly contrast, if not directly challenge, the norms and expectations of academic institutions. This dichotomy presents critical contradictions that are both morally challenging and ripe with opportunities to aid in transformative change. While living within this discomfort, we may feel the need to hide parts of ourselves and our praxis to secure our jobs (Few et al. 2007). For early career scholars, the initial journey into academia is marked by a series of sharp negotiations between meeting institutional expectations and tending to urgent work on the ground. This encompasses a lived experience that entails navigating identity, politics, and ethical implications across both spheres, and deciding to not allow academia to dull or diminish our responsibilities to community commitments (Brady 2014).

The experience of being a double agent, both operating inside an academic institution while also working in community capacities is one of moving along multiple paths simultaneously. There are different paces on these paths, some of which are driven by the urgency of meeting community needs, while others move at the pace of a graduate program, peer review publishing, or the long game of finding and maintaining employment. Academia demands an excess of sped-up work in the areas of teaching, research, and service, while the relationally focused community work requires slowing down and working at any speed necessary toward movement goals (Meyerhoff and Noterman 2017). When we make such prioritizations, questions loom as to how we will explain institutional absence or make movement work institutionally legible:

> My strategy is to say the things I need to say in my job to be left alone and to be able to participate in both the slow and urgent aspects of organizing. Both sides of the work require different parts of us. I recognized that I was constantly engaged in a two-pronged balancing act of, (1) locating strategies to evade the specter of the university and deliberately reject university expectations of my colleagues and I to continuously embody the false position of objective expert,

> while (2) aligning myself with those most impacted in the community and attempting to use my time and outputs in service to their struggle.

In our institutional roles, the university seems to be much more centralized than it was as graduate students, positioning us to have to fight for space and time to maintain community and movement relationships. We have also found that there is an expectation for faculty to carry out community work in particular ways that position themselves as much more formalized and professional than what felt genuine or necessary during our time as graduate students.

> Now that I have a professorship, being a double agent doesn't exist anymore. I'm pulled in more directions than that. Sometimes I'm pulled by opposing city council members, sometimes by community partners, sometimes within activist spaces, and by my responsibilities as a faculty member. I've found that now that I hold a faculty position, I encounter people who want to more or less find an academic puppet for their own agenda in some way. When they find that I'm not Liberal in my politics, and I don't share their opinions, it suddenly shuts out their willingness to hear me or for me to be as useful, automatically viewed as oppositional. I think there's multi-agent roles that we might get asked to be part of, but that don't actually fit that of a traditional academic.

Some of the ongoing work of movement scholarship requires continuously decentering the university's role in the movement spaces we work within. The formality of academic buracracy can be alienating to community members we work with, such as excessively formal yet required language in ethics documents, or government funding platforms that expect high levels of digital literacy and bureaucratic tasks from community partners in order to obtain funding. The goal in how Research as Organizing approaches these relationships is to maintain trusting and healthy connections with the movement spaces we work in regardless of the presence and impact of our university affiliations.

On Academic Longevity

A common challenge among scholars who work within movement spaces is the sense of responsibility to translate praxis and data into formats that are legible to academic audiences, borne of the looming reality that academic institutions and reviewers of tenure and promotion files largely assess 'outputs' for the contribution made for an academic audience first and foremost. The role of translation between organizing and academic environments is not a simple task for movement scholars because the relations of our work are bound up in struggles among people who are denied their humanity through structural and systemic forms of inequality that are often driven by the audiences that academics are called to speak to.

> I think that translation is not possible with every professional or institutional audience or all data, knowledge, or experiences. For example, it shouldn't be the responsibility of organizers who step into academic roles to translate community knowledge to the oppressors of communities we work with or are part of, and we are not necessarily more strategically positioned to do so when constructive critique ultimately shuts down communication.

This incongruence between organizing work and academic expectations continues beyond the graduate school experience. For movements scholars in junior roles, pre-tenure, and precarious academic positions, some degree of negotiating is required to carry out community-focused research, methodologies, and even community partnerships and funding needs. Reflecting on the experience of maintaining responsibilities to the community alongside upholding academic obligations, one co-author offered:

> I process [my own job precarity] daily, so that I can always be ready and not think that it has anything to do with my value. I understand that "doing the work" from inside and outside are fundamentally antagonistic, and this antagonism can eat away at us. The community carries the work and we carry both worlds on our backs. The roles are difficult to simultaneously hold within us and represent in professionalized spaces. The institution calls us to center ourselves as individuals, and experts, while you're also on the outside doing work where you must push away that ego to be collectively oriented.

This antagonism carries throughout an academic career in different ways, though it is most acute once scholars enter the various stages of tenure and promotion. When so much of our written work as engaged scholars is dedicated to political education, policy interventions, other materials useful for community struggle, or service directly *within* the community – we risk these forms of labour from being devalued or excluded from our dossiers. One senior scholar reflected on their tenure process three decades ago:

> I came up for tenure in the year that I took a sabbatical in London. I got a letter saying that the department was tending to a negative on my tenure, and you should fly back to North America to account for yourself. I went to this hearing and it was devastating – it felt like the end of the world. I left and at five o'clock, I got a phone call that they had this offer saying, "We're going to give you tenure, and this is how we're doing it. We took your CV, and we took off everything that had to do with community, and then looked at what was left and decided, just barely, that we can give you tenure." And that's when I started to cry.

This story is an important reminder of the role of senior community-engaged scholars in charting the path that we continue to walk today. It also prompts us to consider how the terrain of expectations has changed and how much more there is to do. There are good examples of senior scholars in Geography who have taken up the crucial work of nurturing platforms and generative intellectual spaces for both academy and community-based scholars. The 2022 Institute for Geographies of Justice (Antipode) gathering, and the work of the Institute on Inequality and Democracy (UCLA Luskin) serve as models for radical systems of support whose knowledge mobilization have undoubtedly aided regard for community-facing outputs in meaningful ways. One senior scholar reflected the following:

> The academic institution is less monolithic, less constrained than you might think. Yes, it's deeply problematic. But departments, for example, are worrying about holding on to smart faculty, right? It looks bad when faculty leave. It looks bad if faculty don't make tenure. 'We' don't always understand the needs that are emerging, and senior scholars need to be told that. And in some cases, they'll listen. There are cracks in the system and spaces. So, it can look really oppressive and really kind of, you've got three years for your first tenure review

> and stuff like that, and it is massively disciplined but when you view it from the other side there is some movement.

It is crucial for senior scholars to utilize their relative authority to create mechanisms of support for junior scholars whose research may not always be legible within typical frameworks of academic productivity. This authority could be useful in creating tenure and promotion processes that take seriously our outputs beyond peer reviewed publications, such as white papers and policy and legal reports, while expanding definitions of "service" to include work that takes place off campus. Most important is the task of alleviating the internalized pressures of resource deficit consciousness that primes junior scholars, who perceive themselves as not belonging within the academy, to making up this perceived lack of belonging through overwork (Wright-Mair and Ramos 2021). Intentionally extending support to junior scholars of color and those with under-resourced or first-generation pathways into the professoriate is an important way to address such pressures (Roscigno et al. 2023).

While it may feel like a stroke of luck to be hired into a postdoctoral or permanent role that sought to attract a *scholar-activist*, upon arrival, the experience of the institution's modes of professionalization can be alienating. We may be assigned teaching duties that have no alignment with our research areas or our methods. We may experience microaggressions, unsolicited classroom monitoring, or be required to co-teach with senior scholars who are traditionally situated within depoliticized and uncritical approaches to the discipline as a means of professionalizing or taming the junior movement scholar. We may even field criticism and questions from senior colleagues and administrators, who often lack understanding of what we contribute to the discipline through our research. The frequent disconnect between being sought out for what our work offers the institution amid the simultaneous lack of institutional support is a form of tokenization experienced by movement scholars that can quickly erode one's sense of belonging within the institution.

Relationships that form out of movement work often supplement a lack of collegial support within our home institutions. Though many of us have found fellowship among movement scholars beyond the departments where we work, we may lack insider support in the institutional spaces where our work is measured and assessed, compromising our long-term job security. There remains a dearth of institutional presence of securely employed, resourced, and institutionally valued movement scholars, especially those who are Black, Indigenous, or otherwise racialized; disabled; queer; or first-generation university graduates. While we may find friendship, queer kinship, political community, or community connection through relationships that stem out of movement work, there are limits to how these relations can support our professional development and ability to sustain ourselves within academic spaces.

> What does it take to survive in these spaces? I just want there to be more people that are black, that are femme, queer, disabled in these spaces. I just don't think that the current frames actually allow for that, even myself. I am still a PhD student and I just wanted that perspective to be at least on this record... There's a constant fear of – if you don't conform, then the academy will abandon you. I think that fear is real.

The process of co-authoring this article has been a part of sustaining and deepening our relationships as movement scholars across geographies and career stages. One wonders if it

is possible to remain within academia without these far-reaching relationships. Despite this challenging environment, we hold in mind this quote attributed to U.S. folk singer and anti-war activist, Joan Baez: "Action is the antidote to despair" – which for us, is ultimately about the crucial role organizing has in drawing us together, even if we are apart. We sustain our joy, alongside our political commitments, knowing that organizing is always the answer to making an academic undercommons (Moten and Harney 2013) that refuses a politics of extraction and exploitation.

Conclusion

The conversations synthesized in this article are part of an expansive discussion about how radical politics and approaches to research are often shut out and excluded from consideration as scholarship and *service* in relation to academic institutions while also valorized by them in both important and superficial ways. We see both merit and necessity in carving out time and space for movement scholars to operate within the academy, particularly as they increasingly build connections that counter many of the unethical and unjust dimensions of universities as institutions, including unfair academic labor practices and institutional discrimination, hoarding of land and other resources by our universities, campus policing, the gentrifying effect of higher education, and legacies of colonization and enslavement from which universities cannot be untethered.

We see the academy as a site of resources that can be mobilized for movement work *and* movement scholarship, as much as it can be a mode of employment that provides more space for intellectual, creative, and political examination. In addition, it also facilitates opportunities to develop a praxis-based and movement-informed model of education and collegial relationships. We want this work to be better supported and less challenging for those who come after us. Upending the neoliberal business orientation and conservative and liberal intellectual confines of university politics is a multigenerational project that should not require waiting out the departure of any one generation to retire. We call on senior colleagues to instead be co-conspirators in the struggle to cultivate spaces of critical thought and transformative student-faculty solidarity and leadership.

At the outset of this paper we reflected on the grave challenges and shifting political terrains that shape the current state of praxis for critical geographical scholarship. Not unlike the turbulent social turning points that animated debates of geography's radical potential in the past, ours is a mixed moment of crushing urgency and hopefulness that springs from that potential. One such bright spot visible today is faculty rising to the occasion to support student-led campus activism across the world. In the US, where recent race, class, and gender-focused curriculum bans proliferate, and state suppression of student movements has led to expulsion from academic programs, students and faculty fighting for justice and liberation have likely radicalized part of a generation. The transformative potential of education and research is precisely why it has been under attack – in the past and present. We believe in the radical potential of all educational spaces – and yes, of critical geography. Just as early radical geographers of the 1970s created "conditions of possibility" for the dissident pluralisation of geographies that followed (Castree 2000, 956), movement scholarship holds the potential to further forge conditions of possibility for a geography - now and in the future - that exercises political will, and is materially and practically committed to struggles against injustice beyond the confines of the academy.

We have been fortunate in locating one another and building a movement scholarship co-writing and thinking practice. We have found one another through strategic organizing of conference panels, through joint collaboration on movement scholar book projects, through participation in scholar-activist workshops, and by being in shared community spaces. These modes of finding one another took effort on our part that came from a deep desire to feel less alone in this work and to be among allies and co-conspirators in rattling the edges of traditional academic research, outputs, and institutional expectations.

Our work as movement scholars teaches us the rewarding and generative lesson that what is possible is what is *made possible by doing*. Identifying insider supporters of movement scholarship who work in academic spaces is a critical lifeline for the longevity and possibility of movement scholarship. Though movement scholarship via Research as Organizing is not the sole route for transformative and community-centered research, this is the path the authors find themselves on. Carving out spaces, time, and resources within, on the edge, and beyond the academic institutions that house us for movement work allows us to resist 'being of' or becoming of the university, at least in a traditional sense. This is collective ongoing work – and this is not the beginning nor the end of the discussion we offer in this article. We look forward to finding fellow allies, co-conspirators, and interlocutors to join in the conversation.

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