

# Riding the Zone

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*Gratitude to Carmela Garcia, José Herrera, Jesus Guillen, Mario Cardenas, Yana Kunichoff, Juan Ibarra, Jorge Mújica Murias, Hugo Esparza, Michael Johnson, Tito Moreno, the No Name Group and all those involved in the Moratorium on Deportations Campaign. I hope not to speak in anyone else's name—I offer instead my own reflections on our discussions and actions, as well as on the sense of community and shared knowledge we were able to create.*

## MOVEMENTS

In spring 2010, a few undocumented youth organizers from Chicago pulled out from DREAM Act campaigns and began trying to form an alternative to the mainstream of the immigrant rights movement. All the youth in the group had been organizing for several years, and had strong individual critiques of the politics of the movement. Some got their political education in college. Others became politicized while incarcerated in Cook County Jail under immigration hold. Some were organizing even while under deportation proceedings—and while living under various Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) “remote supervision” programs, which vary from ankle bracelets and mandatory curfews to regular home visits and restrictions on movement.

One of their first actions as a group was an un-permitted march on Cook County Jail on July 29 2010, a gesture of non-compliance on the date in which Arizona bill SB1070 went into effect. I somehow stumbled into the organizing process in the run-up to this action, and became immediately

drawn to this group. The organizing became more and more experimental and self-exploratory, and more explicitly about searching for a collective vision, a collective critical voice. Over the next year we worked together, meeting, talking, walking, writing, exchanging poetry and dance moves. We talked about the lock-step and top-down politics of part of the movement, its hostility to internal critique and co-dependency with the Democratic Party's political machine. We staged parties and speak-outs to challenge the specific rhetoric and performance of "undocumented youth." For me the most transformative experiences were those that put bodies in motion through and across territories—from prisons and detention centers to suburban warehouse districts, from heritage farms to city streets and corporate plazas.

In September 2010 we set off as a group of about thirty immigrants, some with papers and some without, for a three-day bike ride of more than a hundred miles around the suburban perimeter of Chicago. It was a counterclockwise arc: from Schaumburg to Wheaton, Naperville, through Romeoville and Bolingbrook, then Joliet, Homer Glen, Bridgeview and back into Chicago through Back of the Yards and La Villita. We rode through a landscape of residential enclaves and malls, massive warehousing districts and inland ports, rail lines and limited access roads, by detention processing centers and county jails contracted by ICE to warehouse and incessantly transfer almost 30,000 people under deportation proceedings in 2010 alone.

Our route kept us well within Foreign Trade Zone #22, the area within either a sixty-mile, or ninety-minute travel radius from the Port of Chicago. This is something we knew very little about. We knew it referred to territories which were in a certain sense outside of the jurisdiction of the United States, particularly for the purposes of goods movement, and also that it contained other "special economic zones" or zones of exception. We knew this suburban ring was a major node on the global supply chain, sometimes referred to as the Midwest Empire: the largest concentration of intermodal, warehousing and logistics facilities on the continent, where commodities produced all over the world were shipped, stored, repackaged, assembled, redirected, or destroyed. We also knew that goods movement through the Foreign Trade Zone had a growing impact on the movement of migrant worker populations, that immigrant communities from Central and Latin America (previously concentrated in the urban Little Village-Cicero corridor) were moving toward several pockets in the western and southwestern suburbs—a migration largely fueled by the labor needs of the warehousing and logistics industry. We knew that several townships in the zone integrated local policing and border patrol; that "heritage farms" served as national organizing hubs for the Minutemen, and that several townships had recently passed local anti-immigrant and English-Only ordinances.

In researching and preparing for the ride, I found it hard to visualize these different forces working together, to visualize how the management of migration and the logistics of trade were related. The zone appeared to me as a perimeter within which a set of confusing regulations gave exceptional, incentivizing status to certain enterprises engaged in trade and the global movement of goods, which is increasingly becoming a factor in the reorganization of urban/suburban space. But within the zone entire populations were on the move, too, re-concentrated in increasingly dispersed residential enclaves, and rendered increasingly deportable. The ride marked the beginning of my effort to make sense of the zone as a dynamic system, a process that integrates the mass movement of goods with the accelerated movement of territories and with the production and management of mass deportability.

Over three days we rode and stopped for a number of more or less organized local actions. There were meetings and protests, petitions and fly-erings, and the dropping of large banners. We distributed several political statements and tactically inserted ourselves into mainstream media along the way. We rode slowly, at the speed of the slowest riders, on county highways and limited access roads, up to and through the boundaries of warehouse districts. We stopped to conduct picnic seminars in residential developments that warehoused thousands of perma-temp migrant workers. We rode thorough monoculture crops and monocultural counties. We held teach-ins and conducted sidewalk chalking actions about the history of English-only legislation and the conflation of local policing with border enforcement—what organizers refer to as *poli-migra*. We took turns speaking, in different languages, and through different frames, about the specific ways in which the border was widening and stretching across every aspect of social life.

We understood that our collective presence would be expressive, would say something. We assumed that the roving, inquisitive, public presence of migrant bodies would be disruptive in both residential and commercial enclaves, and on the network of roads that connect and enclose them. We also assumed that a bike caravan would be inherently discordant to the rhythms of suburban mobility and the densely integrated flows of the intermodal transport system. What surprised me was the capacity of the bike caravan as a social form to register, or somehow make legible and sensible, the system of differential mobilities and immobilities that made up the zone. Somewhere between a slow-moving intervention and territorial research, the ride involved people using their experiences, bodies, and the conditions of their own lives to collectively register a dynamic geography under construction.

Sitting down to plan who would ride when and where, and who would drive the supply cars was a real lesson in the complexities of how different

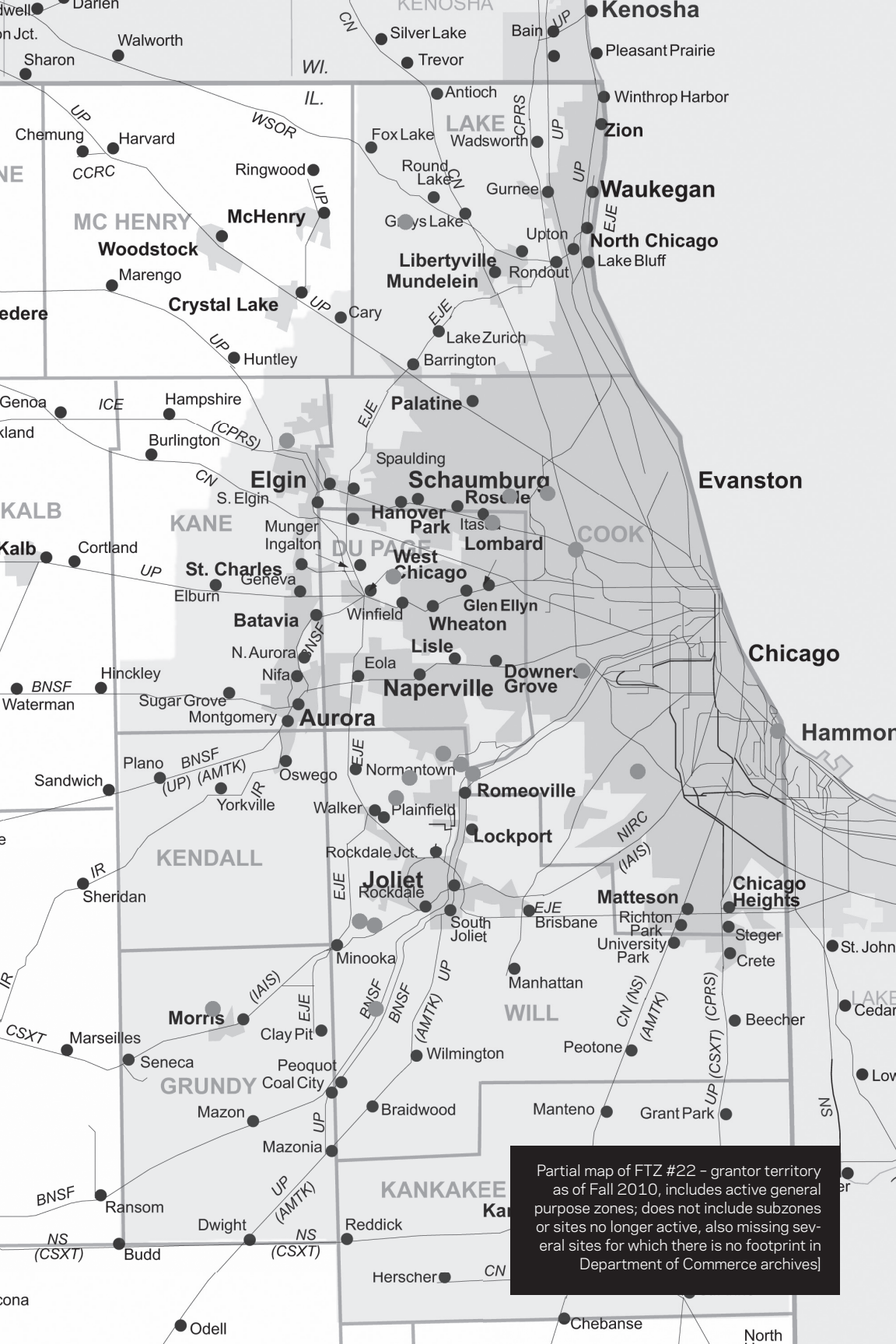
bodies can or cannot move under specific conditions. The production of these differentials is mediated by a system of overlapping jurisdictions, a framework that produces distances across which certain bodies can be policed in certain ways. And it is neither simple, nor always visible, nor easy to visualize. There are many changing and often discretionary ways in which people become identified, targeted, incarcerated, conditionally released, electronically monitored, detained, and shipped between detention centers. In the case of our small group, undocumented organizers were denied access to drivers' licenses, and several were under deportation proceedings, their movement restricted to the jurisdiction of particular deportation courts. Once placed in electronic surveillance programs (a regime often referred to as the "prison without walls"), people who are facing deportation have the rhythms of their lives structured by ankle bracelets, mandatory curfews, or regular home visits. Criss-crossing jurisdictional frames also has to do with differentiated policing practices. Some counties and townships fully integrate local policing with border enforcement, through programs like 287g (which deputizes local cops as border patrol agents) or Secure Communities (which operates by integrating the data gathered by local police with homeland security databases). The result is that undocumented parents and their American citizen children would be differently affected by the possibility of encounters with police across different jurisdictions.

We negotiated these issues because our caravan purposely occupied at least one lane of traffic at all times, and was sure to encounter some hostility. More importantly, we negotiated these issues because one of our goals was to expose and contest *poli-migra* practices. This became the basis of our presentations in several public meetings along the way, from meeting with two people in Schaumburg to hundreds in Joliet, themselves part of the growing concentrations of increasingly undocumented migrant workers in the suburban counties.

During the ride we learned that how movement is policed has a lot to do with how people are made to appear to be in or out of place. We also learned about how commodities and places themselves are on the move. Juridical frameworks can tether and immobilize specific bodies within specific territories; but they also extract territories and move them elsewhere, off-shoring entire localities or industries.

## **STRANGERS IN A FOREIGN TRADE ZONE**

Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) #22 covers a vast area. On a map, FTZ #22 covers Cook, Du Page, Grundy, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties, certain areas of Porter County in Indiana, and sites outside of this perimeter. But an FTZ is also a set of procedures and codes, a permitting and management system, and a set of policy instruments, mediated



by a constellation of terms: venture, innovation, flexibility, competitiveness, efficiency, profit recovery, trade. An FTZ is a territory but also a project, that is to say, a set of integrated processes whereby zone-ing happens, whereby territories (spatial, economic, and juridical) are continuously being (re) made. A trade zone is not a static delineation on a map, but rather a process of spatialized power.

An FTZ is established in conjunction with international points of entry. Each port of entry can become a zone project; each zone project can produce numerous zones, and each zone can have numerous subzones. The boundaries of an FTZ as they are marked on the maps of the Federal Zoning Board can be a radius of sixty miles or ninety minutes transit from the edges of an international port of entry, and are established by the Department of Commerce. The area inside this boundary is the service area of a grantor agency. It is the area within which a zone can be activated, like a perimeter of off-shorability. In the case of FTZ #22, the grantor is the Illinois International Port District (containing the Port of Chicago). Within this service area, business interests work through the grantor to activate or make use of zone for specific footprints. Once activated, a zone is considered outside of the United States for the purposes of trade, tariffs, processing of goods (which includes assembly, disassembly, destruction, testing, mixing and manufacturing), and other regulations.

When a zone becomes activated it must be completely secured—enclosed by a border, with access points under the jurisdiction of Customs and Border Protection, often managed via proxy (private) agencies. FTZ #22 currently has at least eleven activated zones, including several logistics and warehousing centers, such as the 2,500-acre CenterPoint Intermodal Center in Elwood and the 3,600-acre CenterPoint Intermodal and Logistics Center near Joliet, which together form the largest inland port in the country. FTZ #22 also integrates dozens of sub-zones: smaller, discontinuous, single-user, restricted-access areas that are frequently used as manufacturing sites. Subzones may even be located outside of the boundaries of the grantor territory, but are connected to ports of entry and other “special economic zones” via an expanding network of publicly-funded rail lines, roads and inland waterways.

The US currently has over 270 FTZ projects, each with a service area radius of between sixty and 120 miles from center, and around 1,000 sub-zones. Manufacturing and waste generating processes, assembling, repackaging, storage, exhibition, shipping, and other processes within the zone legally occur outside of the United States. Commodities that move within the “zone universe”—between zones/subzones, ports of entry and military bases—never enter U.S. juridical territory. This means they can be assembled or stored, repackaged or tested, without incurring tariffs. It means manufacturing and assemblage can take place without value-added taxes on domestic

materials, parts, labor, overhead, or profit. It also means that materials and commodities appear as continuously moving, never in place.

Because they are not only territories, but also policy instruments and financial mechanisms (responsive to “global trade factors” and historically changing), FTZs are not stable. The zone universe is constantly under construction, expanding and deepening. As smaller areas consolidate, new zones are carved out, and the differentials or distances that are produced by making zones expand in scope. More and more territories and processes are “off-shoring,” where “off” signals a range of increasingly stratified differentials. Centralized “magnet zones” are expanding, but so too is the constellation of small, discontinuous zones outside of FTZ geographic boundaries; the interconnectedness and integration of zones and subzones, as well as of processes that take place within them, is deepening. As a system, zones are in accelerated movement.

Nested within FTZ #22 are dozens of other special economic zones. The most pervasive of these are the “enterprise zones,” (EZs) which are designated by local (usually state or county) jurisdictions. The location of EZs is not related to ports of entry, but instead identified in terms of “underdevelopment” indicators and rhetorically justified in terms of job creation and local development. In these areas, which are not physically enclosed, commercial interests activate zoning to off-shore from the standpoint of labor, land use, and abatement regulations, in relation to local and state taxes, among many other factors. While “job creation” is one of the justifications for EZs, they put into motion incentivizing mechanisms as well as risk management systems that make flexible what exactly counts as a job—the conditions under which people can be hired, retained, trained, discarded, and worked. EZs emerged around the rhetoric of “development,” while creating corporate tax havens that deprive local communities of revenue and subsidize buildings, roadways, water treatment plants and other major infrastructure to encourage territorial centralization of specific economies.

FTZs and EZs offer “competitive advantages,” an effect of nimble, overlapping, and contradictory jurisdictional frameworks. FTZ implies that goods enter US territories but remain outside of US trade markets, while EZ implies that bodies that are physically in the US in terms of policing and labor are moved outside of the US in terms of labor regulations and human rights. FTZ has to do with the connection to ports of entry, to the mass movement of goods, and the assembly, storage, or destruction of commodities and materials; EZ is tied to managing and speculating upon shifting labor markets, warehousing, and supply chain management of labor as commodity. FTZ has to do with tariff differentials and cost differentials for parts, as well as flexible inventory and storage of commodities (the time value of money,



which pertains to price differentials between spot and futures markets, for instance, and “just-in-time” production). EZ has to do with tax differentials and labor cost differentials at smaller scales (competition between states or even counties) and to the flexibilization of work.

Both are responsive, dynamic financial organisms, each ostensibly developed as a solution to previous crises of capitalism. In the U.S., the legal framework for FTZs was first established in 1934, a response to the Great Depression. Initially, regulations explicitly prohibited manufacturing processes from FTZs; free from labor intensive processes, zones would also be free from the friction of labor politics. In the first 40 years there were relatively few FTZs activated (by 1970 there are 7 zones established only), but each development, each zone designation, each new commercial interest wanting to operate in the zone, is accompanied by a tremendous amount of rhetoric and spatio-juridical experimentation. How zone is talked about, imagined and represented produces certain understandings of the distinction between production and circulation. Gradually, and increasingly after containerization becomes standard in the 1960s, human associations become separated from commodity movement, even as manufacturing processes become normalized as an FTZ activity: FTZ becomes in a sense a regime that separates labor from trade, workers from commodities, producing a de-laboring of the global goods movement.

EZs were developed in the early 1980s and justified as a solution to the “stagflation” crisis, following the British model credited to Peter Hall who imagined bringing the *maquilladora* into the urban areas of the developed world. In Hall’s vision, “wages would find their own level” in zones of “fairly shameless free enterprise (...) outside the scope of taxes, social services, industrial and other regulations.” The resulting spiraling low wages, reduced regulations, and minimal taxation would incentivize or attract investment. While FTZs and EZs emerged as distinct spatial and rhetorical regimes, in the current crisis, these systems of exception cumulate in ways that are intensely experimented with and speculated upon. This is producing new geographies that correspond not only to “just-in-time” production and the logistics management of commodities on the global market, but also to the management of cheaper and cheaper labor and the marketization of migrant bodies.

## INTEGRATION AND HALLUCINATION

Our little bike caravan took place precisely as FTZ #22 adopted the “Alternative Site Framework,” an extensive process of expansion and restructuring. As we were riding, the zone was shifting from an “island model” to an “integrated model,” which refers to integrating zone activity within the larger economy.



Integration at this stage of FTZ #22 restructuring apparently allows the zone as a space of exception to expand, gain permanency, and become molecularized throughout the whole landscape of administrative units, governmental agencies, and special interests. First, there is a considerable expansion of the perimeter of the service area. Since this can be either a sixty-mile or a ninety-minute transit radius from the port of entry, new rail, inland waterways, and express roadways expand the distance covered horizontally. The zone is also rooting itself more deeply into local jurisdictions, cutting incentive deals at the level of local zoning laws and permitting processes, such that a host of previously unconnected localized actors and dispersed agents are brought into the process, sometimes in overlapping relations. Secondly, there is a move toward permanence around increasingly autonomous magnet sites, which were initially designated with set expiration or “sunset dates” and required oversight by Customs and Border Protection and Border Patrol. Currently, sunset dates are being removed, and regulatory oversight has been transferred to the companies themselves as a set of compliance procedures. In addition to making magnet sites permanent exceptions, there is now a self-interested coincidence between magnet site and grantor as public-private entity, rather than a government agency. Thirdly, there is increasing flexibility for zone designation initiated by end-users for a number of industries, such as manufacturing, mixed-use warehouse districts, corporate parks, oil refineries, pharmaceutical and aerospace works, testing and destruction facilities. It becomes faster, cheaper, and easier to activate zoning at smaller and smaller scales and at greater distance outside of the designated perimeter of the service area. The increased “reach” of zoning has accelerated so much that there is currently no agency that keeps an up-to-date map of the integration of FTZs in Illinois.

More and more EZs are also being activated within FTZ #22, producing increasingly stratified differentials across a greater range of territorial scales. Meanwhile, the rhetoric of tariff differentials, competitiveness for private entities, profit restoration, and trade efficiency, which had been historically associated with justifications for FTZ, is replaced by claims of civic engagement, local development, and job creation, typically reserved for enterprise zoning. In the absence of significant studies on the claims to benefit made by either FTZ and EZ, or of any real analysis of the rhetorical and political function they perform, the two are merging into a single dreamworld.

As zoning deepens, integrates, and molecularizes, and emergency financial managers declare entire states exceptional territories, questions of jurisdiction become granulated, so that deportable bodies are both commodities to be seen as never in place, as well as offshorable entities. In the hallucinatory world of efficiency and profit maximization woven by zoning, significant parts of the U.S. are off-shoring, enclosed by walls and yet moving outside of

national jurisdiction, subject only to the rules commensurate with “just-in-time” management—a territorial and financial organism integrating each of us as distinct subzones bounded at the level of skin and activated within the limits of the individual human body.

## LIVING SYSTEMS

If extra-territoriality and deportability are instruments of statecraft, they are also global regimes. The zone offers a perspective on the articulation of neoliberal logic and the state form: a dynamic process whereby territories and populations are increasingly zoned for optimal insertion into capital circuits, enforcing regimes of stratified spatiality. Our little group had long understood that a politics based on “rights” and “papers” would not allow us to develop a shared analysis of neoliberalism, nor to call the state into question as the necessary and inevitable frame of reference. Riding the zone became a way to explore and also to disrupt specific space-making practices and capitalist relations. We began to refer to an “undocumented perspective” as not merely the perspective, knowledge, or experience of people who are themselves rendered illegal by the state. “Undocumented” came to refer not to an identity, but to a set of practices, to the production of social relations that could be resistant to the capitalist relations that characterize the zone.

After the ride we continued to organize, and our actions became increasingly public. We also re-crafted our analysis of *poli-migra*. It seemed to us the violence was of a different nature—and its effects were different—than we had though. Our work still focused on deportation enforcement, but we began to discuss the ways in which criminalizing migration worked to forcibly integrate so many aspects of life into the logic of the dominant economic order. In writing about the scale and scope of migrant incarceration, and its connection to increasingly widespread disenfranchisement in the name of the current financial crisis, we reconsidered what we felt was at stake in migrant resistance.

. . . (poli-migra) is also an all-out attack on the communal relations and economies that immigrants are crucial in sustaining; neighborhood arrangements that collectivize domestic and reproductive work, economies of barter and exchange, social and institutional practices of self-governance. In other words, all the social relations that correspond to a definition of communities as living systems. These arrangements are a nuisance from the perspective of capital; they are an impediment to efficiency and profit maximization, [. . .] an obstacle to the total marketization of life . . . (Moratorium on Deportations, from *Why an Immigrants Freedom Ride*)

Our little group initially came together around a shared set of critical questions. They had to do with the hierarchies that characterized the dominant local organizations. As the mainstream immigrant rights movement shifted from “Aquí estamos, y no nos vamos” to “We are not criminals,” we questioned the political effects of the movement’s rhetoric, which seemed to rely on normative understandings of “Americaneness” and reproduced the difference between rightful citizen and rightless other in the form of “good immigrant” vs “criminal.”

Our questions also had to do with the ways in which difference based on racial, class, gender, and immigration status could sometimes become erased in social movements (via claims of inclusivity or commonality) or alternately reduced to identity politics and a narrowly-defined ally relation. In some ways, our experiments with organizing made us inefficient, especially from the perspective of campaign politics. But they produced new possibilities for how difference can be understood, and tactically leveraged. We recognize that it is capital that produces regimes of stratified and increasingly unequal differentials, and that our differences can therefore be neither overlooked nor overcome within it. In our experiments, various forms of entanglement with and across territories became our way of neither erasing nor essentializing difference, but rather leveraging it in order to force its production into some kind of legibility.