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Visions toward Democratizing Our Economy

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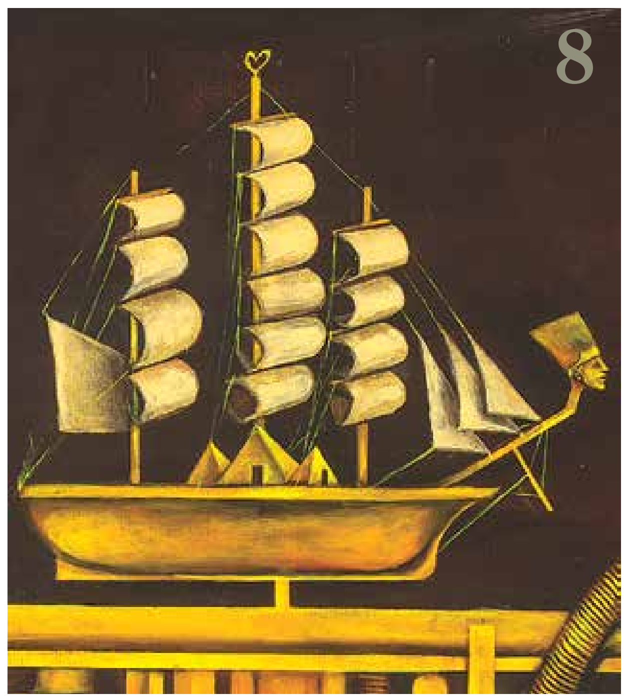
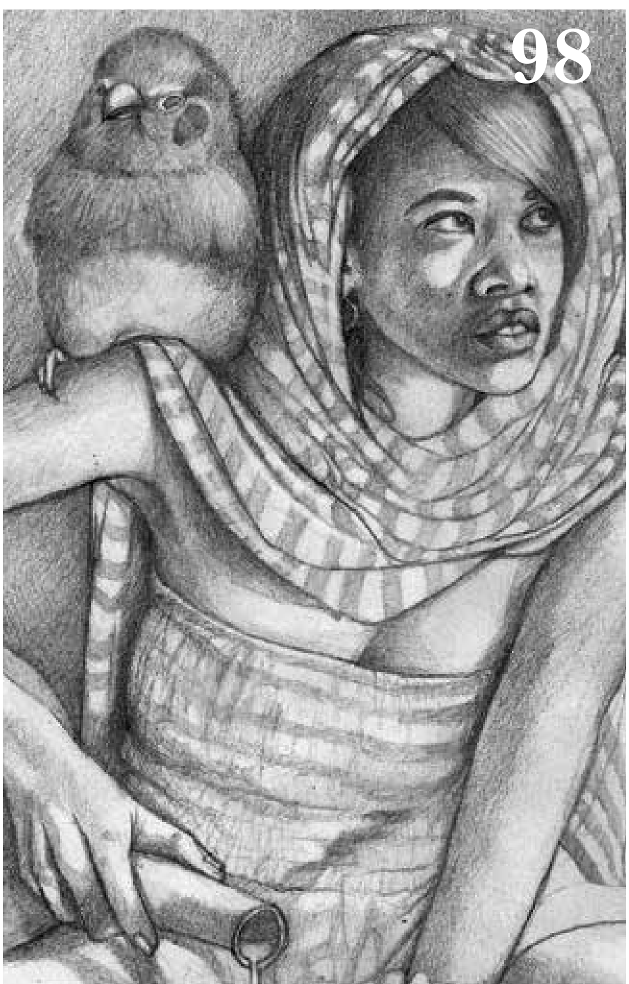


On the Cover . . .

"Nneka" by Komi Olafimihan/www.komiolaf.com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WELCOME

Dear Readers,

How do we claim collective ownership of the economy and our future?

Two clear, conflicting trends are evident: there is both tremendous energy behind the idea of a solidarity economy (along with a parallel revival of the U.S. labor movement) *and* ongoing, corporate blocking of even modest federal policy reforms. In other words, we exist in a time of both extraordinary economic justice advocacy and intensified neoliberal capital resistance to that movement. Unions and worker co-ops, for example, have gained new visibility, as workers mobilize at a scale unseen in decades; but federal policy reforms that seemed possible at the beginning of 2021, such as "Build Back Better," are stymied.

In this context, this edition of the magazine looks at the fundamentals of the concept of ownership across the economy—ownership of labor, business, technology, and communities—and asks: *What does ownership mean, and how can ownership be structured to design a more democratic economy?*

The articles in this collection speak to this broad approach to economic transformation. We see movements increasingly striving to instill democratic direction, not just in businesses and the workplace but also in the algorithms and institutions that govern our lives. More organizations are being developed, especially in BIPOC communities, that seek to claim ownership of culture and community and work together to operate as an alternative ecosystem.

We must also be willing to identify capitalism, the system that concentrates ownership of capital in limited hands and dominates our present economy, as a key obstacle to our collective flourishing. These days, capitalism is often seen, even by many progressive funders, as a fact of nature. We might, in this view, "reimagine" it but can never transcend it. We beg to differ. An economy that we can all claim as our own, cannot, by definition, be one in which most ownership is held by the few.

Building a truly democratic economy requires a willingness to challenge core beliefs and to think anew. We look forward to the conversations with those who are ready to join us on this journey.

Cyndi Suarez
President and Editor in Chief
NPQ

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Beyond Capitalism

Owning Our Economy, Owning Our Future

by Steve Dubb and Emily Kawano

Our current economic system privileges greed and diminishes cooperation; an economic system that prioritized solidarity would do the opposite. We can design our economy to build on the more cooperative, rather than the more self-serving, parts of our human selves—if we choose.

What does ownership mean, and how can it be structured to design a more democratic economy? It is common to think of ownership as being about possession: it's yours, or it's mine—or perhaps, if we are thinking as a group, it's ours. But it is much more than that. Ownership is a bundle of rights—social, individual, and collective—which means its boundaries and intersections vary from place to place.[1]

Today, a growing number of people are questioning how those ownership rights are defined and distributed. These days, in the world of work in the United States, there is talk of a Great Resignation;[2] but this can also be thought of in other ways—as a great awakening, a great rebellion, a great recalibration.[3] Beyond the workplace, communities are designing entirely new ecosystems of institutions—reclaiming ownership of their identities, cultures, land, and businesses.

Discussion of systems change has also rarely been more present. Yet, when people say "systems change," more often than not they don't mean *systemic* change—not really. Perhaps, to be generous, they mean systemic change *writ small*, focused on taking a multifaceted (sometimes called "collective impact") approach to addressing a single problem—such as building a better workforce training and development system[4]—rather than shifting power and changing rights of ownership in society as a whole.

DETAIL OF “CROSS SECTION OF THE AFRO PUFF” BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

It is common to treat the present global economy as a fact of nature, but it is not. Greed, we are also told, is part of the human condition. Maybe it is, but so too is cooperation.

As Cyndi Suarez, *NPQ*'s president and editor in chief, observed a few years ago, "[S]ystem thinking has become deracinated, devoid of its true power implications."[5] Nowhere is this point more apt than when it comes to thinking of the overall economy. Simply put, when it comes to the economy, all too often systems change is treated as a bridge too far, best not entertained at all. Alternatively, systems change is only framed within the confines of our current dominant system: we are invited to "reimagine capitalism" rather than to dare imagine beyond it.[6]

With this article, we want to take that challenge on. We do this not out of curiosity or academic fancy but for some highly practical and pragmatic reasons. Our collective well-being—and perhaps even our collective survival—depends on it.

THE NATURE OF THE CHALLENGE

It is common to treat the present global economy as a fact of nature, but it is not. Greed, we are also told, is part of the human condition. Maybe it is, but so too is cooperation. As Ariel Knafo, a psychology professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, explained in *Scientific American* years ago, "Human nature supports both prosocial and selfish traits," and the "degree to which we act cooperatively or selfishly is unique to each individual and hinges on a variety of genetic and environmental influences."[7] Our current economic system privileges greed and diminishes cooperation; an economic system that prioritized solidarity would do the opposite. We can design our economy to build on the more cooperative, rather than the more self-serving, parts of our human selves—if we choose.

Can a redesign be done? Well, it has been done before. In fact, our present capitalist system, so often treated as permanent, is, historically speaking, quite new. The origins of the capitalist economy can be traced back to at least the beginning of the imperialist process unleashed by the European so-called "discovery" of the Americas. As economist Jeffrey Sachs explains in "Twentieth-century political economy: a brief history of global capitalism," modern capitalism only "emerged as a [dominant] social system in western Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century."[8]

In short, capitalism became the world's reigning economic system only two centuries ago, and in many parts of the world its ascendancy is more recent than that. Economic systems have changed before. They can—and almost certainly will—change again.

Capitalism, as an economic system, has unleashed human productive capacity, but it has done so in ways that are highly exploitative and extractive. Capitalism, in short, has done and is doing great harm. It is impossible to discuss capitalism without recognizing its roots in Indigenous genocide and the enslavement of millions of Africans and their forcible relocation—dragged in chains to the "New World." As Joseph Inikori, a University of Rochester historian, details, "the employment of enslaved Africans in large-scale commodity production in the Americas was central to the rise of the nineteenth-century Atlantic economy."[9]

These days, even the benefits of capitalism on its own terms (such as gross domestic product) are showing diminishing returns—one sign of which is a decline in productivity increases.[10] Meanwhile, when it comes to economic justice, the costs are disturbingly obvious. In January 2022, Oxfam offered a report that noted, "The 10 richest men in the world own more than the bottom 3.1 billion people."[11] And U.S. data on the racial wealth and wage gaps give few indications—to be polite—of substantive progress. In 2020, David Leonhardt in the *New York Times* observed that "the wages of Black men trail those of white men by as much as when Harry Truman was president."[12] Meanwhile, the Black-white wealth gap, according to Federal Reserve data, was greater in 2016 than in 1968 (2019 data showed modest improvement).[13]

Environmental costs are also rapidly rising. The climate crisis, the result of mounting carbon emissions, has already increased global temperatures by an estimated 1.11 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels.[14] But carbon emissions are by no means the only environmental challenge. As journalist Ashoka Mukpo writes in *Mongabay,* "The past 50 years have seen a catastrophic decline in the planet's ecosystems and natural environments. Every day at least 32,300 hectares (80,000 acres) of forest vanish, and the size of wildlife populations has dropped by an average of 60%."[15]

The word *economy* is a combination of two Greek words—*oikos*, meaning *household*, and *nomos*, meaning *management*. The global economy, then, requires that we collectively manage our planetary home.

A PATH FORWARD: STEPS TOWARD A SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

How can any economy address the vast injustices ours generates today? The word *economy* is a combination of two Greek words—*oikos*, meaning *household*, and *nomos*, meaning *management*.[16] The global economy, then, requires that we collectively manage our planetary home, including how we generate wealth and allocate resources. This is, of course, an immensely complicated endeavor in a world inhabited by more than 7.9 billion people.[17]

Still, the good news is that the economy is ultimately a human creation. It therefore can be—and is now, albeit often in very harmful ways—collectively managed. Even better news is that there is widespread creativity and innovation building a new economy right now in the shell of the old. In some cases, people are doing so consciously—in other words, in their work, they are pursuing a vision of replacing the overall economic system with one that would prioritize solidarity. More often, though, these innovators are claiming ownership of their community and their local economies without explicitly seeking to build a solidarity economy. But in this pragmatic, practical, problem-solving work, these economy-building movement leaders are laying crucial building blocks of a different, more humane form of economic and social organization.

But what do we mean by the phrase *solidarity economy*? As was noted last year in the *Nonprofit Quarterly*, when moving toward an economy that is rooted in principles of solidarity, there is neither a "ready-made" formula nor a "one-size-fits-all" approach. A solidarity economy is, however, organized around some core values—*solidarity*, *participatory democracy*, *equity in all dimensions*, *sustainability*, and *pluralism*.[18] In terms of its theoretical base, the solidarity economy builds on the notion of economic democracy—namely, the idea that principles of popular sovereignty should be applied to management of the economy.[19]

The notion of a solidarity economy is also based on lessons from the failures of twentieth-century state socialism. The core solidarity economy values of pluralism, participatory democracy, and sustainability are a direct response to the lessons learned from state socialism's overreliance on centralized decision-making, as is the solidarity economy movement's overall emphasis on the importance of decentralization and federation.

A mistaken assumption of state socialism was its implicit postulate that economic management of our collective home meant management from the top. The work of the late Elinor Ostrom, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2009, points to the fallacy of this assumption. Her Nobel Prize lecture is titled "Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems." Ostrom's research focused on the organization of what she called "common pool resources." To pick a prominent example, the free-for-all dumping of carbon into the air could be considered a degradation of the common pool resource of our global atmosphere, resulting in climate change. Among her conclusions: more often than not, effective resource management solutions come from the bottom rather than the top. Ostrom also argued that "a core goal of public policy should be to facilitate the development of institutions that bring out the best in humans."[20] This also happens to be a good way to summarize a central goal of the solidarity economy movement.

PUTTING SOLIDARITY ECONOMY VALUES INTO PRACTICE

So, what practical, pragmatic lessons can be learned from economic justice movements today? Here are a few:

Mutual Aid. The COVID-19 pandemic has lifted mutual aid out of obscurity and made evident to all the practicality of solidarity as an operating principle. An article published last year in *Frontiers in Psychology* noted the fundamental role that mutual aid played in promoting community health and well-being during the pandemic in the United Kingdom. It called for sustaining such practices even after the pandemic finally subsides, by (among other things) prioritizing community-level interventions, and recognizing their importance in public policy in developing "long-term community responses."[21]

Democratic Planning. Participatory democracy is sometimes described as a pie-in-the-sky concept; but participatory budgeting in the United States is, increasingly, shifting from a niche idea to a serious mechanism for the public to take ownership of public resources and plan their use in a democratic way.[22]

Take the city of Seattle, Washington. In response to calls to defund the police, the city council allocated $30 million to be distributed through a public planning process. The process was sometimes contentious, but it succeeded in giving BIPOC communities in Seattle an opportunity to self-determine the investments that they needed. As city council member Debora Juarez said, when the council geared up to approve the measure, "We don't need to tell BIPOC communities what they need. We just need to listen and deliver."[23]

Political economist Gar Alperovitz has noted that the issue of democratic planning is a central challenge for building a post-capitalist economy.[24] There is, quite obviously, a lot more work to do to build governance structures that can allow for effective democratic input into economic planning at the regional and national level. Nonetheless, nascent though they may be, local examples of democratic planning, such as in Seattle, are building a critical knowledge base in this direction.[25]

Workplace Democracy. Employees typically spend around half of their waking hours at their workplace. All too often, they are excluded from any democratic decision-making beyond what's for lunch. The transformative potential of fostering workplace democracy is enormous, and data suggest that it pays off in terms of productivity, job quality,

Figure 1: Seattle, $30 million Participatory Budgeting (as adopted by City Council on August 9, 2021)[26]

Housing: $8.8 million

- $4.6 million: Subsidized homeownership projects, with target outreach to households of color
- $1.8 million: Wealth-building education for residents, artists, and business owners of color
- $1 million: City contracting help for construction businesses owned by women and people of color
- $875,000: Help for homeowners to keep their properties
- $250,000: Study on potential lease-to-own program
- $250,000: Consultant work on housing for union apprentices

Small businesses: $7.5 million

- $5 million: Grants and subsidized loans to small businesses, including those owned by people of color
- $2.5 million: Consultant support for small businesses

Education: $7.5 million

- $4 million: Various student and teacher programs, with focus on youth of color
- $2 million: Cultural programs aimed at youth of color
- $1.5 million: Programs for youth involved in the criminal legal system

Health: $6.2 million

- $1.7 million: Programs helping residents of color with healthcare careers
- $1.5 million: Innovative healing programs at community health centers
- $1 million: Efforts to secure healthcare for residents without coverage, with focus on communities of color
- $750,000: Healthy food programs aimed at communities of color
- $550,000: Environmental justice grants for community organizations that focus on people of color
- $500,000: Healthcare mentorships and internships for youth of color
- $250,000: Farm-to-table programs aimed at youth of color

It begins with imagining an economy beyond capitalism. Is this possible? Not only is it possible, it's a *must*, if we truly want to work toward an economy that we can all claim as our own.

job satisfaction, and employee retention. Employee ownership is a hot trend these days, especially given the so-called "silver tsunami"—the impending retirement of the baby boom generation of small business owners.[27] There are two major avenues of employee ownership: an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) and a worker cooperative. Both have been shown to improve business performance. ESOPs give workers shares of stock in their workplace, and are by far the more widespread model. While workers in some ESOPs have a controlling interest, the vast majority do not. Worker cooperatives, by contrast, are owned and controlled by the workers, thus hardwiring workplace democracy into the structure. While ESOPs are a step in the right direction, worker co-ops are a better strategy to build democracy in the workplace.

Sustainability. At the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES), executive director Lori Stern sees regenerative agriculture as a means to apply solidarity economy principles to build "a more equitable and resilient system that puts farmers, workers, and eaters in control." Her organization pursues this vision through a range of strategies, including increasing connections between farmers (including by building domestic supply chains), promoting cooperative ownership structures, and food system policy advocacy. Stern adds that, "The emerging farming solidarity economy is a sum of a range of practices, rooted in solidarity economy principles of pluralism, democracy, equity, mutualism, and sustainability. The connected and circular nature of life on a diverse farm forms the ecosystem that enables all to thrive."[28]

Equity and Reparations. There are many inspiring examples of how a genuine solidarity economy, organizing effectively, combines equity and community ownership. One example comes from Humboldt, California, where Cooperation Humboldt—an organization with an explicit solidarity economy mission—has partnered with the local Wiyot nation. This partnership has involved committing to paying an honor tax of 1 percent of Cooperation Humboldt's annual budget to the Wiyot nation, in acknowledgment that Humboldt is unceded Wiyot ancestral territory. Such reparations are integral to a solidarity economy.[29]

BUT IS SYSTEMIC CHANGE POSSIBLE?

We conclude where we began. We respect those, such as Chris Benner and Manuel Pastor, who advocate for the broad application of solidarity principles in our economy but seek to do so within the framework of the existing economic system.[30] Benner and Pastor note that "we have reached a point where our fundamental economic structures are driving unprecedented inequality, social divisions, and ecological destruction, amidst a politics of polarization, fragmentation, and alienation," and ask if we cannot "build a better economy" out of a sense of mutuality.[31] That is, indeed, the right question to ask.

Where we differ is in our contention that advocates of a solidarity economy must be brave enough to admit that building an alternative economics that is truly based on cooperation will very likely require systemic change beyond capitalism.[32] *In particular, we believe the separation of the overwhelming majority of people from meaningful ownership of the economy is a central flaw of capitalism that fosters division, creates concentration of wealth and power, encourages corruption (and cheating—anything to get an edge), and, ultimately, undermines solidarity.* This is not to deny the need to fight for reforms; however, it is also to affirm the need for movements to retain the imagination to envision systemic transformation, even while fighting for reforms such as the ones obtained by solidarity economy advocates in Seattle.

Where we agree with Benner and Pastor is in the necessity of rooting social change in social movements. The struggle for a solidarity economy is a practical one, *and there is no path forward without social movement*. As the late sociologist Erik Olin Wright noted, "If processes of social reproduction were comprehensive, and fully coherent, then there would be little possibility for effective strategies of radical social transformation."[33] But Wright was an optimist, and he added that "even when the spaces are limited, they can allow for transformations that matter."[34]

That remains the work. It begins with imagining an economy beyond capitalism. Is this possible? Not only is it possible, it's a *must*, if we truly want to work toward an economy that we can all claim as our own.

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STEVE DUBB is a senior editor at *NPQ*, where he directs *NPQ*'s economic justice program, including *NPQ*'s Economy Remix column. Dubb has worked with cooperatives and nonprofits for over two decades, including twelve years at The Democracy Collaborative and three years as executive director of NASCO (North American Students of Cooperation). In his work, Dubb has authored, coauthored, and edited numerous reports; participated in and facilitated learning cohorts; designed community-building strategies; and helped advance the field of community wealth building. He is the lead author of *Building Wealth: The Asset-Based Approach to Solving Social and Economic Problems* (Aspen, 2005) and coauthor (with Rita Axelroth Hodges) of *The Road Half Traveled: University Engagement at a Crossroads* (Michigan State University Press, 2012). In 2016, he curated and authored *Conversations on Community Wealth Building*, a collection of interviews with community builders that he had conducted over the previous decade. **EMILY KAWANO** is a cofounder of the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network, codirector of Wellspring Cooperatives, in Springfield, Massachusetts, and a member of *NPQ*'s economic justice advisory committee. An economist by training, Kawano served as the director of the Center for Popular Economics from 2004 to 2013, and has taught economics at Smith College.

Owning Our Labor

Productivity, Profits, and Power

by Rithika Ramamurthy

Ownership over work is the right to be safe, the right to have a say over our time, and the right to a life of dignity. To realize a world beyond our capitalist present, to leave behind staggering inequality and crushing productivity, we need workers to take the wheel and steer society into these fairer waters.

If you performed a task at four times the rate of productivity, shouldn't you receive four times the pay?

In his 1911 book *The Principles of Scientific Management*, mechanical engineer and management consultant Frederick Winslow Taylor tells the story of how he convinced a worker at the Bethlehem Steel company, whom he named "Schmidt," to increase the amount of crude iron he was able to load onto a railroad car.[1] Taylor did this by promising him a raise, to be determined by management. Schmidt was eager to accept, as he had worked hard to own a small plot of land, and hoped to build a house on it. Taylor told Schmidt that he should walk, rest, and load when/as he was instructed by a manager, minimizing any inefficiencies or inconsistencies in the process of carrying the crude iron onto the train. Schmidt went from loading around 12 tons of iron to almost 48 tons per day—an increase of 400 percent. For this, his pay rose from $1.15 to $1.85—an increase of 60 percent.

Taylor's method turned into an entire system of management focused on minimizing waste and maximizing profits, which became known as "Taylorism."[2] By breaking down every task into its smallest components, Taylorism took control away from the worker executing the task and gave it to another person, a manager, who decided the "one best way" for it to be done. As workers lost more and more control over how their work was done, management was able to streamline the labor process, squeezing every last drop of efficiency out of it without paying in kind. From 1979 to 2020, according to a study by the Economic Policy Institute, net productivity rose 61.8 percent, while the hourly rate of pay for the average worker increased by only 17.5 percent.[3] In other words, even though today's worker is more productive than

"SPEAK IT INTO EXISTENCE" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

The political terrain on which the struggle for ownership over work is taking place does not exactly favor workers. Over the second half of the twentieth century, management responded to worker struggles for power with brutal techniques to inspire fear and tamp down resistance.

ever before, she has seen wages stagnate, prices increase, profits disappear into deep pockets, politics favor the wealthy, and working conditions worsen.

THE FRUITS OF OUR LABOR

In Taylor's story about Schmidt, everyone made more money than the steel loader himself, whose increased productivity was met with disproportionate compensation. A century later, this has stayed true: as workers struggle to make ends meet, pay for top-level executives and profit for the ownership class have grown exponentially. The Economic Policy Institute found last year that in 2020, CEOs made 351 times as much as the average worker.[4] And even as those in the C-suite are being paid at such asymmetric rates, the owners of the companies they manage are making away with even more. Over the course of the last two years alone, wealth inequality has soared: American billionaires, many of whom are owners of the largest corporations in the world, have grown their assets by over $2 trillion since 2020—totaling over $5 trillion in October 2021, as one report shows.[5] This kind of mind-boggling math is proof that the numbers don't lie: the scales of the American economy are tipped in favor of those who already have the most. And that ownership relies on a system that funnels wealth away from workers and toward owners and the management class.

Giving workers back the fruits of their labor would completely alter the distribution of wealth in our economy and reverse economic inequality. At a very minimum, ownership over labor would be constituted by a fair wage. The federal minimum wage, which is at $7.25 per hour, has not been raised in over a decade, and fails to be sufficient pay as inflation steadily increases and prices soar. Lowering the value of the minimum wage hurts workers in the economy who often have the least bargaining power in the workplace—Black, Brown, immigrant, and women in low-wage jobs. Better wages are only one aspect of ownership in the workplace, but they are the main site of struggle for labor, because they are the most concrete illustration of one group's efforts being controlled by another for profit. Tackling this disproportion in profit head on is the first step toward taking back control of how work is done.

STRUGGLE FOR POWER

The political terrain on which the struggle for ownership over work is taking place does not exactly favor workers. Over the second half of the twentieth century, management responded to worker struggles for power with brutal techniques to inspire fear and tamp down resistance, such as delaying negotiations, firing strikers, and even threatening or terminating union activists.[6] While companies consolidated political power, federal labor law was not up to the task of defending workers and unions from political assault. As deindustrialization led to U.S. production being moved abroad, unions had less leverage to protect workers from closures and cuts. The American economy changed in its composition, turning to precarious work schedules and lean production to increase productivity, while giving U.S. workers less power and fewer protections than ever before.

Federal agencies and laws that support labor have been political targets since the middle of the twentieth century, when the labor movement was at its heyday. For example, the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act amended the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act)—the nation's fundamental law protecting workplace rights—by taking aim at some of labor's most effective weapons: solidarity strikes (striking in support of other unions), secondary boycotts (calling for boycotts of companies that do business with a company engaged in a labor dispute), and closed shops (an agreement that employees will require membership as a condition of employment). The passage of Taft-Hartley led to the decline of union victories nationwide.[7] If the legal apparatus of Taft-Hartley and other antilabor laws limited what unions could do, other political efforts attempted to limit what the nation knew about the labor movement altogether. For example, the Reagan administration cut funding for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1982, forcing it to limit documentation of work stoppages to those involving only one thousand or more workers who complete at least one entire shift.[8] Because more than 80 percent of businesses have fewer than one thousand employees, the majority of work stoppage activity, from slowdowns to walkouts, goes undocumented.[9] The consequences of this exclusion are vast, but the major loss is that workers all over the country have no way of knowing about workplace activity of various kinds—making it harder to inspire organizing efforts and learn from other fights.

Today, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is a federal agency that is in desperate need of support. Since last October, when the media buzz around labor activity was at an all-time high, union representation petitions—filed by employers or employees to hold an election to determine whether workers want a union—have increased by an impressive 57 percent at the NLRB, according to a report released in April 2022, with increased cases coinciding with critical shortages in both funding and staffing. Budgetary apportioning by the federal government, the report details, has not increased in nine years, and field staffing has decreased by half. "Right now, there is a surge in labor activity nationwide, with workers organizing and filing petitions for more union elections than they have in the last ten years," NLRB General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo said. "This has caused a significant increase in the NLRB's caseload, and the Agency urgently needs more staff and resources to effectively comply with our Congressional mandate."[10] Without this funding, workers all over the country will be much less likely to succeed in their organizing efforts, especially when they are up against employers with resources dedicated to anti-union campaigns.[11]

There have also been legislative efforts to give workers back control over their workplaces, beginning with the right to organize. The Protecting the Right to Organize Act, also known as the PRO Act, is one proposed piece of legislation that would protect worker power.[12] The PRO Act proposes to end right-to-work laws (which financially undermine unions by preventing them from requiring membership as a condition of employment), protect workers from corporate exploitation, and put forward civil penalties for employers that violate labor law—including anti-union practices that undermine union elections and collective bargaining. This comprehensive reform aims to position unions as a powerful entity to stand up to corporate power, reversing close to a century of repression of the labor movement. With the PRO Act, the federal government has a chance to mitigate four decades of economic polarization and the brutalization of the working class. But achieving this kind of historic legislation to make labor law work for the people will require strong pushback from the working class and its allies.

As of now, it seems that many workers are seizing the moment to insist that they deserve better. In what has come to be called "The Great Resignation," almost 47 million American workers quit their jobs in 2021.

MOBILIZATION

As of now, it seems that many workers are seizing the moment to insist that they deserve better. In what has come to be called "The Great Resignation," almost 47 million American workers quit their jobs in 2021, an overwhelming if unorganized response to the increased pressures of low-wage jobs.[13] Workers—predominantly in the areas of retail, hospitality, and food services—quitting in the tens of millions is part of a larger trend of pushing back against the way we work now.[14] This unprecedented wave of individual resistance—significant expression of a larger collective dissatisfaction—has sparked a national conversation about the nature of work. As Ophelia Akanjo wrote in a recent article for *NPQ*, employees are "treated as one-dimensional expendable beings with very little care for their three-dimensional complex lives outside of work."[15] Whether workers are fed up with low wages, despotic management, or limited flexibility, their mass quits suggest that work as we know it—wages, working conditions, and workplace power—is in desperate need of transformation.

As the widespread sentiment that "work sucks" became reflected in various spheres of media coverage, worker activity began to pick up steam. Last October, over 100,000 workers in the private sector were ready to walk off the job or were already walking picket lines—a phenomenon the media has called "Striketober."[16] But as Luis Feliz Leon and Maximillian Alvarez wrote in *Labor Notes* during this flurry of work stoppage activity, the labor movement—unions, worker centers, journalists, and other allies—has to both stoke the fires that fuel worker activity *and* clearly assess its obstacles: "We need to identify and cultivate the passions among

Paying attention to the stories of workers struggling for power in the workplace will allow us to better understand where revolutionary potential lies across various sectors of the economy, which are constantly being restructured by the pressures of capital.

America's rank and file that have made this a special moment, but we also need to be clear-eyed about the deep challenges preventing this moment from becoming a movement."[17] Even though it has been widely repeated, for example, that more Americans are supportive of unions than ever before,[18] that public opinion doesn't translate directly to the incredible effort that workplace organizing requires: sitting through captive audience meetings (mandatory anti-union sessions run by management), running successful elections despite the arcane process, and growing membership to supermajorities in order to build power in local communities.

Without both strategies—telling positive stories about labor while also honestly recognizing its political challenges—movement building will be divorced from the material context that makes it real: the workers themselves. Because the labor movement is an uneven and complicated one, grasping its ebbs and flows and mapping its moments of defeat is the only path forward with the strength required to take on multibillion-dollar corporations. As labor scholar Naomi R. Williams has noted, paying attention to the stories of workers struggling for power in the workplace will allow us to better understand where revolutionary potential lies across various sectors of the economy, which are constantly being restructured by the pressures of capital.[19]

Amazon is the most prominent example of a company that has restructured the economy and, by extension, the labor process. Employing over one million people in the United States, the company has set unprecedented productivity standards and reshaped consumer expectations—all at the expense of worker health and safety.[20] Insider accounts of working at an Amazon fulfillment center, like the one by journalist Emily Guendelsberger, detail the brutal expectations of this low-wage work. "Working in an Amazon warehouse outside Louisville, Kentucky," Guendelsberger recounts, "I walked up to 16 miles a day to keep up with the rate at which I was supposed to pick orders. A GPS-enabled scanner tracked my movements and constantly informed me how many seconds I had left to complete my task."[21] Amazon has consistently been in the press for ignoring health and safety protections and imposing efficiency requirements that force workers to relieve themselves in plastic water bottles, miscarry pregnancies due to overexertion, or even die on the shop floor of a heart attack.[22] As workers at Amazon have pointed out, this production pace is set, as at other low-wage jobs, by technology: algorithms and trackers that count a bathroom break as a "TOT" (time off task).[23] Subverting the safety and dignity of workers to Amazon's two-day delivery model via various modes of technological surveillance is not just a feature of the logistics sector. Technological surveillance for productivity purposes has become a near ubiquitous feature of the modern workplace,[24] ranging across sectors from food service to healthcare, and prioritizing output above all.

A company of this insidious influence and economic power is unlikely to take kindly to attempts to curb its insatiable pace. This is one reason why Amazon spent over $4 million on anti-union consultants when workers at JFK8, a Staten Island fulfillment center, began to organize an independent union.[25] Considering this well-resourced attack—alongside the conditions that make organizing at Amazon extremely hard (including high employee turnover and technological surveillance)—the Amazon Labor Union's historic election in favor of union representation at JFK8 is no small feat.[26] There is no straightforward path to worker sovereignty, however: earlier this May, workers at the fulfillment center LDJ5 warehouse voted against the union.[27] But the uneven character of struggle within the corporation itself does not necessarily change the labor movement's energy on a national scale; nor does it change the fact of the ALU's first and essential win. Organizing efforts at Amazon fulfillment centers are important first steps toward taking back the reins of a global infrastructure that increasingly surveils and profits off us all. When workers see other workers winning power at their workplaces, especially at a giant like Amazon, it tends to spread like wildfire.[28]

Workers . . . understand that power in the workplace is the first step toward living whole and healthy lives. Without control over the eight hours of the workday, the remaining sixteen, for rest and what we will, are bound to suffer.

The famous slogan of the labor movement—"eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will"—articulates the spirit of many worker struggles we are seeing today. Workers, from manufacturing to higher education, understand that power in the workplace is the first step toward living whole and healthy lives. Without control over the eight hours of the workday, the remaining sixteen, for rest and what we will, are bound to suffer.

This control looks like many things. Beyond demanding good, high-paying jobs for all, the labor movement also struggles for other kinds of equality in the workplace: freedom from discrimination and harassment, transparency around working conditions and wages, and decision-making power—all aspirational features of a worker-owned economy. Ownership over work is the right to be safe, the right to have a say over our time, and the right to a life of dignity. To realize a world beyond our capitalist present, to leave behind staggering inequality and crushing productivity, we need workers to take the wheel and steer society into these fairer waters.

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About the Artist: Komi Olafimihan

Toronto-based, Nigerian-born visual artist and poet Komi Olafimihan is a man whose ceaseless curiosity and truth-seeking nature allow him to represent the complexities of this world and generation in bold, ingenious, and often eclectic fashion. In recent years, Olafimihan's work has meditated powerfully on notions of decolonization, belonging, and African diasporic history, all through the lens of Afrofuturism—an artistic and cultural movement that explores African culture and its intersection with present and future technologies.

Olafimihan is an artist whose work, as both a painter and a spoken word poet, reflects a desire to use his gifts of perception to recontextualize common ideas of race, Africanness, femininity, manhood, and political awareness in ways that cast a sturdy gaze on the present social moment but always look toward the glorious possibilities of the future.

As a visual artist, Olafimihan has received international attention and praise. His work has been the focus of solo exhibitions on three occasions: *Alkebulan* (Harbourfront Center, Toronto, 2015); *Angels of Music* (National Arts Center, Ottawa, 2009); and *Fire Dance* (Gallery 101, Ottawa, 2008). His paintings have also been part of group exhibitions in New York, Paris, Accra, Lagos, Edmonton, Toronto, and Ottawa. In the world of visual art, Olafimihan is a sought-after educator, lecturer, and panelist, having offered his perspectives at Kaya Fest 2018, Bowie State University, and Carleton University's Institute of African Studies, among several other institutions.

As a poet and spoken word performer, Olafimihan has carved out an equally long and acclaimed career. He was a member of the national slam championship winning team at the 2009 Canadian Festival of Spoken Word. He has toured Canada extensively as a poet, including performances at notable festivals such as the Vancouver Island Music Festival, Hillside Community Festival, Manifesto Festival, and Ottawa Versefest, among others. His poetry has been published in *Arc Magazine* and *The Great Black North: Contemporary African Canadian Poetry* (Frontenac House, 2013).

Olafimihan's futurist, visual, and world-building aptitudes are also an outcome of his formal education. In 2009, he received his master's degree in architecture from Carleton University. At present, he is devoted to using his creative powers to transmit, in as many ways as possible, a sense of pride and shared history, particularly for those of African lineage. He is a versatile, sensitive, and daring artist, whose artistic expressions remind us of the integral role artistry and imagination can play in shaping, redefining, and ultimately grasping a rigorous vision of justice within this generation and the ones to come.

Reclaiming Worker Control
New Forms of Ownership

Restoring worker control will require persistence, creativity, and solidarity—anchored in worker movements' ability to align with each other and find common ground.

by Steve Dubb

What does it mean to own the labor process? Denise R. Johnson, a former associate justice of the Vermont Supreme Court, noted in a 2007 *Vermont Law Review* article that the standard "modern legal understanding" of the term "property ownership" is "an abstract notion that analytically describes property as a collection of rights vis-à-vis others, rather than rights to a 'thing,' like a house or a piece of land."[1]

What Johnson describes may not be intuitive, but it makes sense. Understanding ownership as a "bundle of rights," as Johnson describes it in her article, recognizes that most assets have limited value outside of the value society places on them. You can't be a billionaire, for example, in a society where money has not been invented. *Property is relational.* Ownership refers not just to possession per se, but also to the *socially recognized rights tied to that possession*.

"3014" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

For workers to claim ownership rights, two strategies have historically been paramount: workers can own businesses directly, such as in a worker co-op, or workers can organize to place social limits on the rights of capitalist property.

The rights of ownership can and do change, which means that there are many paths to democratizing ownership. Of course, within today's capitalist economic system, owners of capital can also act to undermine democratic ownership. For instance, in the early twentieth century, corporate owners employed supervisors to extract knowledge from line workers, reducing worker ownership and control of the production process—which became known as "Taylorism" (named after the man who pioneered the approach).[2] Workers, in turn, responded by combining into the associations we know as "unions."

For workers to claim ownership rights, two strategies have historically been paramount: workers can own businesses directly, such as in a worker co-op, or workers can organize to place social limits on the rights of capitalist property. The latter is what, at the core, unions do. A collective bargaining agreement does not just specify wages; it limits the rights of ownership—for example, by restricting owners' rights to dismiss workers from their jobs.

But what about workers who are neither union members nor employee-owners? In the United States, only 10.3 percent of workers (14 million people) are union members,[3] while the number of people working for companies with employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs)—the most common (albeit flawed) form of employee ownership—is about 10.2 million (7.5 percent of all workers).[4] Even if there were no overlap between those two groups (and there is), more than 80 percent of American workers presently benefit from neither.

In this vacuum, many other paths have been employed to increase worker ownership and control. In this article, we look at three of these: *day laborer centers*, *the worker center movement writ large*, and *mutualism*.

THE EMERGENCE OF A NATIONAL DAY LABORER CENTER NETWORK

What is a day laborer center? Simply put, it is an association of people who labor on a job-by-job basis. When unorganized, these day laborers are among the most vulnerable workers in the labor force: they lack job security and benefits, have traditionally tended to be hired at street corners, and, in the United States, many are undocumented.

Before he came to be a codirector of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON), Pablo Alvarado was a day laborer. He immigrated to the United States from El Salvador—fleeing its civil war at the end of the 1980s—and began working in Los Angeles in 1990. As he explained to Harold Meyerson of *The American Prospect*, "I stood on street corners waiting for work; I worked on demolition jobs; I learned carpentry and drywalling; I did gardening and house painting."[5]

Forming a day laborers' association would come later. First, Alvarado was hired as an organizer by a local Los Angeles immigration rights nonprofit, in January 1996. That November, Alvarado relates, he started talking with another organizer from Northern California after a game of soccer. The organization that would become NDLON, the National Day Laborers' Organizing Network, began on that soccer field, Alvarado explains, although the nonprofit was not formally launched until 2001.[6]

Today, there is a national network of over fifty centers for day laborers. These have served as vital community support centers during the COVID-19 pandemic.[7] Indeed, during the economic shutdown, day laborer centers became much more—sites for giving out cash assistance, food, and personal protective equipment like masks, as well as providing referrals to health clinics.[8]

But how do the centers give ownership of the work process back to workers? The key mechanism is a tool familiar to union members: the creation of a democratically controlled hiring hall. As Ligia Guallpa, director of the Proyecto Justicia Laboral (Workers Justice Project) in Brooklyn, New York, explains: "We have been able to create a safe space for workers to come together to set standards."[9] Guallpa elaborated, "Along with my coworker, Yadira Sanchez, we cofounded the organization to create a safe space for workers to organize our union of community members and workers. Some call it our 'little union.' It is a group that

One area where worker centers have made strides is with domestic workers. The National Domestic Workers' Alliance, which Ai-jen Poo directs, connects several dozen member and affiliate groups across the country.

dreams that it is possible for workers to have dignity and respect in their own workplaces and be treated as human beings."[10]

Day laborer centers, such as the one Guallpa directs, ensure fair and safe working conditions at a standard rate. Meanwhile, employers pay more but benefit from having an organization stand behind the work. Fundamentally, the day laborers move from taking the jobs at the rates offered to establishing standards and conditions of their employment—and typically get paid at rates between $18 and $25 an hour. In these centers, day laborers have a space to meet with each other as well as enroll in classes (such as English as a second language) that are run according to popular education principles.

At these centers, workers elect their own leaders, hold their own meetings, set their own wage levels, and establish *reglamentos*—or codes of conduct—to hold each other accountable. The results are not only that day laborers gain ownership over the work process, their standing in the community rises, as well. "[T]he Center restored to us the dignity of being respected as human beings," Rodrigo Perez Valencia, a day laborer in Santa Cruz who immigrated from the Mexican state of Oaxaca, told *NPQ*.[11]

THE WORKER CENTER MOVEMENT WRIT LARGE

A day laborer center is one type of worker center, but the worker center movement covers a much broader range of workers. Laine Romero-Alston, formerly at Open Society Foundations (and now working for the U.S. Department of Labor) observes that, just as many unions arose in opposition to Taylorism, worker centers too gained strength rising in opposition to the "fissuring" of work—by which she means the severing of the typical employer–employee relationship. Often, this means that workers have become gig workers, or, legally speaking, "independent contractors."[12]

Technically, workers who are independent contractors are self-employed and "own" their own businesses. But, as noted above, not all ownership carries the same benefits, and in some cases, ownership brings significant costs. Contracting can work well for professionals who have multiple clients (such as accountants); but for millions in the United States, being an independent contractor can mean getting saddled with business costs (insurance, equipment, and so forth) while the profits and benefits flow elsewhere.

For example, Steve Viscelli—a University of Pennsylvania sociologist and author of *The Big Rig: Trucking and The Decline of the American* Dream—has described in the *Atlantic* how independent contracting in the trucking industry, a product of trucking deregulation in the late 1970s, has resulted in "sweatshops on wheels"—with drivers often leasing trucks from companies and only providing services to one company, even as the drivers technically are their own employers. The result? As Viscelli explains, "Forty years ago, truckers formed one of the best paid and most politically powerful parts of the U.S. working class. Today, according to the Department of Labor, the average trucker makes about $40,000. In 1980, according to one industry analyst, the average trucker was making (after adjusting for inflation) the equivalent of more than $110,000 today."[13]

Romero-Alston observes that it is "in this context we saw the emergence of worker centers."[14] This is also the context in which platform cooperatives have formed to organize gig workers at ride-hailing app companies and elsewhere.

One area where worker centers have made strides is with domestic workers.[15] The National Domestic Workers' Alliance, which Ai-jen Poo directs, connects several dozen member and affiliate groups across the country. Poo explains that the national network began in Atlanta in 2007 with a dozen organizing networks.[16] But organizing a hiring hall structure like the ones the day laborers have created has not been viable for domestic workers. The group has been highly successful in getting into place a domestic bill of rights (state and local), however, which not only provides protections for workers but also in some cases gives them the ability to cogovern the sector. In Seattle, due to deep

These days, mutualism is making a comeback, with the COVID-19 pandemic leading to the formation of thousands of mutual aid networks.

organizing by domestic workers citywide, Poo notes, "We were able to create a domestic workers' standards board that brought together the city representatives of employers and worker representatives to . . . talk about what labor standards in the city of Seattle for domestic workers should look like, and that is starting to move towards concrete changes."[17]

Worker centers have also emerged more broadly as a strategy to organize workers across multiple industries in BIPOC communities. Nationally, for example, over a dozen Black worker centers are now linked in a national network, explains Lola Smallwood-Cuevas, cofounder of the Los Angeles Black Worker Center.[18] As Steven Pitts, emeritus associate chair of the University of California Berkeley Labor Center, wrote in 2018, early chapters of what came to be the National Black Worker Center Project (NBWCP) in 2014 emerged in the South—including Black Workers for Justice, founded in North Carolina in 1981, and the Mississippi Center for Human Rights, founded in the small city of Greensville in 1996.[19]

Today, the Black worker center network extends to many additional places, including Los Angeles, Chicago, New Orleans, Baltimore, Boston, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Washington, DC. Primarily, the centers act as support spaces for Black worker organizing and as advocates for Black workers, with a focus on helping Black workers access job opportunities. For example, in New Orleans, after Hurricane Katrina, the Black worker justice center in that city advocated to compel the federal government to abide by Housing & Urban Development Section 3 rules, which require public housing authorities to employ residents where possible. In some cases, the centers have also used direct ownership strategies. As Pitts writes, "Across NBWCP, some affiliates find that many of their initial members feel alienated from a political economy that devalues them as Black workers, and their response is a search for alternatives to the status quo. ONE DC is exploring the development of worker cooperatives. Two cooperatives already implemented are a child care cooperative and a cleaning cooperative."[20]

MUTUALISM: MAKING A COMEBACK

Today, when one thinks of a union, the immediate vision is surely of an association that supports workers in the workplace. Yet, as Sara Horowitz reminds us in *Mutualism: Building the Next Economy from the Ground Up,* historically unions have operated as social institutions—both within the workplace and far beyond it. As Horowitz writes, in the 1910s and 1920s, "workers could get a loan from Amalgamated Bank or medical help at the Sidney Hillman Health Center, or buy into affordable union housing in the Bronx."[21] The point, Horowitz explains, is that the textile workers' union did not just represent workers inside the factory—it was a bank, a hospital, and a co-op housing provider as well.

What can be learned from this in the present moment? Horowitz contends that social institutions—be they unions, worker centers, or cooperatives—must rebuild what she calls *civic infrastructure*, by which she means institutions that are created and owned by—and therefore responsive to—social organizations such as unions and cooperatives.[22] Horowitz doesn't just talk about this—she's an institution builder herself. In 1995, she founded the Freelancers Union, a member-governed nonprofit that she led until 2018, which provides insurance benefits for its 500,000-plus "gig economy" worker-members nationwide.[23]

These days, mutualism is making a comeback, with the COVID-19 pandemic leading to the formation of thousands of mutual aid networks.[24] Mutual aid has also become increasingly central in disaster recovery.[25] As Horowitz points out, the potential for mutualism extends far wider. For instance, she suggests that historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) could have been implementation partners in the 2021 infrastructure bill, if only building community-responsive institutions was seen to be a central goal of a democratic polity.[26]

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, a moment of U.S. labor union revival has been evident. Last October, signs of this were apparent in the strike wave that broke out, known as "Striketober."[27] This spring we saw pro-union votes at over fifty Starbucks branches,[28] as well as a union election win involving around eight thousand workers at an Amazon warehouse in Staten Island.[29] To understand how significant that Amazon win is, note that—according to *Bloomberg Law*—since 1989, a U.S. private sector union has not won an election that large; in fact, the Amazon win is only the fifth time in thirty-three years that a private-sector union has won an election in a workplace with five thousand workers or more.[30] What drove the Staten Island success? Workers' desire to control the labor process and working conditions. Notably, organizing began after a health-and-safety walkout spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic.[31]

Clearly, it will require multiple strategies for workers to (re)claim ownership over the labor process. Union co-ops—that is, co-ops where workers both own the business *and* link to workers beyond their workplace—are still uncommon, but they offer a window into how different approaches—unions, cooperatives, worker centers, and mutualist organizations—might complement each other.[32]

Nearly a decade ago, I asked Rob Witherell of the United Steelworkers union, an early advocate of co-op–union bridge-building, where he saw common ground between the co-op and union movements. His response: "At the most basic level, in both cases, it is about workers helping each other out to create a better life for themselves. . . . The means for achieving their goals are different, but their goals are very much aligned."[33]

Today, two larger-order trends are evident. On the one hand, the toolkit of available methods that workers possess to reclaim ownership of the labor process and the economy has expanded. Yet, no one should lose sight of the loss of worker control that has occurred in recent decades. At Amazon, for example, a reporter noted years ago that pickers at one warehouse had to pull up to one hundred items from the shelves an hour and walk as many as twelve miles a day on their shifts—working conditions that might have appalled even Frederick Taylor.[34] Restoring worker control will require persistence, creativity, and solidarity—anchored in worker movements' ability to align with each other and find common ground.

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The State of the Care Economy

Community Leaders Weigh In

In the past two years, the U.S. economy has revealed an undeniable truth: it runs on care work. . . . This labor, done mostly by women of color, is often made invisible: performed quietly and cheaply by those at the margins of society, who work hard without good pay or protections. How do we counter this tendency of capitalism to devalue what is most important and intrinsic to our survival?

In the past two years, the U.S. economy has revealed an undeniable truth: it runs on care work. The essential work of cooking and delivering food, caring for children and the elderly, and cleaning homes and offices is both necessary for our lives and not paid a living wage. This labor, done mostly by women of color, is often made invisible: performed quietly and cheaply by those at the margins of society, who work hard without good pay or protections. How do we counter this tendency of capitalism to devalue what is most important and intrinsic to our survival?

"SELF ISOLATION WITH A POTTED PLANT" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

The pieces all articulate in common that *care work is work*—and that it's time to value it as such.

We asked four leaders of care organizations to put the consequences of this problem—and creative solutions to it—into words: Ai-jen Poo of Caring Across Generations coalition and National Domestic Workers Alliance; Adria Powell of Cooperative Home Care Associates; Dennis Hogan of Service Employees International Union, District 1199NE (SEIU 1199NE), who cowrote with Dulari Tahbildar of the Rhode Island Child Care Training Program for SEIU Education & Support Fund (ESF); and Ellen Vera of Co-op Cincy. All are part of national or local organizations at the forefront of fighting for economic and racial justice in care work, advancing policy to create change in the sector, and building democratic models that remake the care economy.

Respondents were invited to speak to this year's theme of "Owning Our Economy, Owning Our Future" directly, or to use it as a point of departure to talk about an aspect of the sector of their choice. The pieces all articulate in common that *care work is work*—and that it's time to value it as such.

POVERTY-WAGE CARE WORK: UNSUSTAINABLE BEFORE, UNTHINKABLE NOW

by Ai-jen Poo

The narrative about care in our culture has long been misaligned with the reality of care in our society and economy. The capacity to care for children, disabled family members, or older loved ones is either taken for granted—work that should be quietly performed by family members, particularly women, before or after hours of full-time work outside the home—or assumed to be something that underpaid care workers, often women of color and immigrants, will quietly enter our homes to do for us. Care is poverty-wage work, seen and treated as unskilled and unprofessional, and yet it could not be more valuable. And despite all of us requiring some form of care at some point in our lives, if we struggle it is treated as an isolated, personal problem—even a personal failure. When we're doing our best, it never seems to be enough to relieve the mounting pressures, especially with baby boomers aging and millennials having families of their own.

As a society, we must take ownership of the care economy we rely on and invest in the strength and resilience of our care programs, our caregivers, and our care workforce. From child care to home- and community-based services, care work is an essential part of the infrastructure for a strong workforce and economy. Access to child care enables parents to work. Access to home- and community-based services enables many older adults and people with disabilities to live in the home and community, work, stay healthy, live whole lives. Investing in care jobs would transform what are now poverty wage jobs without benefits into jobs with real economic security, so that care workers can care for their own families, too.

What would this look like? Investment in home- and community-based services would advance equity—supporting women and especially women of color, who shoulder a disproportionate amount of care work, whether as family caregivers or formal care workers. Young workers would join the home care workforce with the confidence that this was a career worth investing in. Tens of millions of family caregivers would have the support they need for their family members while continuing their own careers. States would save money in the long term, because home care is much less costly than nursing home care.

The pandemic revealed some of the risks of our cultural norms and narratives about care, and helped us all see that we have care in common. Our time in quarantine helped us see that we need more than individual sacrifices and patchwork programs if we are to recover, sustain, and succeed in the future. Social distancing and COVID protocols shut down the minimal care supports we had, and millions of mothers and family caregivers were pushed out of the workforce. Now, two and a half years later, we have an opportunity to transform our culture around care work.

Care work wasn't considered infrastructure or a part of the "real" economy before the pandemic. A part of our economy long governed by norms rooted in gender discrimination and the legacy of slavery, care work can no longer be sidelined. The status quo was unsustainable before the pandemic, and it's unthinkable now.

The post-pandemic care economy must be one that is dignified for all, including care workers, their families, and all of us who rely on care.

Investment in a solid care economy will enable future generations to care for their families from birth to death. Future generations are counting on us.

AI-JEN POO is a next-generation labor leader, award-winning organizer, author, and a leading voice in the women's movement. She is president of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, director of Caring Across Generations, cofounder of SuperMajority, and a trustee of the Ford Foundation. Poo is a nationally recognized expert on elder and family care, the future of work, gender equality, immigration, narrative change, and grassroots organizing. She is the author of *The Age of Dignity: Preparing for the Elder Boom in a Changing America* (New Press, 2016).

MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE: FAIR PAY FOR HOME CARE

by Adria Powell

One of the most significant challenges home care workers face today is the lack of value society accords them and their critical work—work that runs the gamut from daily assistance with getting out of bed, bathing, dressing, and meal preparation to assistance focused on helping clients with physical disabilities maintain gainful employment—allowing older adults and people with disabilities to remain in their homes and communities safely and independently. That we allow society to undervalue these jobs and not invest in these workers is inexcusable. These workers face inequities across the board. It is a result of who does the work (overwhelmingly, women, people of color, and immigrants), the legacy of slavery, and where the work is carried out (in someone's home) that a bias emerges toward viewing the work as obligatory and undeserving of adequate compensation.

Perhaps it's connected to the declaration I hear from so many home care workers that they "love" what they do, that their passion for this work comes "from the heart," or that they feel like they are "part of the family" that we believe it is reasonable—even acceptable—to provide home care workers with poverty-level wages. When it comes to human services work, there seems to be a direct correlation in our society between work coming from the heart and low pay. Of course, reasonable people understand that workers deserve to both love what they do and be fairly compensated for the services they deliver.

The lack of value placed on these workers and their jobs results not only in low wages but also minimal investments—training, ongoing support and development, career advancement, and so forth. And because home care workers work within someone else's home, they are largely unseen and unheard. They work alone, and the job can feel excruciatingly isolating. It is the perfect setup for invisibility.

At Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA), we have worked for decades on building a model home care agency designed to demonstrate how investing in quality jobs is important for both home care workers and clients. Established in 1985, CHCA is now the largest worker-owned cooperative in the United States, growing from twelve home care workers to a prepandemic high of twenty-three hundred workers. We have long recognized that these jobs need to be *good* jobs—jobs that engender dignity and in which workers are treated with respect. Our worker-owned cooperative structure is ideal for countering the issue of invisibility. Workers in a cooperative are owners, and with ownership comes the opportunity to vote on key decisions, serve as part of a governing body, and have a stake in profits generated by the work.

CHCA develops and trains workers to advocate for policy changes needed to improve jobs in the field. And within the organization, we improve job quality by providing robust training both in how to be a home care worker and what it means to be a member of the cooperative. Workers are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the organization at whatever level feels attainable to them. The continuous learning and opportunities for advancement demonstrate to workers that they are valued and that their work is respected.

But the challenges home care workers face cannot be overcome by one organization. We are part of an enormous ecosystem in healthcare that is fraught with inequity and deep-rooted system failures. The long-standing problems must be addressed and corrected at the macro level. In New York State, we are part of an historic coalition of home care stakeholders seeking to bring about this correction. The coalition is engaged in a campaign: Fair Pay for Home Care. For two consecutive years, we have had the Fair Pay for Home Care bill introduced. The bill would increase home care worker wages from $13.20 per hour in some regions of New York State to $22.50 per hour (or 150 percent of the highest regional minimum wage) in New York State, which would help to lift hundreds of thousands of women, people of color, immigrants, and their families out of poverty and represent fair compensation for home care workers.

The coalition has achieved a modest gain for home care workers in the New York State 2023 budget. Home care workers will see a $3 hourly increase over the next two years. Additionally, New York State will invest over $2 billion annually for bonuses for healthcare workers who earn less than $125,000 per year (unfortunately, home care workers were eliminated from this pool because they received the $3 increase over two years in the budget). We are part of the Fair Pay coalition that has remained intact for the past two years, is a political force, and has gained considerable momentum. We will continue to work to reach the end goal of Fair Pay for Home Care—a real and achievable solution to the lack of investment in these workers and jobs, with effects that are positioned to reach well beyond just the home care workforce in New York State.

ADRIA POWELL is president and CEO of Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA), the largest employee-owned cooperative business in the country. CHCA is a thirty-seven-year-old Licensed Home Care Service Agency (LHCSA), firmly anchored in the Bronx, New York. Powell is responsible for the oversight of more than seventeen hundred home care workers and nearly one hundred administrative staff. Nearly half of the employees own a share of the cooperative. Powell has worked for CHCA since 1988, and has held various roles with progressive responsibility. In her current leadership role, she runs an agency that empowers home health aides—who typically earn modest wages for taking care of the elderly and disabled at home—by giving them better benefits and opportunities to buy a stake in the business, serve on its board of directors, and share in profits.

CHILD CARE: THE LINCHPIN OF OUR ECONOMY

by Dennis Hogan and Dulari Tahbildar

Child care has always been the linchpin of not just the care economy but also the economy more generally. Parents who have access to affordable, high-quality child care are able to participate in the labor force, earn more money, and advance in their careers. The pandemic has only amplified the need for affordable and reliable child care as a key part of our society's larger workforce strategy.

Child care providers are often the very first teachers a child has (not to mention the adults with whom they spend much of their time), and experience with a skilled early childhood educator has benefits for developing children. Yet, training, compensating, and valuing child care workers is too frequently an afterthought. This is in part because the work is overwhelmingly performed by women—many of them women of color, and many of them immigrants. Indeed, the profession has been devalued because it is considered "domestic" work—that is, work that in many places and contexts has been performed by women, in the home, and often for little or no compensation.

In Rhode Island, family child care providers came together in 2013 to change that reality—first by unionizing with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 1199NE, and then by successfully negotiating for a training fund benefit and partnering with the SEIU Education & Support Fund (ESF) to administer and leverage that benefit. ESF recognizes that the reality of professional child care today requires a worker-centered, relationship-based educational and training model that allows child care providers to reach their highest professional potential.

By coming together to assert and celebrate their value as well as grow together as professionals, the providers who pursue professional education through their union training fund demonstrate the values of collective action.

Rhode Island's collectively bargained family child care training fund benefit represents a truly unique offering in the world of early childhood education: working closely with members themselves, ESF staff design and deliver programming targeted specifically to the population of home day care providers in Rhode Island, with a special focus on culturally competent education that meets personal as well as professional needs. ESF programming is offered in both English and Spanish—and during the evenings, when providers are more likely to be able to attend. Beyond providing a pathway for providers to grow as professionals and achieve certifications that move their facilities into higher-quality ratings and higher compensation levels, ESF likewise offers providers ownership over their own educational progression, through a peer mentoring program that pairs experienced providers with new participants and offers courses taught by providers themselves. Finally, ESF cultivates a space of sharing, conviviality, and mutual support—a crucial function for a workforce that experiences isolation from peers, where providers work individually and gather only infrequently.

Training funds have long been an established norm among unionized workers in other professions, from healthcare to the building trades. For employers, training funds guarantee an adequate supply of highly trained professionals with a demonstrated commitment to the work and the workplace. For workers, training funds offer not only a path to greater stability and greater benefits but also a chance to participate in a collective endeavor of self-improvement. By adopting this model and reinventing it to suit the unique home-based child care workforce, members of SEIU 1199NE are taking ownership of their businesses as care workers, and changing their own lives in the process.

DENNIS HOGAN serves as the Rhode Island political director for SEIU 1199NE. **DULARI TAHBILDAR** serves as the director of the Rhode Island Child Care Training Program for SEIU Education & Support Fund (ESF).

CREATING OUR OWN SOLUTIONS IN THE FACE OF A BROKEN CHILD CARE SYSTEM

by Ellen Vera

The child care system in the United States is broken. On average, families are paying the unsustainable amount of over 10 percent of their monthly income; child care workers are some of the lowest-paid workers in the country, making an average of $13.31 per hour; and the number of child care businesses have decreased by 10 percent (or sixteen thousand facilities) since the start of the pandemic, because market conditions are so challenging. This field is in dire need of a complete overhaul and significant investment from our federal government.

The United States is one of the few industrialized countries that does not have a strong state-sponsored child care system. The monthly Child Tax Credits that the federal government issued during the pandemic were an important and impactful start, bringing 3.7 million children out of poverty. But unfortunately, due to political stalemate in Washington, even this relief has disappeared.

It is in this vacuum of not having a large, systemic, government-driven solution that families, child care workers, and business owners are coming together to create better child care solutions for their communities.

In Cincinnati, Co-op Cincy has been researching and working to create teacher- and parent-owned child care cooperatives since 2017. We started by digging into the economics of our local child care system, which had recently received a substantial amount of public funding through passing a local ballot initiative: Cincinnati Preschool Promise. The initiative articulated options for how our city could fulfill a commitment that was made during the campaign to raise the minimum wage from an average of between $10 and $11 per hour to $15 per hour, as spelled out in the report *Strategies Towards Wage Equity in Early Childhood* (Cincinnati Union Co-op Initiative, September 17, 2018). These options included the possibility of creating a shared services cooperative to help small child care businesses achieve economies of scale.

In 2017, Co-op Cincy also began supporting an alternative co-op child care model: parents coming together to lower the cost of care while paying a living wage, through a small nanny-share cooperative called CareShare Cooperative. Co-op Cincy is also part of a national cohort of co-op developers who are working to launch and support child care co-ops, including Wellspring Cooperative, in Springfield, Massachusetts; Cooperation Jackson, in Mississippi; and Cooperación Santa Ana, in California.

Most recently, Co-op Cincy has been helping existing child care centers to preserve their legacy—and keep their businesses in the hands of the people who helped build them—by selling them to their teachers through our Business Legacy Fund program. In January 2022, the owner of the small, nature-based Montessori child care center, Shine Nurture Center, sold the center to her workers, saying that she wanted to give the employees an opportunity to make the business their own. "It's just such a great group," she notes on Shine's website. "I really wanted to take myself out of it, let them take Shine in the direction they see fit. I honestly think it will get better and better." She continues, "The responsibility of a business like that on one person's shoulders is a lot. When you can spread it over 5 shoulders, there's more opportunity for growth." And Co-op Cincy is currently working with a second child care center in the Greater Cincinnati area, one that has been an anchor in the community for over four decades and that is preparing to transition to worker ownership within the next few years.

Broadening ownership in our community through these types of transitions is such an important strategy for opening the door to wealth building for the families of these workers, in a way that otherwise would not have been possible; and for the community, these successions are anchoring important child care centers in the community for the long term.

The inadequacy of our current child care system is a universal problem across our country—and until our government decides to create a universal solution, the only choice our communities are left with is to come together to form our own solutions. Creating the best models we can—to make care more accessible to families, make wages and working conditions better for workers, and create viable long-term businesses in our communities and co-ops—is an important step along the way.

ELLEN VERA has organized people from diverse backgrounds to improve their workplaces for more than a decade, and became a cofounder of Co-op Cincy and of 1worker1vote in 2011 to develop a more sustainable model of organizing, economic democracy, and wealth building with marginalized communities. Vera's experience as part of a family with mixed immigration status deepens her perspective and her passion for organizing with immigrant worker-owners and worker-owners of color. Prior to her work with Co-op Cincy, she helped people organize and strengthen their labor unions, as the national organizing coordinator for the manufacturing arm of the Communication Workers of America, and for United Food and Commercial Workers Local 75.

The Transformative Power of Worker Ownership

by Camille Kerr

One of the values underlying the solidarity economy is mutual benefit and care. This value not only applies inside a cooperative among the members but also in terms of how the cooperative moves relative to the stakeholders in its community.

I learned about the concept of worker ownership in 2011, when I was hired into a research position at the National Center for Employee Ownership. Although the idea that workers can and should own their own workplaces deeply resonated with me, it felt too technical to be a transformative tool for economic or racial justice. Worker ownership involves corporate governance, legal structures, stock. I couldn't explain it to my family or peers, or even to my nonprofit colleagues.

Since then—via positions at two other national worker ownership nonprofits, launching my own consulting firm, and service on more than a dozen boards—I have had the opportunity to design worker ownership plans and support the development of new worker-owned companies, using nearly every form of worker ownership. The projects have ranged from three-person worker cooperatives to a joint venture employing more than forty thousand workers. And although many people in my personal network still don't quite understand what I do, it is clear to me that worker ownership is a linchpin in the movement for economic justice.

Community organizations are starting new co-ops to create job access for those excluded from the economy. Unions are leveraging worker ownership to build more agency and economic security for their members. Movement builders are developing worker cooperatives as living examples of what a reimagined economy based in mutual care can look like.

"BUBBLEHEAD DREAMER" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

Cooperatives are the closest legal form to what we might imagine a liberatory version of work looks like when we reject capitalist norms and structures.

At the consulting firm I started, Upside Down Consulting, we focus on projects that connect worker ownership to larger systemic change. Our purpose is to lay the foundation for a solidarity economy;[1] we are working to create the conditions where such an alternative system can thrive. For us, worker ownership is a tool—a powerful one, but a tool nonetheless, not an outcome in itself. As Kali Akuno of Cooperation Jackson has described it, "We are very clearly not trying to build cooperatives for cooperatives' sake . . . [but to] build base foundations of anti-capitalist society."[2]

GETTING TO KNOW WORKER OWNERSHIP

Worker ownership (also referred to as employee ownership) is a broad term that encompasses a variety of structures. For several reasons, worker cooperatives are the primary form of worker ownership associated with the solidarity economy. Prominent among those reasons is democracy. In a worker cooperative, democracy is baked into the model. Worker co-ops are structured in such a way that each worker-owner has an equal vote, and they directly choose—and serve on—the governing board. (With other forms of worker ownership—such as employee stock ownership plans [ESOPs], employee stock purchase plans [ESPPs], and equity compensation vehicles—democracy is possible but not a given, and it is uncommon to see these forms of employee ownership with democracy layered on top.)

But more important, cooperatives are the closest legal form to what we might imagine a liberatory version of work looks like when we reject capitalist norms and structures—that is, a group of people coming together for mutual benefit with care for one another, each with an equal voice, moving toward a common goal. (Other forms of employee ownership, on the other hand, are primarily designed to share profits—and possibly some influence—more evenly within our current economic rules.)

Though worker co-ops are the gold standard when it comes to democratic governance, we have worked with mission-driven organizations interested in democracy that prefer other forms of employee ownership. One reason companies we have worked with chose an ESOP or ESPP form over a cooperative one is because they were only interested in introducing a partial worker-ownership plan at the time, which is hard to structure within a worker cooperative. Others were interested in the tax benefits that come with the ESOP structure; for example, as with nonprofits, 100 percent ESOP–owned companies pay no corporate taxes. (This tax benefit also makes it more financially feasible for a company transitioning to worker ownership to manage the debt used to purchase the company from the selling owner/s at market rates.) Another rationale for preferring ESOPs and ESPPs is the wealth-building potential for workers. Workers in a cooperative receive annual dividends, but the underlying value of their share does not increase. In a company with an ESOP or ESPP, worker-owners receive the market value for their ownership stake when they sell their shares, which can result in significant financial gain. For some social entrepreneurs interested in worker ownership, this potential windfall is how they personally built wealth and is something they want to share with workers.

This structural difference between cooperatives and stock plans is analogous to housing. Limited equity housing—where the underlying value of the property only marginally increases based on a formula—keeps rates affordable and avoids a windfall for any particular resident based on current market conditions. Owners of market rate housing, on the other hand, may double their financial assets (or more) in a matter of a few years (or less) under the right market conditions. Worker cooperatives are designed to be off the market, removing the possibility of a windfall and maintaining the long-term benefits and affordability for future worker-owners.

At Upside Down, we look at this full range of democratic worker ownership options when supporting clients. However, when we are building institutions ourselves, we are rooted in worker cooperative structures, as they most closely mirror our solidarity economy values.

DETAIL OF "BUBBLEHEAD DREAMER" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

Figure 1: Worker Ownership Spectrum

Form	Description	Democracy	Financial Return	Solidarity Economy
Worker Cooperatives	Business owned and democratically controlled by the workers. Some states have a specific statute for worker co-ops	Fully democratic: each worker has one voting share and equal voting power	Workers receive annual profit dividends, typically based on hours worked. Underlying share does not increase in value	Build living examples of mutuality and care inside the economy. A rethinking of our relationship to work
Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs)	Federally regulated retirement plan (like a 401k) designed to hold employer stock. Often used to create 100% employee-owned companies	Limited voting rights are built in for plan participants (major corporate decisions like sale, acquisition, etc.). It is uncommon, but ESOPs can be structured to create democratic worker control	Workers receive a retirement account that goes up in value based on both annual dividends and increase in the underlying share value. Shares are valued annually	Transition large-scale, traditionally structured businesses to democratic worker ownership and control
Employee Ownership Trusts	Innovative use of existing trust law (the non-charitable perpetual purpose trust) to create a vehicle that can lock a mission and structure into a business (analogous to a land trust, but not structured as a nonprofit)	Completely flexible when it comes to governance. Can be designed with or without worker control, democracy, or any other feature	No direct ownership of shares, but workers can be given bonuses based on the performance of the company	Can be a way to structure a fully democratic worker cooperative, where a mission and/or certain policies are locked in
Employee Stock Purchase Plans (ESPPs)	Employee benefit that allows workers to purchase company stock, often at a discount. Primarily used in public companies	Democratic governance is possible but rare	Workers own different numbers of shares and receive return based on investment (instead of hours worked)	Transition vehicles to provide partial worker ownership until a full conversion can be made
Equity Compensation Vehicles	Stock options, restricted stock plans, synthetic equity, and other stock-based compensation. Primarily used to compensate management and executives, but there are examples of broad-based equity compensation plans	Equity compensation vehicles are not structured democratically (to my knowledge)	There are a variety of vehicles with different returns. Each offers some combination of the underlying share value, any increase in share value, and annual dividends	Not likely to be used to advance the solidarity economy

We were committed to democracy and full worker control. We were also hoping to build a long-term institution that was not meant to be sold or market valued.

DEVELOPING A WORKER-OWNED COMPANY FROM THE GROUND UP

When I started Upside Down Consulting, my goal was to be able to make enough of a living from client work to be able to spend a significant amount of time and some resources supporting the development of a new worker cooperative. Although much of the focus of the worker co-op field at the time centered on conversions—transitioning existing businesses to worker ownership—I wanted to center the needs of those who did not have access to dignified work that creates long-term wealth.

Formerly incarcerated workers, for example, and especially Black women in this group, face significant barriers to economic security, wellness, and stable family relationships post-release. Before the pandemic hit, formerly incarcerated Black women had an unemployment rate of 43 percent, compared to a rate of 23 percent for formerly incarcerated white women (and 5 percent for the general population).[3] This lack of employment access, along with other factors, contributed to the fact that 75 percent of formerly incarcerated women experienced homelessness.[4] Again, these statistics are pre-COVID; the situation has likely significantly worsened since March 2020.

In October of 2018, I brought in two organizers—Joan Fadayiro and Angela "Yaa" Orokoh—to build the foundation for ChiFresh Kitchen (although the project had no name at the time). We were focused on creating liberatory work and space for formerly incarcerated Black women. Our small development team assembled an advisory board of abolitionist organizers, solidarity economy advocates, and industry experts. In line with our value of centering those most affected in the design and decision-making process, the board included three formerly incarcerated Black women who made the key decisions on how to proceed. Beyond our formal advisory board, we also had a network of cooperators sharing their wisdom and resources throughout our planning phase.

From the outset, it was clear to everyone in the room that the business would be a cooperative. We were committed to democracy and full worker control. We were also hoping to build a long-term institution that was not meant to be sold or market valued.

The development team and advisory board went through a yearlong process of determining a business model. Our priorities were a company that paid living wages, was safe, could grow to dozens if not hundreds of people, and would provide a space where we could be in community together. We landed on replicating the model of City Fresh Foods, a Black-owned social enterprise in Boston that provides meals to schools, to nursing homes, to nonprofits, and to social programs (for example, Meals on Wheels). They were one of my clients and are now a partially worker-owned company with an ESPP that has democratic worker representation.[5] They agreed to support us with advice and intellectual property as we got started.

Once we had the outline of a plan, we began organizing our first informational session. In the weeks leading up to our meeting, Yaa and our advisors took on recruitment. One of our advisory board members, Colette Payne, a tireless advocate for formerly incarcerated women, recruited Kimberly Britt. Kim, now the president of the board of ChiFresh and the co-op's primary press contact, brought in three friends: Sarah Stadtfeld (who designs our gear and will oversee our retail space), Renee Taylor (secretary of the board, in charge of purchasing and inventory), and Edrinna Bryant (treasurer and head chef). Daniel McWilliams (who manages the facility and vehicles) received information about the session from his sister. We held our kickoff meeting on December 5, 2019, at the #BreathingRoom space, a community space stewarded by abolitionist organizers. Those five folks our team recruited—the ones who showed up to this first meeting—stayed with us throughout the process to become the founding worker-owners.

We met with the members weekly, sharing food and designing the business model, governance, and launch plan together. We prioritized meeting in aligned spaces: a Black-owned, coworking space in Pilsen called Blue Lacuna, and the office of an alderman, Jeanette B. Taylor, where Joan

We did not realize how embedded we would become in local movements for food justice, housing justice, and healing—working toward systemic change alongside dozens of aligned, committed partners.

Fadayiro (one of the original development team members) was working. We planned for an early summer launch—but then COVID hit. In the midst of layoffs and unemployment applications, the members wanted to expedite the launch process. We registered ChiFresh Kitchen with the State of Illinois on March 13, 2020—the last weekday before the first round of COVID-related shutdowns.

In the weeks that followed, the Chicago Food Policy Action Council (CFPAC) began convening food ecosystem actors to coordinate and support each other on a "Food System COVID-19 Response" (later renamed "Chicago Food Justice Rhizome Network").[6] Organizations such as Chicago Public Schools, Greater Chicago Food Depository, and YMCA were in the room alongside urban agriculture and food justice organizations, as well as mutual aid groups, local restaurants, and others. ChiFresh was not yet operational, but we had been in discussions with CFPAC about their Good Food Purchasing Program standards and how we could integrate the values of that program into our policies and practices, which is why we were invited into the space.

It was in the context of these emergency food meetings that we first began building relationships with partners who would become a critical component of our "village": Urban Growers Collective (UGC), Grow Greater Englewood (GGE), and CFPAC. UGC and GGE are both urban farming organizations rooted in racial justice and food sovereignty. CFPAC works closely with UGC, GGE, and other aligned organizations to address larger policy needs of the Chicago food justice ecosystem. We came together around shared values centering BIPOC-led organizations—and we referred to ourselves as the "Squad." The Squad also included our fellow worker cooperative developers at Centro de Trabajadores Unidos, who supported the development of an immigrant-owned catering company, Cooperativa Visionarias. We began to meet weekly to design our collective response to the dire food conditions that the pandemic had exacerbated, especially in the South and West Sides of the city.

During this time, we wrote each other into grants, provided letters of support for each other's work, and even pushed funders to finance us collectively instead of reviewing our applications as separate asks. As a newer organization with fewer philanthropic connections, ChiFresh was often on the receiving end of the Squad's fundraising work. Our work with the Squad built what I expect to be lifelong relationships, while also providing ChiFresh with critical revenue in our start-up phase during the pandemic—all while meeting an urgent and crucial community need. Since May 11, 2020, when ChiFresh provided our first meals to Hope House of Chicago (a transitional home introduced to us through UGC), the Squad has provided tens of thousands of meals to folks facing pandemic-related food insecurity—meals that included produce grown right on the farms at UGC.[7]

The ChiFresh Kitchen members rose to every new challenge as we managed these emergency meals alongside our nonprofit and school clients. We went from fifty meals a day to two hundred in a matter of weeks. Now, we make more than fourteen hundred meals daily. In December 2021, ChiFresh purchased a 6,125 square-foot building, which we are renovating and will be moving into soon, and where we can expand to five thousand meals per day or more. In March 2022, ChiFresh reached an important milestone: our first profitable month as a business.

While we had hoped for these outcomes, we did not realize how embedded we would become in local movements for food justice, housing justice, and healing—working toward systemic change alongside dozens of aligned, committed partners. During this journey, we have experienced the transformative power of worker ownership. Not only have we witnessed the benefits to the members, to us as the co-op developers, and to those receiving food from the cooperative but also how a small pilot can weave into larger economic and racial justice strategies that lay the foundation for a solidarity economy.

There is economic theory to back up the intuitive idea that humans are capable of cooperation in scenarios where private ownership is currently the norm.

BUILDING THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY ECOSYSTEM

The New Economy Coalition defines a solidarity economy ecosystem as "an environment where all of the things a community needs are controlled and governed by everyday people," including land, food, money, and housing.[8] The ChiFresh and Upside Down Consulting network is full of powerful individuals and organizations moving toward this vision. Over the past two years, we have worked with many partners to form coalitions, initiatives, and new institutions that go beyond supporting each other's projects to focusing on how we can collectively achieve larger systemic change. While much of this work is nascent, each experiment is strengthening the emerging solidarity economy ecosystem here in Chicago. Indeed, many of our partners participate in multiple networks and initiatives like these, reinforcing our alignment and deepening our relationships and trust. (See Figure 2, following page, for some of our collaborations.)

In addition to these collaborative efforts, the members of ChiFresh and Upside Down are coming together to form the Chicago Solidarity Collective (CSC). The purpose of CSC is to build new cooperatives that meet the needs of ChiFresh members and their network. The first project of CSC will be to create cooperative housing that is accessible to formerly incarcerated individuals, including the current ChiFresh members. We plan to coordinate this work with PATHS Chicago, Urban Growers Collective, and other partners committed to housing justice.

One of the values underlying the solidarity economy is mutual benefit and care. This value not only applies inside a cooperative among the members but also in terms of how the cooperative moves relative to the stakeholders in its community. Even though worker cooperatives are (usually) for-profit businesses operating in the private sector, operating with generosity, care, and reciprocity in group

dynamics is not only possible but also can lead to more creative, effective solutions for everyone involved. As U.S. Solidarity Economy Network's Emily Kawano has written, "In contrast to the narrow self-interest, competition, and struggle to dominate others that are at the heart of racist, patriarchal capitalism, the solidarity economy is centered on a culture of solidarity, mutuality, caring, and cooperation."[9]

There is economic theory to back up the intuitive idea that humans are capable of cooperation in scenarios where private ownership is currently the norm. In 2009, Elinor Ostrom received the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for documenting examples of natural systems like forests, irrigation, and pastureland that were managed as commons by stakeholders, and were more efficient, sustainable, and equitable than those of private owners. Connecting with game theory work, Ostrom argued against predictions that people will tend to behave in self-serving and ego-driven ways.[10]

As ChiFresh Kitchen grows and becomes more established, we are excited to share what we have learned and support other groups interested in building worker-owned companies to lay foundations for more transformative change in our economy and society overall. We are also excited to learn from our comrades in other cities with similar strategies. For example, Cooperation Jackson and Boston Ujima Project (and its sister nonprofit, Center for Economic Democracy)—to name just a couple of standout

DETAIL OF "BUBBLEHEAD DREAMER" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM efforts—each work to build institutions with the larger solidarity economy and political organizing work in mind, and each has had a powerful impact in their respective cities. Boston Ujima Project has a multimillion-dollar fund controlled by working class and poor people of color that finances community businesses and real-estate infrastructure. Cooperation Jackson has created a community land trust with over forty properties to create local land sovereignty and prevent displacement. We hope to replicate those successes in Chicago, with the solidarity economy values of reciprocity and mutualism guiding our approach.

Figure 2: ChiFresh Kitchen and Upside Down Consulting Collaborative Projects

Initiative	Timeline	Areas	Description
Partners for Abolition, Transformation, Healing and Solidarity (PATHS)	Formed 2020	Solidarity economy Housing justice Abolition	Chicago-based coalition rooted in Black liberation and with a queer, feminist lens; brings together community organizers, healers, and solidarity economy practitioners to create movement-building infrastructure; embraces a “resist, build, and heal” framework that recognizes the importance of all three elements in achieving racial and economic justice
Illinois Worker Cooperative Alliance (IWCA)	Formed 2015	Solidarity economy	Membership organization for worker cooperatives and cooperative developers that houses a cooperative loan fund connected to the national Seed Commons Network
City of Chicago Community Wealth Building Initiative	Formed 2021	Solidarity economy	Community wealth building initiative, in which the City of Chicago invested more than $15 million, designed to support worker cooperatives, housing cooperatives, and community land trusts; housed in the city’s Office of Equity and Racial Justice, which “seeks to advance institutional change that results in an equitable transformation of how we do business across the City of Chicago”[11]
City of Chicago Food Equity Council	Formed 2021 (formally recognized by the City of Chicago in 2022)	Food sovereignty Solidarity economy	Body that supports urban agriculture and emerging food businesses with a fund that will provide both grant and loan capital to those in our local ecosystem building food security and sovereignty;[12] the city also passed $10 million to promote food equity
Community Food Navigator	Formed 2021	Food sovereignty	Collectively developed platform for BIPOC growers, food businesses, mutual aid groups, and other food actors to access knowledge, resources, support, and connections

NOTES

1. For background on the solidarity economy, see Emily Kawano and Julie Matthaei, "System Change: A Basic Primer to the Solidarity Economy," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, July 8, 2020, nonprofitquarterly.org/system-change-a-basic-primer-to-the-solidarity-economy/.
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11. "Office of Equity and Racial Justice," City of Chicago, accessed May 5, 2022, www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/office-of-equity-and-racial-justice/home.html.
12. See Steve Dubb, "Navigating the Environmental Justice Terrain: Two Leaders of Color Speak Out," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, November 1, 2021, nonprofitquarterly.org/navigating-the-environmental-justice-terrain-two-leaders-of-color-speak-out/.

CAMILLE KERR is working to build a democratic economy in service to U.S. social justice movements, including organizations advancing Black liberation, immigrant rights, food justice, and the U.S. labor movement. Kerr specializes in cooperative start-up development, designing complex worker-centered initiatives, democratizing capital access, and policy advocacy and drafting. In partnership with Chicago organizers, she helped found the worker cooperative ChiFresh Kitchen, a food-service contracting business that is owned and led primarily by formerly incarcerated folks living in the south and west of Chicago. She is also the founder of Upside Down Consulting. Kerr is a board member of Shared Capital Cooperative, Urban Growers Collective, E.G. Woode, and Obran Cooperative, and a member of the Council of Cooperative Economists. She is an executive fellow with the Institute for the Study of Employee Ownership and Profit Sharing at the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations, where she codirects the Project on Unions and Worker Ownership with Sanjay Pinto. She is also an advisor for the Chicago Food Equity Council and Community Wealth Building Advisory Council. Kerr has a law degree from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, where she was awarded a human rights fellowship.

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Future Horizons

Visions toward Democratizing Our Economy

by Esteban Kelly and Melissa Hoover

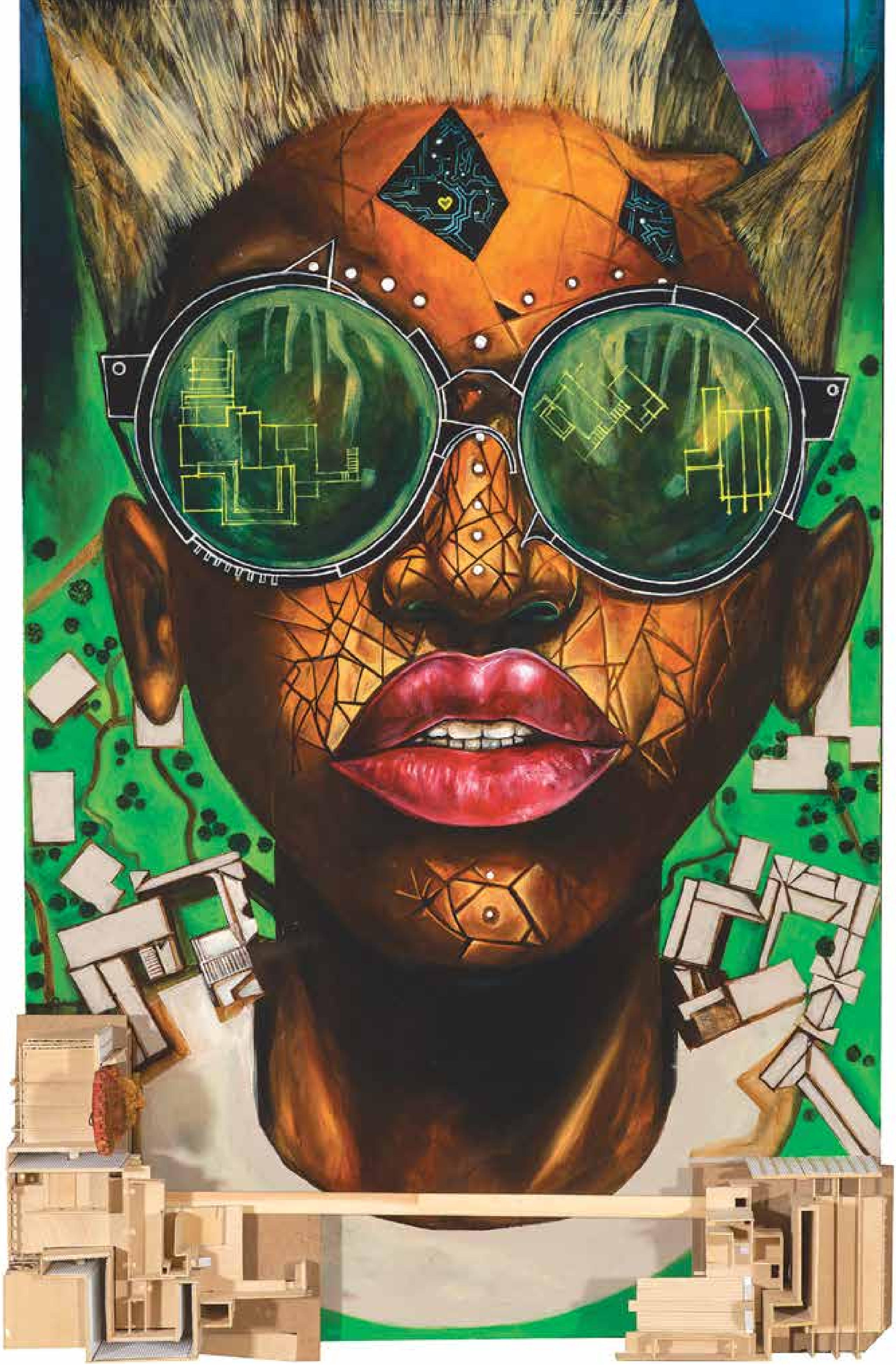
The future is still fundamentally open to us to continue to plan and shape. We can and should always approach the work from the starting place of an aspirational vision that can orient our collective strategies.

It's thrilling to see how much interest there is in building democratic futures that center people, communities, solidarity, and ecology in our economic system. We (the coauthors of this article) have been engaged in just that for the past twenty-plus years. We have a close, wide, and deep perspective on the emergence of a more democratic economy. Indeed, we have some thoughts about the next horizon of that work.

For the past decade, the primary questions for those seeking to expand the democratic economy in the United States have focused on scale: "Are we capable of larger projects?" "Is it *possible* to scale elements like worker cooperatives, participatory budgeting, community land trusts, and nonextractive finance?"

Such questions are inadvertently limiting. We've known for years that the solidarity economy can scale, and yet too much energy that could have been channeled into developing it has instead been devoted to raising awareness and producing data about whether that leap is even possible. We don't mean to imply that such efforts were fruitless. Indeed, compiling data along these lines was essential for garnering support among elected officials, government workers, foundation program officers, lenders, investors, and other power brokers new to the field and unfamiliar with the viability—let alone the imperative—of expanding the democratic economy as the path toward a just, sustainable, and equitable economy.

"TECKNOSCOPE" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM



Puerto Rico has had a cooperative curriculum integrated into public schools . . . for decades, reaching tens of thousands of students. It is no accident that the island boasts more worker cooperatives than any U.S. state or territory other than California and New York.

We suspect all this itching around scale and proof of concept is merely a proxy for implicit questions of vision. Put another way, *curiosity about scale is one way of provoking debate about what we're even hoping to build*. What animates questions of scale may just be the provocation to share what it actually looks like when an economy serves and is accountable to people and communities by design.

The choices we make over the coming years will be critical to either hampering or catalyzing a democratic transition rooted in worker and community ownership and control. To be sure, we're not suggesting that even a turbocharged transition would land us at such a vision a mere few years from now. *Rather, a strategic, resilient, resourced, and supported network of leaders, institutions, and infrastructure might, over the next decade or so, create fertile soil for such transformations to take root and, ultimately, flourish*.

What evidence is there for the viability of a democratized economy when so many of its elements across this country have languished as marginal "experiments" for generations? The problem starts as a discursive one. For half a century, cooperatives and our allies in the United States have oriented toward institutions of a democratic economy as an "alternative" to traditional American business as usual (dispossession, extraction, pollution, exploitation, and inequality). In this we include the leaders of such initiatives themselves. In the Black community—going on several generations now—we have used the language of "economic alternatives" for self-sufficient societies;[1] only recently are some of our leaders agitating to shift from language that doesn't presume to displace the exploitation of racial capitalism, which otherwise will ravage our people for what would become a fifth century.

VISIONS OF A SOLIDARITY ECONOMY: FOUR SCENARIOS

Without a mindset that a robust solidarity economy is possible beyond a few marginalized projects, most of the key agents of change have not been positioned to offer a vision for transformative possibilities. And yet, so many parts of that vision are already present for us to observe. We could simply look beyond the United States as proof that a democratized economy can transform society. See, for example: Northern Italy's Reggio Emilia approach, a primary instrument of early childhood education;[2] Quebec's forestry and EMT services, industrial mainstays for the region;[3] scaled cooperative "guilds" of freelancers (primarily composed of artists and creatives) in Belgium and France;[4] India's Self-Employed Women's Association, the country's largest organizing means for women's collective empowerment;[5] and Argentina's[6] and the Basque Country's[7] worker cooperatives, engines of industrial output.

Even just within the United States, we can already track strong signals of the rise of a democratic economy at a scale that was difficult (but not impossible) to imagine back in 2012. In the last year, Philadelphia[8] and parts of California (San Francisco,[9] Los Angeles,[10] and the East Bay[11]) have cleared their first hurdle to allocate money to establish public banks, the likes of which only previously existed for the state of North Dakota. Puerto Rico has had a cooperative curriculum integrated into public schools (elementary and secondary) for decades, reaching tens of thousands of students. It is no accident that the island boasts more worker cooperatives than any U.S. state or territory other than California and New York.[12] We are also seeing larger enterprises, thanks to the use of digital platforms: The Drivers Cooperative, for example, established in 2020 as a democratic rival to Uber and Lyft, recruited somewhere between 2,500 and 3,000 workers within a few months of its launch.[13]

We ought to seriously consider visions of what a more democratic economy might look like ten or fifteen years from now. Such visions are meant to provoke our action in the present—informing the choices we make *now* to shape our preferred future.

What's more, we are living in transformative times. In the midst and continuing effects of the still-raging COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing and ever-deepening racial, economic, and climate injustice, things that recently seemed like far-fetched alternatives now appear as the only path for resilience under unprecedented pressures. With the recent "Great Resignation"[14] and a newfound labor militancy,[15] workers across the country are increasingly choosing unions, cooperatives, and worker ownership as a way into the economy when they have no other alternatives.[16] Young people, particularly attuned to the contradictions of our current system with the total amount of student debt load surpassing $1.6 trillion, are demanding that the debt be canceled.[17] Housing shortages and unaffordability are stoking interest in—and organizing of—a new wave of permanent real estate cooperative land trusts and the Vienna model of green social housing[18]—as well as a retreat from expensive cities, scrambling demographics in unpredictable patterns. Heightened crises and consciousness provide a different set of political and movement-building conditions.

Even the government eventually mobilized in unforeseen ways in the wake of COVID-19. In 2020, we saw the financial tools of government briskly deployed. Everyday people got a taste of what the world's wealthiest economies are capable of: unemployment benefits for most workers (including freelancers, for the first time), monthly child tax credit payments, stimulus checks, free COVID tests and vaccines even for the uninsured, and forgiveness of small business loans powered by the SBA and underwritten by banks and CDFIs. Indeed, these dramatic shifts in how public infrastructure intervened with visionary economic policy were so expansive that they also watered our little seeds of a solidarity economy. Thanks to the institution building and leadership development of the past decade, multiple democratic economy organizations were in a position to inform the drafting of the CARES Act and ensure that previous government obstacles were removed in order for cooperative economic constituents to receive economic rescue support. Three thousand or more co-ops of all types accessed Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and/or Economic Injury Disaster (EIDL) loans, unlocking $1.2 billion in financial assistance to cooperative sectors and preventing countless co-ops from going under.[19]

All of this is evidence that we ought to seriously consider visions of what a more democratic economy might look like ten or fifteen years from now. Such visions are meant to provoke our action in the present—informing the choices we make *now* to shape our preferred future. It is in this spirit that we offer not one static vision but rather a glimpse of how a solidarity economy might show up in four very different scenarios.

SCENARIO 1

The World We Know: *Obstruction*

In a scenario without much further disruption and with current trends enduring, what might a more democratized economy look like by the mid-2030s? A "status quo world" could see a democratized economy stagnate.

It's entirely possible that the government never becomes the partner we need in order to scale the democratic economy in the United States. In this future, by 2035 there has been a host of so-called "messaging" bills promoting public banks, regenerative economics, green social housing, and worker ownership introduced around the country, but few are ever enacted as law. In the executive branch, the Small Business Development Centers stubbornly resist changing the 7(a) SBA loan conditions that require a personal guarantee for every co-owner of a loan to cosign and put up collateral in order to access this federal business debt program. This effectively disbars

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The United States misses an opportunity to foster learning and exchange with a growing international network building a democratic economy, and is ultimately left behind.

cooperative and community-owned enterprises from tapping into federal programs and their cache of low-interest finance capital.

Perhaps the experimentation of the 2020s amounted to nothing fundamentally groundbreaking. A flurry of platform co-ops and legal and hybrid structures attempt to include more members in the democratized economy, but few of these models proliferate beyond marginal success. Even then, some of the previous decade's innovations, particularly with LLC co-ops and nonprofit community land trusts, remain the last vestige of experimental new forms of economic solidarity. The United States misses an opportunity to foster learning and exchange with a growing international network building a democratic economy, and is ultimately left behind. Rather than growing steadily, ESOPs lose power under attacks from private equity. Though they still outnumber worker cooperatives, that gap begins to narrow, and experiments with democratic ESOPs remain just that. Seeing little uptake in most democratized models, U.S. institutions, social movements, and everyday workers dispirited by the crushing momentum of extractive platforms, private equity, and the unified will of the billionaire class judge the solidarity economy to be esoteric and marginal. Thankfully, even without institution building, communities respond to the ensuing economic crises with heroic and sundry mutual aid projects.

SCENARIO 2

The World We Know 2.0: *Limited Progress*

But there's another direction in which a "status quo world" could go. What follows is a "best-case" scenario if the world we know persists.

Obstruction and marginalization aren't inevitable. It's possible that with a sound foundation of research and experimentation, the leaders, institutions, and infrastructure of the solidarity economy prove sufficient for some significant evolution. In this scenario, the impact by 2035 is impressive but uneven. Developments are clustered in certain sectors of the economy, and in specific regions of the country that either already had a strong local ecosystem or leadership and infrastructure friendly to experimentation, innovation, and resourcing of new approaches to economic problems.

Here, the establishment of public banks has proven to be impactful, unlocking capital for both a proliferation of worker- and community-owned enterprises and large-scale innovations in social housing, green retrofits, and post-carbon energy democracy. Young politicians have found ample support to test out community benefit agreements, permanent real-estate cooperatives, tuition-free public colleges, universal child care programs, and democratic municipal energy and broadband utilities in progressive cities. Historical strongholds of worker- and consumer-owned cooperatives like Ohio, California, Western North Carolina, southern Wisconsin, New England, the mid-Atlantic, and the Pacific Northwest grow fivefold. Worker co-ops grow from about one thousand firms in 2022 to five thousand, thanks to a burgeoning ecosystem of cooperative leaders, technical assistance providers, business leagues, employee ownership centers, and community development organizations. Eighty percent of the growth in the field is concentrated in these places, but the standout case is Colorado.

The Centennial State, a nascent ecosystem in 2020, by 2035 becomes a beacon of innovation for models of employee ownership. Leadership from the Rocky Mountain Employee Ownership Center, Amicus Solar,[20] a new Colorado State Chapter of the United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives (USFWC), and iconoclastic lawyers, organizers, and politicians open the way for a wave of legal experimentation in the democratic economy. This leads to cohorts of platform co-ops, refugee- and immigrant-owned co-ops, and multistakeholder co-ops, including those with

Of course, rather than continuity of a stable status quo, volatile (in some cases violent) disruption is all but certain.

easy pathways for investor classes. The state and local governments partner with these experiments, forming public acquisition funds to purchase business assets and eventually sell them from founders to workers or community owners. Not every experiment is a success, but Colorado's confluence of leaders, institutions, and infrastructure over a period of fifteen years pioneers a dozen breakthrough strategies that make it the home of more worker-, platform-, and community-owned cooperatives than any other state—surpassing even Massachusetts, New York, and California.

Perhaps the biggest realization among the existing community of solidarity economy practitioners is the importance of protecting and defending the gains and infrastructure built during the first third of the twenty-first century. With increased visibility, the associations, coalitions, and federations of new economy organizations band together with renewed solidarity. Together, they commit to funding their own membership organizations, including representing the field in the media and legislative spaces—and against attacks from traditional corporate firms that have fallen out of favor among a shifting consumer base expressly concerned with a sustainable post-capitalist future.

SCENARIO 3

The World Shaken Up: *Collapse*

Of course, rather than continuity of a stable status quo, volatile (in some cases violent) disruption is all but certain. What remains speculative is the nature and valence of change, the extent of it, and its impact on prospects to democratize the economy. An upheaval of this elevated magnitude could spin in a positive or negative direction, but turmoil of some flavor is coming and bears some consideration.

Since 2022, it was easy enough to sense the multitude of disturbances on the horizon—problems poised to overwhelm existing systems—but it wasn't easy to pinpoint any single upset that would lead to collapse. It could have been catalyzed by any one or combination of wicked climate conditions, rise of militarized surveillance and authoritarianism, unaccountable financial and fossil fuel corporations, monopolistic concentrations of capital and intellectual property, new waves of racial justice uprisings and subsequent fascist backlash, ruinous debt, a compounding housing crisis, and a new flux of human migration in response to droughts, floods, famines, heat waves, wars, and public health outbreaks. Each compounding crisis hollows out the working class and further fractures workers and communities, leading to a tipping point.

The burden on communities is fatiguing. Nonetheless, our crisis-response systems within the solidarity economy and its ability to fill in the cracks (including co-ops for this purpose) offer some respite to the many left behind by a rapacious economic system. Worker-directed nonprofits, land trusts, community practices like participatory budgeting, and employee-owned businesses are resilient enough that disorder does not lead to our ecosystem's total demise. Democratic economic institutions that survive do so because they meet a community need or solve a pressing problem.

When energy and food systems, labor conditions, and "social institutions" collapse, we eventually see a substantial turn to a solidarity economy, even if in all but name. Overwrought systems of control and consolidation evoke interest in mutuality as a countervailing force. In the 2020s, this was initially very weak, but by 2030 small efforts demonstrate potential to grow and thereby potential to rebuild a set of institutions and infrastructure to nurture a new solidarity economy.

However, this growth in mutual economic activity, catalyzed as it is by exclusion and opposition, and taking place amid the collapse of mainstream institutions, does not have political support—at least not initially. Only over time does a political party and even a movement begin to grow around

After workers at Starbucks and Amazon teach us that we have the power to take on the owning class and win, grassroots labor strategies go viral across the board.

the principles of solidarity economics. A new generation of politicians centers the question of democratizing the economy and explicitly works to counter corporate power and consolidation of ownership. A political program begins to form under very difficult conditions.

SCENARIO 4

The World Evolved: *Transformation*

As Arundhati Roy said at the beginning of the pandemic, "It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next."[21]

Along with the racial justice uprisings and the climate crisis, the early 2020s force us to more fundamentally reckon with ourselves and our relationships to land and work. *This leads to a watershed of abolitionist modalities—land back, reparations, transformative justice, worker power, community ownership, social housing, just transitions, renewed global solidarity—which we use to step through the portal*. While these practices start in the cracks and margins, as crises intensify and people need the answers to how they and their communities are going to survive, they blossom into genuine and necessary alternatives.

As above, a new generation of politicians centers the question of democratizing the economy and explicitly works to counter corporate power and consolidation of ownership. They lean in hard with political will and some power—and the leaders, institutions, and infrastructure of the democratized economy are there to meet them, inform their vision, and help their impulse take shape into a political program.

This scenario is different from the others in two critical ways: first, the institutions of government and the economy don't reach a point of collapse; second, the will of the people to democratize the economy continues to grow. They can't be ignored as they unionize, build their own institutions, elect new politicians, and demand a stronger and more accountable role for the public sector in providing for the needs of people and communities.

After workers at Starbucks and Amazon teach us that we have the power to take on the owning class and win, grassroots labor strategies go viral across the board. Government partners with the democratic economic institutions to meet real needs, bringing resources and regulatory powers to support the growth of care cooperatives, social housing, and food systems. The Department of Labor's platform cooperatives division supports that growth. Alongside union drives at corporate retailers across the country, platform co-ops are able to offer gig workers genuine pathways out of precarity toward ownership, benefits, and community. The Small Business Administration's shared ownership division dedicates debt and even equity pools for cooperatives. The Department of Transportation undertakes infrastructure projects in partnership with the solidarity economy sector and prioritizes cooperatives in procurement. It funds robust institutions to meet community needs more efficiently, and the economy is democratized at many levels.

HOW WE GET THERE

These speculative visions are intended to give some texture informing how the work of organizing for a democratic economy will play out within the context of broader trends and drivers of change. But it remains true that the future is still fundamentally open to us to continue to plan and shape. We can and should always approach the work from the starting place of an aspirational vision that can orient our collective strategies.

An honest assessment of the current state of economic democracy in the United States leads us to conclude that we are, per the scenarios above, currently toggling between *Obstruction* and *Limited Progress*, in a world that is on the brink of *Collapse* by several metrics. So how do we get to

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Anywhere in the world the economy has democratized at scale, it has been because advocates successfully made the case that shared ownership plays a unique role in meeting public needs.

Transformation? Specifically, how do we use the tools of policy to remove obstacles and foster democratic economic organization throughout the U.S. economy?

Our strategy encompasses three interdependent strands. First, we must create *access* to—and parity across—democratic economic forms. Second, we aim to unlock *advantages* and unique supports for broad-based ownership. Third, we contend for *power* within the larger economic system to displace undemocratic, exploitative, and wealth-concentrating forms and practices. Each strategy has its own logic and tactics, but this is not an either-or proposition—it is a both-and approach. To be effective at creating the conditions we know to be possible, we must do all three things.

ACCESS

Access to existing institutions of support is the first ask. Parity with conventional forms of small business and individual ownership is simply a matter of fairness for all actors in a diversified economy. Worker cooperatives should be able to access SBA 7(a) loan programs without a personal guarantee. Credit unions should be able to do business lending above the current 12.25 percent cap that effectively kneecaps them from competing with banks. MBA programs should include courses on broad-based ownership. Unions should be able to associate, organize, and collectively bargain free of interference, intimidation, and reprisal.

The frame is simple: economic institutions with shared ownership based in democratic values exist and deserve access, too. The tactics are relatively straightforward: use data and numbers to show that we exist, and framing to make the case that we should be included. Persuade validating institutions—trade associations, think tanks, educational institutions, the media—to bring us under the mainstream umbrella. Ultimately, this is a numbers game: there are enough of us, and we generate enough revenue or employ enough people or provide enough services that you should acknowledge we exist and include us in your supports.

The modest accomplishment of the Main Street Employee Ownership Act (MSEOA) was precisely this.[22] It served to alert the Small Business Administration that employee-owned businesses exist, and directed it to make programs available to worker co-ops. Including worker cooperatives in eligibility for PPP funds by temporarily waiving the SBA requirement for a personal guarantee was another example of parity.[23]

Both recent advances were critically important; they were also wholly inadequate for removing the obstacles faced by shared ownership forms. At the mercy of mainstream institutions for inclusion, broad-based ownership forms will always be vulnerable and marginal. Democratic economic institutions risk looking like inferior businesses, stuck forever trying to prove our legitimacy, instead of the powerful human-centered engines of community resilience we know them to be. Depending on the prevailing political winds, our options within this frame range from indifferent acceptance to uncomfortable alliance to cute window dressing.

ADVANTAGE

A stronger way forward is to shift the frame: position democratic economic institutions as an active solution where others have failed, and then craft policy that *creates advantages based on those strengths*. Anywhere in the world the economy has democratized at scale, it has been because advocates successfully made the case that shared ownership plays a unique role in meeting public needs and therefore should access unique public supports.

The frame is ambitious: cooperatives and other mutual forms solve problems better than profit-maximizing forms can, and in some cases better than the public sector can (or is willing to). The tactics are sophisticated: articulate a clear vision; undertake demonstration projects; develop a policy strategy to leverage the success of values-driven, community-serving, and democratically-controlled shared ownership strategies;

and start making friends. We can show how broad-based ownership forms meet worker and community needs both more effectively and holistically. Allies in the industry, sector, or place already doing advocacy around the issues that cooperatives address can help make the case.

The U.S. Department of Treasury's inclusion of employee ownership provisions in implementation of the federal State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) constitutes an acknowledgment that conversions to employee ownership are a real solution to the problem of business closure, and should therefore have dedicated access to capital. California's pending "Expanding Employee Ownership Act," which would provide funding for education, technical assistance, and other supportive resources for conversions, employs the same logic, as do state-funded employee ownership programs.

The key here is to include cooperatives and other democratized economic forms in initiatives to solve real problems, and to do that we cannot focus on cooperatives or employee ownership or land trusts alone; we must focus on the problems they solve best, and build relationships with communities and organizations already working on those issues.

In 2022, there are clear and pressing unmet needs in whole sectors where profit-maximizing models have proven a poor fit, left gaping holes in the social safety net, and actually weakened the economy. These include child care, home care, elder care, transit, the arts, job creation for excluded workers, and business-owner retirement. For example, Cooperative Home Care Associates provides better care because its worker-owned company provides better jobs; this is why they and their partners have access to substantial workforce development funding to train home care workers. United Taxicab Cooperative of San Diego, a project of United Taxi Workers of San Diego that was incorporated in 2021, is building its business model around providing affordable and ethical "last-mile" transit to hospitals that are not consistently served by corporate ride-hailing services, and is exploring an anchor contract with the city.[24] Rapid response cooperatives provide income pathways for excluded workers, who are also often essential workers—this is why multiple cities and counties are funding their development.

Meeting needs is not the heavy lift—the challenge is building the ecosystem that can stand up to predatory competition. Cooperatives are designed to meet member and community needs: they spring up where a need is not being met, and they often meet that need better than profit-maximizing businesses can. Sadly, there has been a trend of cooperatives building a market that is later captured by corporate actors. You have cooperatives to thank for access to healthy foods and coworking spaces, both now almost entirely controlled by corporate giants. This evolution was not inevitable, but it is what happens when we fail to recognize and make the argument that some economic forms are better suited to meeting some needs and providing public goods and *therefore* should be privileged, supported, and incentivized to grow. It's what happens when we limit our ask to *access* and don't press for *advantage*.

Cooperative advocates often point to "the cooperative advantage." Local, state, and federal governments can recognize this advantage by giving cooperatives and other democratic economy forms specific preferential treatments in procurement, contracting, licensing, and access to affordable capital, among many other elements of business.

POWER

Ultimately, we want to make the case that democratic economic institutions must contend for *power* and aim to change the economic system overall. Accepting that we exist and granting access to existing programs is a start. Acknowledging that we do some things better and therefore

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In 2022, to be solely an alternative is to be able to spot your own demise right over the horizon.

conferring some advantages is progress. But the policy work that will ensure the long-term democratization of the economy should aim to realign public investments, supports, and commitments to serve human and community needs, not outside investors.

The frame is expansive: our vision understands democratic economic institutions as one piece of a much larger strategy to build power. This cannot be accomplished alone. A transformative approach requires a great degree of active, functional solidarity that connects high-road solutions to broader demands to limit extractive practices and police bad actors. Shared ownership advocates must see ourselves as part of a labor movement, a fair housing movement, a movement to change how capital flows, and immigrants' rights and racial justice movements. We work together in a strategic, coordinated way with base-building and member-serving organizations. Our asks are grounded not just in the cooperative advantage but in what will benefit whole workforces, industries, and communities.

Some examples: when home care cooperatives partner with the National Domestic Workers Alliance to advocate for better conditions and raising the minimum wage for all home care workers, and point to their own cooperatives as an example that good jobs in the industry are possible; when the National League of Cities promotes shared ownership strategies to its members as part of a community resilience strategy; when labor, cooperative, and immigrants' rights advocates inform the California Department of Labor's priorities to unlock millions of dollars for shared entrepreneurship strategies for excluded workers. None of these efforts are exclusively about specific models but rather about democratizing the economy writ large and working together to create the ecosystem of support that business, economic, and community development projects will use to do so.

There is a sequencing question here. We may seem to be implying that you start with aiming for access and build up to advantages and power—but we think this would be a mistake. In fact, we see the process as iterative: all three strategies must be operative at all times, in varying proportions. As gains are made in one area, possibilities open up in another and build to bigger opportunities.

Back in the latter part of the twentieth century, when democratic economic institutions conceived of themselves as an "alternative," there wasn't much of a policy ask. Our world—the worker cooperative sector—operated with a general indifference and even occasionally an understandable hostility to government. The implicit vision was that the alternative could grow to displace undemocratic economic institutions. This seemed feasible under different conditions than today's. There was space for an alternative to survive and even thrive that simply doesn't exist under the totalizing institutions of late capitalism. But in 2022, to be solely an alternative is to be able to spot your own demise right over the horizon.

To respond to these multiple overlapping crises with clarity of vision is to choose to survive and to thrive. Our explicit vision is for an economy in which all people have access to ownership and control of the institutions that sustain us—work, land, home, care, education. *This is not a utopian vision. It is not an alternative. It is possible. And it is necessary.* There is no shortage of crises to address, and democratic economic institutions thrive in times of crisis. Our challenge—to ourselves and to you—is first to assert this vision and aim for embedding it in policy, and then to get to work building the relationships of active, functional solidarity that will help bring this vision to reality.

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Technology for Whom?

Owning Our Platforms

by Minsun Ji

To prevent their bodies from becoming an on-call commodity owned by an algorithmic app, and the value of their labor getting extracted by capitalists, workers and movements must mobilize to own the apps themselves.

Back in 1995, in the early days of the internet, a San Francisco innovator named Craig Newmark started a small email distribution list for friends, highlighting local events across the Bay Area. Thus was born Craigslist, which soon expanded into a web-based platform where users could connect directly with each other at will to sell, trade, and donate goods, services, and gigs. It was the early stirrings of what we now call the "platform economy."

The early promise of this emerging platform economy seemed fantastical. New computer and internet technologies would facilitate direct connections between individual users anywhere in the world, using web-based platforms provided by companies like Craigslist, eBay, Airbnb, Uber, and Grubhub. The open and direct connections among individual users would allow for the efficient exchange of goods, services, and information. Want to share your extra room with a traveler and make a few bucks? Airbnb has an app for that. Want to trade old auto parts for used furniture? Craigslist can help. Want to earn some money in your spare time by ferrying food or riders around town? Check out Grubhub or Uber.

The platform economy was pitched as revolutionary and liberating. Relations could be smooth and direct over these platforms. Anyone could join and use them to efficiently offer services and receive products. Big thinkers like Jeremy Rifkin predicted that the costs of exchanging and distributing goods and services could soon become "near zero" with the platform revolution.[1] Everyone could become a microentrepreneur and could buy, sell, or offer their products or labor as they wished and without the control of legacy companies with their ponderous old factory floors, taxi garage headquarters, and department store showcases.

"KAINJI" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

While economically privileged consumers get to enjoy the lifestyle provided by technological innovation and on-demand platform services, the situation hasn't been so rosy for less privileged consumers and most workers.

Certainly, people seemed to appreciate access to the platform apps that began changing their world. Amazon, born in 1995 as an online bookstore, grew by the 2000s to become the largest global e-commerce platform company in existence. Airbnb and Uber emerged as platform companies providing services without actually owning hotels (in the case of Airbnb) and vehicles (in the case of Uber—soon to be joined by Lyft), and quickly came to disrupt and dominate their respective industries.

Globally, the number of platform companies rose five times between 2010 and 2021;[2] and, as of 2022, about 20 percent of all market commerce in the United States is now conducted online.[3] By signing up for app access, individual Uber or Lyft drivers can choose their hours and place of work, enjoying independence not promised by traditional taxi companies—and customers can hail rides from strangers quickly and affordably. Similarly, Instacart grocery-delivery workers don't report to a single store as their "boss," and are free to work the hours they wish and take on the deliveries and delivery payments they wish, using their platform app—and shoppers can order from home.

What's not to like?

Plenty.

NOT SO ROSY AFTER ALL

While economically privileged consumers get to enjoy the lifestyle provided by technological innovation and on-demand platform services, the situation hasn't been so rosy for less privileged consumers and most workers. These "sharing" tech companies are, in the end, profit-seeking endeavors, and as such they reproduce the all-too-familiar negative aspects of capitalism. For instance, tech companies use algorithmic management to precisely surveil and manage the details of workers' daily working conditions—tracking every delivery time, cataloging every customer review, mapping workers' daily locations, even noting the length of bathroom breaks. This tight control of workers via technology is a form of "algorithmic despotism,"[4] making workers constantly aware of their electronic surveillance, and pushing them to remain glued to their app screens and prepared to accept long hours and unattractive orders so as to remain in the good graces of the algorithm and receive future work orders.

Instacart, for example, sometimes bundles multiple orders from different addresses but only pays for the work of one order. Some orders also come with potentially dangerous conditions, such as carrying heavy packages up stairs—and delivery workers have experienced assault and even murder on their rounds. Yet, for the most part, Instacart offers no injury or death benefits, and workers are forced to rely on crowdfunding to cover their medical costs.[5] As for Uber and Lyft, these companies maintain policies that reward workers for low ride-cancellation rates—policies that are so tightly enforced, drivers are pressured to continue their rides even in the face of verbal abuse or physical assault. After experiencing thousands of assaults without company support, Uber and Lyft drivers initiated a wave of lawsuits against the companies in 2021, receiving a mostly antagonistic company response.[6]

Racist practices familiar within capitalism are also reproduced in the platform economy. Research has found, for instance, that rideshare drivers of color systematically receive lower reviews and tips. Tracking and reporting on such racialized work experiences could inform public education campaigns and push companies to proactively prove that their app does not discriminate against workers of color, as well as to develop policies to mitigate workplace bias—but rideshare companies like Uber and Lyft, for example, are not required to track driver demographics or respond to patterns of discrimination by riders, since these drivers aren't classified as company employees.[7]

Relatedly, racially biased facial-recognition technology has resulted in drivers of color losing jobs due to computer-assisted mismatches, without any due process or evidence of wrongdoing.[8] Uber's and Lyft's rideshare systems require drivers to log on to the systems through facial verification software, but the current verification software used by these companies is well-known for its difficulties in accurately identifying the faces of people of color. Nevertheless, when the software consistently reports a mismatch, a driver can be summarily dismissed.

While platform workers face demanding management by algorithm, low wages, and nonexistent benefits, the profits claimed by platform companies have dramatically risen.

Though workplace management and quality control are reasonable aspects of any employment system, the problem with the most dominant "sharing economy" apps is that they are entirely owned and managed by profit-seeking capitalist companies, while workers themselves ("independent contractors" without rights in the company) have no access to the innards of these proprietary apps and thus have little understanding, control, or even voice in how opaque algorithms are used to tightly manage their work lives, and reproduce capitalist structures of inequality and oppression.[9]

It is also well understood that capitalist tech companies systematically mine the data from their "sharing economy" apps to discover all manner of personal or private information about their workers and customers, both in order to hire workers who have a more "compliant" digital profile and to manipulate their customers—all in service of greater profits for the company. In their report *Data Capitalism and Algorithmic Racism*, Yeshimabeit Milner and Amy Traub demonstrate how this behavior exacerbates racial inequality, ever more surveillance, and other discriminations that predominantly affect people of color—by, for example, digitally channeling lower-income users toward predatory services (e.g., payday loans), subpar products (e.g., lower-quality homes), and job openings that the companies have deemed "appropriate" to their customers' social position.[10]

Because of their designation as independent contractors—that is, because they are not defined as full-time employees of a company—platform workers typically receive very low wages, and have few worker protections or benefits.[11] According to a 2017 report, 57.3 million Americans were by then working as freelancers, with 36 percent of all U.S. workers (and a majority of all millennials) participating in the gig/platform economy as their first or secondary job; "freelance" workers like these were projected to be a majority of all workers by 2027.[12] At the same time—as shown by an International Monetary Fund (IMF) report in 2017—technological advancement, especially as regards the growth of the platform economy, had been chipping away at the share of income for workers, resulting in half of the decline in workers' share of income across the globe between 1990 and 2015.[13]

Consider, for example, the case of Instacart, an on-demand grocery delivery platform founded in San Francisco in 2012. Instacart allows customers to use a digital app to choose a shopper, who picks up requested groceries and delivers them to the customer's location. Instacart has partnerships with six hundred retailers across forty-five thousand stores in the United States and Canada, and features more than 500,000 "independent" full-service shoppers constantly clicking the app looking for delivery jobs.[14] The company (which accounted for 57 percent of the market for grocery delivery in April of 2020)[15] takes a percentage of the fee for each delivery, though it claims all delivery agents are independent contractors who don't work for the company.[16] Because of this independent contractor status, as well as the requirement to submit a percentage of all delivery fees to the Instacart platform, a study by Working Washington found that some Instacart workers earn as little as $2.74 an hour, and a national survey of Instacart workers found average wages (before expenses) of just $9.50 an hour.[17]

In addition to receiving low pay with few benefits for the hours they work, independent platform workers are rarely paid anything for their time waiting for a gig to pop up, such as when Instacart workers sit in grocery store parking lots incessantly clicking on the app and hoping for a delivery gig to materialize. Workers are not paid for training time to master a job or for transit time between gigs. Unavoidable work-related costs like gas and vehicle maintenance for Uber drivers and delivery workers are sloughed off the company books and forced onto the independent contractor.

As MIT Professor Daron Acemoglu describes it, such "excessive automation" of the platform workforce has resulted in a workplace dominated by algorithmic management systems tracking every detail of each worker's response rate, delivery time, and customer reviews.[18] In this world of management by algorithm, many workers feel that they have lost dignity and voice.

While platform workers face demanding management by algorithm, low wages, and nonexistent benefits, the profits claimed by platform companies have dramatically risen. As more and more users have come to rely on these online

As Marx classically argued, the astronomical corporate profits made possible by new technologies do not come out of thin air but in fact ultimately only come about by "undermining the original sources of all wealth"—the soil and the workers' labor.

services, synergistic "network effects" have added both value and profitability to several dominant platform companies.

Uber, for example, has reported soaring growth over the last six years, with revenues growing 454 percent from 2016 to 2021, rising to over $17 billion a year.[19] While both Uber and Lyft reported their highest revenues and profits in 2021 (partly due to increases in surge fare pricing of up to 50 percent compared with prepandemic costs),[20] drivers haven't enjoyed higher earnings. In fact, drivers' share of the fare for each ride has instead *decreased* over the years.[21] Such details are hard to track, however, as rideshare companies don't always allow drivers to clearly see the total fare paid by the customer. For example, Lyft doesn't report total individual fares to drivers at all, and only reports weekly aggregate fares for individual drivers, while a California study by Mission Local found that Uber reports fares to drivers that are measurably lower than the fares actually paid.[22] Nationwide, Uber adopted a complex new "full fare" algorithm in 2021 that many drivers claim makes it increasingly difficult to track rider fares or understand what they will earn on a given ride.[23] Other hits to driver earnings in the last two years include rideshare companies requiring increased driver wait times for rider no-shows, "reduction in minimum pay for long-distance trips," reduced customer tips due to Uber and Lyft's higher base fares, and reduced mileage costs to some airports.[24]

PLATFORM CAPITALISM

Although many platform companies such as Uber, Lyft, and Airbnb have claimed credit for advancing a sharing economy—the preferred term for which is now *solidarity economy*—model, they don't in fact fall under that category, because they seek to extract maximum profits from their operations.[25] These companies are wedded to a model of platform capitalism and do not advance notions of sharing rides or homes in the absence of hefty profit potential.[26]

In the case of Uber, for example, robust revenues have certainly not been shared with workers, who earn far-below-average incomes and face working conditions of exceptionally long and harsh hours.[27] Admittedly, high revenues don't necessarily mean high profits, as Uber reports adjusted revenues before discounting interest, taxes, depreciation, amortization, or one-time costs like stock-based compensation to executives.[28] Still, the company is earning enough in revenues to have enabled it to provide its CEO with $12 to $42 million a year between 2019 and 2021, and Uber reported its first net profits amid record-breaking revenues in 2021.[29]

Airbnb is another example of extractive platform capitalism, as the company delivers hearty profits to its private owners, who are far removed from local host communities. Airbnb's model of turning all hosts into profit-seeking microentrepreneurs of short-term rentals has also been found to reduce the stock of affordable housing in communities, undermine local community rhythms with streams of short-term renters, and result in reduced local tax revenues from the hospitality sector. (In many U.S. cities, Airbnb hosts avoid traditional hotel taxation.)[30]

This pattern of immense platform business profits and low worker wages proves that technological advancement alone is not enough to improve the condition of average workers. As Marx classically argued, the astronomical corporate profits made possible by new technologies do not come out of thin air but in fact ultimately only come about by "undermining the original sources of all wealth"—the soil and the workers' labor.[31] Technology is a social product and can have benefits across society, but the core questions must always be: Who *owns* and *controls* the technology, and how will the average worker respond to it?

PLATFORM COOPERATIVISM

The term *platform cooperativism* is relatively new, introduced in 2014 by Trebor Scholz, associate professor of culture and media at the New School in New York City.[32] Scholz and associates use the term to describe the rapid growth of worldwide efforts to establish worker-owned platform cooperatives that are directly owned and managed by workers themselves and that use websites and mobile apps to sell goods or services. If the Uber and Lyft drivers in a particular city united to develop or purchase their own ride-hailing app, and collectively governed the use of the app and the

Recent reports have documented over five hundred platform co-op projects in thirty-four countries, and some of these platform cooperatives have tens of thousands of members. One factor in the rapid growth of worker cooperatives in the United States is the burst of local and national cooperative movement strategies.

equitable distribution of resulting revenues, this would be a platform cooperative.

Recent reports have documented over five hundred platform co-op projects in thirty-four countries, and some of these platform cooperatives have tens of thousands of members.[33] One factor in the rapid growth of worker cooperatives in the United States is the burst of local and national cooperative movement strategies, since national organizations like the United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives (USFWC) and the Democracy at Work Institute (DAWI) have increasingly focused on converting existing businesses into worker cooperatives to scale up the movement. Some states, such as Colorado, have started official employee-ownership commissions and dedicated new funding to support business conversion to employee-owned cooperatives or ESOPs (employee stock ownership plans).

The principles of these platform cooperatives are the same as those of traditional cooperatives: they are democratically owned and governed by workers, customers, and other stakeholders; they adhere to principles of equity in the distribution of revenues; and they strive to be good citizens in their communities. They also have many potential benefits for worker-owners and the broader cooperative movement. First, they can become a model for creating a true solidarity economy. Second, given their capacity to quickly develop very large membership bases, they have the potential to bring more visibility and muscle to the cooperative movement writ large.

Regarding modeling the principles and practices of a true solidarity economy, many members of platform cooperatives seek more egalitarian ways of distributing revenues, support a more democratic governance system, and, as part of the broader worker-cooperative movement, tend toward advancing the humanitarian principles of the International Cooperative Alliance, including "Concern for Community."[34]

For instance, Stocksy United, a platform cooperative for photographers, videographers, and artists generally, has a fair wage distribution system for members. PlatformX, an emerging platform cooperative seeking an alternative to the extractive capitalist model of Upwork or Amazon Mechanical Turk (platforms that help businesses outsource tasks and operations to freelancers), doesn't take a commission and requires users to contribute to local charities or community-based organizations.[35] The Open Food Network, an international platform cooperative, has a focus on helping local farmers connect to customers with sales of their organic harvest.[36] Farmers can begin using the site for free, and commissions on food sales are very low. And Fairbnb (a community-based alternative to Airbnb, based in Europe), operates a nonextractive business model in which investors have a capped return on investment, lodging rates are kept lower than Airbnb's, and 50 percent of all client fees go back to community projects.[37]

And there are yet more radical alternatives emerging—like the BeWelcome platform cooperative, which connects travelers to people who wish to voluntarily share their homes, and forbids any payment for lodging.[38] Through these alternatives, innovative platform cooperatives are advancing a true solidarity economy in their local communities and present not just a substantive alternative to standard platform capitalism but also an explicit corrective to its attempt to monetize the alternative.

In terms of helping to power the cooperative movement more generally: despite the movement's accomplishments—and indeed, the movement has grown rapidly since the global economic crisis in 2008 (and especially rapidly over the past two years)—there were still only about 465 worker cooperatives in the United States in 2019, producing just $505 million in revenues (the number of worker co-ops has since grown to 612).[39] This is a tiny share of the U.S. economy, though the employee-owned business sector grows substantially when counting employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs), of which there were 6,482 in 2019, holding more than $1.6 trillion in assets.[40] Platform cooperatives, which can have a much larger membership base than traditional cooperatives operating out of a physical space, are well positioned to expand the movement—demonstrating, as they do, that worker-owned cooperatives can grow large and successful by taking advantage of the efficiencies and network effects of the platform era.

Despite promising developments, platform cooperatives face obstacles because they are forced to exist within—or at best, alongside—capitalism.

For instance, New York's Drivers Cooperative has recently exceeded five thousand members, and it is expected to have more than ten thousand worker-owners once an on-demand app (comparable to Uber) is launched in early fall of 2022.[41] After the launch in New York City, plans are that New York's Drivers Cooperative will share its platform technology with organized workers in other major cities, with the possible result of tens of thousands of new worker-owners joining the cooperative movement. Other examples of large membership platform cooperatives include: Belgium's Smart (also known as SMart), a platform cooperative for freelancers founded in 1998, with over one hundred thousand members across nine different European countries);[42] Eva, a local delivery and ride-share platform cooperative established in Canada in 2017, which has more than forty-five hundred partners working together;[43] and Stocksy United (mentioned earlier), founded in 2012, which has over one thousand members and generates over one million photographs, videos, and artworks every year.[44]

A CAPITAL CONUNDRUM

Despite promising developments, platform cooperatives face obstacles because they are forced to exist within—or at best, alongside—capitalism. Thus, the most immediate challenge for most platform cooperatives is their lack of access to capital. (Raising capital is an obstacle not only for cooperatives, of course—currently, fewer than 1 percent of all new small businesses are able to raise venture capital to help them grow.)[45]

Compounding the normal difficulties of raising capital, platform cooperatives face additional problem of larger start-up costs. Due to the high cost of developing a polished and reliable internet platform, platform cooperatives are exceptionally vulnerable to technical and financial challenges. The Stocksy platform cooperative only got off the ground by accessing $1 million of venture capital, which was borrowed from two founders' wealth.[46] And The Drivers Cooperative in New York raised over $1.6 million, much of it through crowdfunding—a rare achievement.[47] Even so, this money is not enough to support outreach to other cities to start their own driver cooperatives.

Another key problem for platform cooperatives is that their business model is based on unique value propositions (equitable pay, limited extraction of profit, concern for community) that aren't attractive to most traditional investors. Early investors are loath to risk capital when they are so limited in their ability to capture returns from future revenue streams. With hundreds of millions (and even billions) of dollars of venture capital flowing into early iterations of companies like Airbnb and Uber—and with these companies' platform capitalism model of cheap labor and extractive profits—it is hard to imagine most platform cooperatives being able to realistically compete with the artificially low prices and high profits of dominant platform companies.

But still, some innovators are convinced a platform cooperative movement can be well funded. In 2021, the United Kingdom launched an "accelerator initiative" for platform co-ops under the direction of Programme Manager Ludovica Rogers. Though Rogers is aware of the capital conundrum, she maintains that a platform cooperative economy is still possible: "The first challenge to address is imagination," Rogers argues. "We are becoming so dependent on Big Tech that we are starting to believe that there are no alternatives to the big monopolistic platforms. Though platform co-ops are still few and small in scale, they show that another way is actually possible."[48] The key, Rogers maintains, is to develop radical new strategies for financing social purpose investments, for funding communitarian rather than extractive business practices.[49]

And, although most mainstream investors are unlikely to support platform cooperatives, there is an array of possible funding solutions for such initiatives. As described by the Shareable and Grassroots Economic Organizing websites, foundations are increasingly attuned to the importance of humanizing the platform economy, and are growing their financial support of platform cooperatives.[50] Cooperative banks and credit unions are a possible source of business capital, as well. Crowdfunding campaigns have raised over $1 million to launch platform cooperatives, as happened with The Drivers Cooperative in New York. And unions have the capacity to invest both capital and technical support behind platform cooperatives.

The most promising strategy may well be to take up the old tools of democracy, and mobilize the power and finances of the state to moderate the brutality of platform capitalism by funding a healthy dose of platform cooperativism.

But in the end, all of these avenues are quite limited in terms of the capital they can provide. The real money—the serious capital necessary to meet the scale of the challenge—remains in two big buckets: deep-pocketed private investors and government coffers. In terms of traditional investors, the executive director of Start.coop, Greg Brodsky, has emphasized that start-up cooperatives will never be scaled up without the support of more of these whale investors than we're seeing.[51] But while many traditional investors will probably never be attracted to the social mission of platform cooperatives, there *is* increasing interest in such causes among a pool of more patient social investors with longer time horizons and at least some stated community commitment. For these investors, there exist innovative tools like withdrawable community shares, which are shares in a cooperative that cannot be sold, traded, or transferred, but which earn an annual interest rate until they are withdrawn from the business enterprise (which is only allowed under the condition that the business has sufficient cash reserves to pay for the withdrawal).[52]

TOOLS OF DEMOCRACY

Although these tools of alternative financing have some promise, the potential of platform cooperatives to fundamentally change worker conditions in the gig economy will never be well realized within the extant capitalist economy. The "degeneration thesis" has long held that worker cooperatives are inherently weak within a capitalist profit-taking system, and will inevitably degenerate into capitalist enterprises themselves as they seek economic survival, or remain small niche innovations without broader impact.[53] Though strategies to resist either economic obscurity or capitalist degeneration exist, it seems a fair bet that relying on either economic or technical innovation alone to scale up the platform cooperative movement will ultimately fail. Something more is needed.

The most promising strategy may well be to take up the old tools of democracy, and mobilize the power and finances of the state to moderate the brutality of platform capitalism by funding a healthy dose of platform cooperativism. There is no reason that both national and local governments cannot be more active in creating, funding, and supporting platform cooperatives, and involving cooperative leaders in blue-ribbon task forces regarding how best to reform and regulate monopolistic Big Tech. In this regard, the problem for platform cooperatives is not so much technical or financial as it is political. The question then becomes how to mobilize serious political support behind a cooperative movement that is demonstrably better for average workers and community health than typical platform capitalism.

There has been some movement in this direction. In 2018, a national proposal was floated for a "Bill of Rights for American Workers Building Support for Cooperatively-Owned Businesses that are Democratically-Owned and Governed."[54] And in 2020, California's Cooperative Economy Act was drafted by labor unions and community organizations, and put forward by Assemblymember Mia Bonta.[55] Although these two labor bills to protect platform workers have not passed, the focus on new state policies to protect platform workers is definitely growing. For instance, Scholz, who has become recognized as the leading scholar of platform cooperativism in the United States, recently circulated a white paper urging municipal and national governments to develop policy incentives providing preferential treatment for platform cooperatives, create more public lending programs, and expand public participation in multistakeholder cooperatives via direct state ownership of co-op shares, among other stipulations.[56]

Substantial government support and policy change will be critical if platform cooperatives are ever to thrive. Just as Franklin Roosevelt's policy initiatives during the New Deal played an important role in the rapid growth of agricultural and rural electrical cooperatives, new government policy and funding support can change the employment landscape for those most vulnerable to exploitative platform capitalism.

Growing government support in South Korea provides one example of the possibilities. Both the national government and Seoul Metropolitan Government have passed rules guiding "Public Procurement for Realization of Social Values."[57] These ordinances (together with annual public procurement and social economy expos for government

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officials) require affirmative efforts by government agencies to purchase products from social economy enterprises like platform cooperatives. As a result, the total value of Seoul's public procurement from social economy enterprise more than tripled between 2012 and 2018, growing to 136.9 billion in South Korean won (KRW) ($108.5 million in U.S. dollars) in 2018.[58] Seoul has also launched its own publicly supported social investment fund (with $135 million in U.S. dollars in 2022),[59] and provides substantial capacity building assistance to social economy enterprises across the city. Substantial expansion of just this kind of state action is needed everywhere to help local cooperatives meet the challenge of global platform capitalism.

To pursue this kind of global expansion of state support, platform cooperatives could benefit from forming a federation of international platform cooperatives, helping platform cooperatives grow to scale over time. Already, some platform cooperatives have a global presence. For instance, the Smart freelancer cooperative has offices in eight European countries, the CoopCycle biking platform cooperative is active across Europe, and the Open Food Network operates in various nations. These kinds of globalizing cooperatives could lay the foundation for creating an international federation capable of mobilizing state power across the globe and competing with the brutal force of multinational corporations. They can also play a key role in national legislation supporting open-source software and collective ownership of sharing platform technologies, such that collective and communitarian approaches—rather than capitalist proprietary ownership—come to play a larger role in the platform economy. The theoretical and practical models for shared and cooperative ownership of the platforms exist—consider, for example, Nathan Schneider's "exit to community" strategies [60]—but it will take serious political action and legal innovation to take them to scale, whether through top-down nationalization of the capitalist platforms or bottom-up socialist efforts to build thriving worker cooperative platforms.[61]

The platform cooperative movement seeks to make the platform economy more humanistic and equitable—but it will take long and hard work, and dedicated engagement by workers themselves, to sustain what in the end must be a political as much as an economic transformation. Such risky economic ambition as building platform cooperatives requires an activation of the "animal spirits" of workers—a term used by John Maynard Keynes to describe a confident, emotional mindset that some kind of positive result will be achieved through creative action rather than by not doing anything at all.[62] Indeed, it takes ambitious animal spirits just to form a cooperative—to do the hard work of learning to trust one another, establish and practice rules for democratic management, and perform all the tasks of business management.

But more is needed than Keynes's economic "animal spirits." In order to evolve the platform cooperative movement in the United States and elsewhere, workers will need to go beyond economic innovation—they must organize their political power to mobilize state support. In other words, they must not only activate their "animal spirits" but also be the "political animals" that Aristotle once described—capable of values leadership, policy advocacy, and coalition building to grow the economic, social, and *political* power of platform cooperatives.[63] We know from experience that technological advances do not always work to the benefit of marginalized communities or average workers. It is always a question of "Technology for whom?"—as in, "Who owns the app? Who controls the code?" In the end, these are not questions of technical capacity but of political power. Platform cooperatives are a strategy of political and organizational might, uniting workers in a concrete way to own the conditions of their work and to redirect technology to the benefit of average workers, not global investors. To prevent their bodies from becoming an on-call commodity owned by an algorithmic app, and the value of their labor getting extracted by capitalists, workers and movements must mobilize to own the apps themselves. When workers organize to own the conditions of their workplace, then fair earnings, dignified work, and democratized management can become substantive realities instead of crumbs pried from the edges of privatized, profit-seeking apps.

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The Future of Workers in the Gig Economy and Beyond

A Conversation with Steve Dubb, Rithika Ramamurthy, and Sarita Gupta

> "We're in a moment that's transformative. . . . The magnitude of this crisis is an opportunity to have a magnitude of vision, and to reconstruct our economic and labor systems from the ground up. And that has to start with workers."

This conversation with Sarita Gupta, vice president of U.S. programs at the Ford Foundation—who until recently directed the Ford Foundation's Future of Work(ers) program—and NPQ*'s Steve Dubb and Rithika Ramamurthy, focuses on the struggle for workplace justice, and discusses where the points of leverage are for building worker power and ownership.*

Steve Dubb: We would love to hear a bit about the background of your work. How did you come to the field of worker justice? And what led you to move to Ford, recently, after a decade at the helm of Jobs With Justice?

Sarita Gupta: I like to think that I came to worker justice by a few pathways. A key one was that my family immigrated to Rochester, New York—"Kodak City"—when I was a child. Seeds were planted very early in my childhood, growing up in a city where, at the time, Kodak was downsizing and I saw the devastating impacts of unemployment on families and communities. At such a young age, I couldn't really make meaning of it—but it always seemed strange to me that there could be generations of families who were part of building a major company like Kodak and who could suddenly lose their livelihoods and not have a voice in that process.

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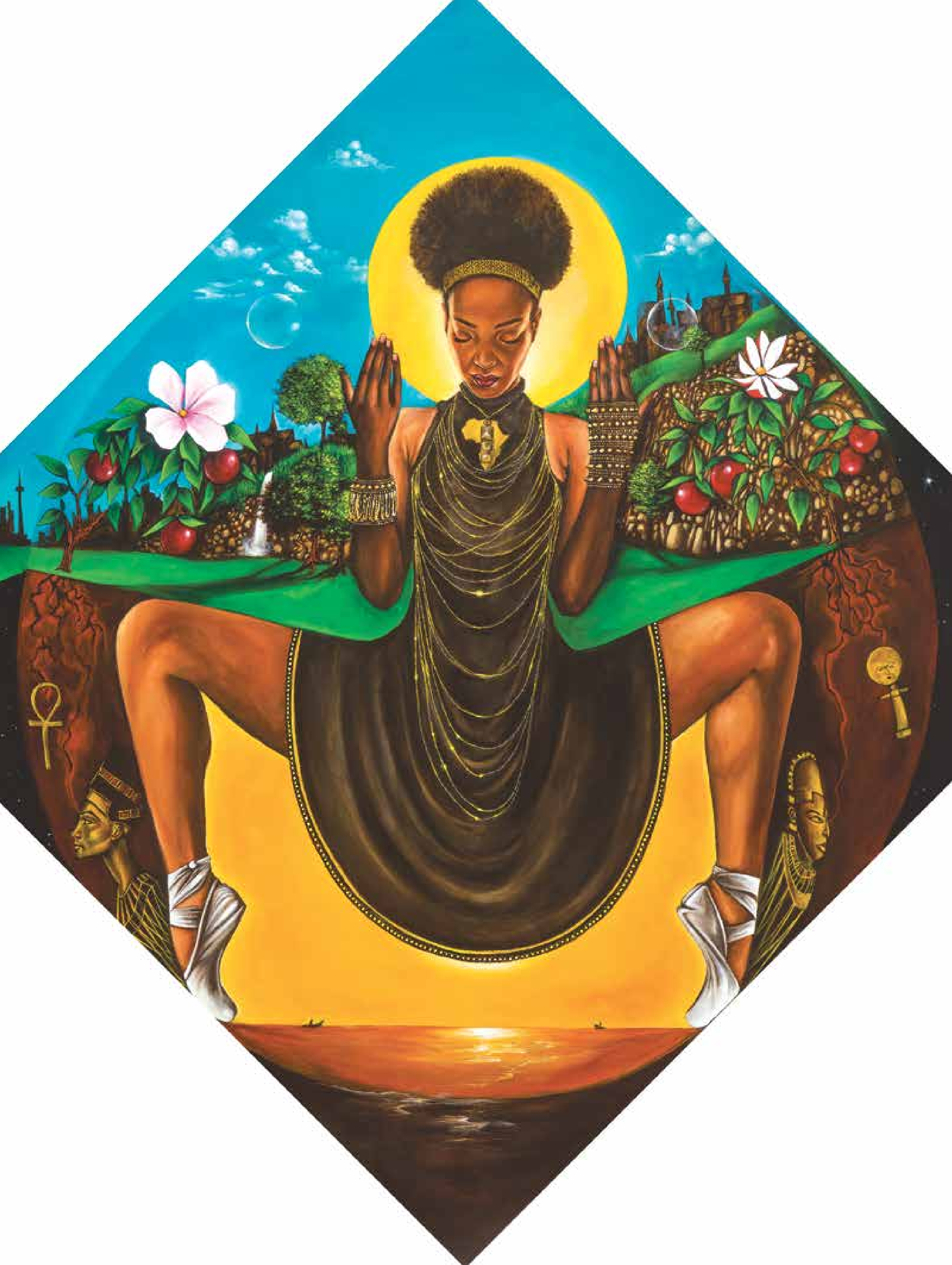

“Automation and the impact of new technologies is a relevant topic to discuss, but all too often the people who are impacted by current problems of wages, benefits, and the lack of influence over working conditions get left out of the debate.”

As I moved on in life, I went to college—and in college I saw workers organizing on campuses, and grad students organizing, and I started to recognize how important worker *voice* is. So, it was from the student movement, and going into the labor movement—and, specifically, Jobs With Justice—that I began to make links between the attacks on student voice and democracy on campus with attacks on collective bargaining. And that's what brought me into the worker movement—where I spent the next twenty years.

I was a local organizer in Chicago—a strong union town—but I was there at a time when there was a rise of immigrant workers organizing in the city: janitors, hotel workers, industrial, laundry, and food service workers. I helped found the first worker center in the city. And that led me down this path of what it means to work with traditional unions, as well as worker organizing happening outside of a union context. That helped me to have an imagination around working—or being able to work—at the edges of the labor movement, if you will, and to really understand the importance of seeding new approaches to how workers are organizing.

My transition to Ford after Jobs With Justice was based on two things. One, wanting a different perch from which to look at the field of worker justice. For years, I had been an organizer and an advocate, and I was hungry to widen my aperture, to better understand the interests of a variety of stakeholders. And two, the biggest driving force for me was my horror that, as this conversation about the future of work was taking root, it became focused on machines and automation, not centering workers and the realities of workers.[1] I was given an incredible invitation to come to Ford to help recenter that debate. It has been so inspiring for me over the last couple of years to be at the foundation and be able to do just that.

Rithika Ramamurthy: Can you elaborate on what that conversation about the future of work gets wrong?

SG: Automation and the impact of new technologies is a relevant topic to discuss, but all too often the people who are impacted by current problems of wages, benefits, and the lack of influence over working conditions get left out of the debate. Even before the pandemic, the average worker had experienced forty years of stagnant or declining pay, shrinking benefits, and reduced voice in the workplace. At the Ford Foundation, we focus on the future of *workers*—and named our program as such—because we're focused on ensuring that all workers, regardless of their classification, have equal rights in terms of labor protections and social protections, and that workers shape the policies and the economic systems that affect their lives. We work to build public will and reimagine labor and social policies, to make sure all work and workers are valued and protected. I think that is what is critical right now, and I think the pandemic has created an opening for the kinds of discussions that we needed prepandemic and that thankfully are now beginning to take root.

RR: This is so important right now, as gig work starts to encroach on professions that you might never have imagined would be gutted by this. I was just reading about a bill in California that's about to pass, "Uber for nurses."[2] I think your instinct is right that with employment shifting and becoming flexible and restructured, new approaches and creativity vis-à-vis the working class are needed.

SG: Absolutely. If we aren't careful, the policies that get created around so-called gig work could be the next chapter of policies that exclude large swaths of working people from the kinds of labor and social protections that are needed. It's another vehicle that can promote the kinds of historical exclusions that our program has been trying to address. Domestic workers should have labor and social protections; day laborers should have labor and social protections. It's important, through that lens, to recognize how critical this debate is right now, and how important it is for us to recognize—as a nation, as people, as policy-makers, as employers, as workers—that we can't allow another vehicle by which those kinds of exclusions get created.

SD: You noted once that "the arc of the economic universe has bent badly toward injustice."[3] Why is this so, and what can be done about it?

SG: Why? Neoliberal policies of free trade, structural adjustment,[4] increased outsourcing, and the fissuring of work. The growing concentration of power in the hands of multinational corporations and financial actors that occurred over the last forty years enabled them to rewrite the rules of the economy and claim the lion's share of its benefits for themselves—and, as a consequence, working communities across the country are experiencing increasing economic insecurity. So, it's critical—when we think about an inclusive and equitable economic recovery from the pandemic—to take a moment and pause, and acknowledge that the prepandemic economy was incredibly unequal, and that this pandemic has simply laid bare the results of decades of growing inequality and compounded it.

There are lots of statistics: you can look at the wealth gap, you can look at where jobs have grown or not grown in the last few years—and all point to the importance of looking at our economic recovery. It shouldn't mean that we're returning to "normal" or to recovery from just the pandemic. We're in a moment that's transformative; it's an invitation (and responsibility) to build an economy that centers those who've historically been pushed to the margins. The magnitude of this crisis is an opportunity to have a magnitude of vision, and to reconstruct our economic and labor systems from the ground up. And that has to start with workers. We're seeing that now, as we see workers expressing with their feet their discontent with the types of jobs they have access to, and what they believe they deserve.

SD: Why did those neoliberal policies pass into law and become effective? What can we learn from the experiences of labor defeat?

SG: Neoliberal policies include free trade, low taxes, deregulation, privatization, and balanced budgets. Every aspect of society is seen through the market economy. Neoliberal policies took hold because of a combination of trends: new economic thinking in reaction to the Keynesian economic model; businesses aggressively asserting their interests in politics; the public becoming more skeptical of government; and the aggressive attacks on unions as entities that represent the interests of working people. Many of these policies created a "race to the bottom," in which many sectors of work were displaced and lost due to companies seeking cheaper labor in different parts of the world. Since the '80s, a well-financed and organized anti-union industry has taken hold, making it more difficult for workers to form unions. As a result, we have witnessed the decline of unions that have been opposed to these types of policies that do not benefit workers and working-class communities. At the same time, we have seen the concentration of political and economic power and influence of the wealthy and corporations that are interested in making greater profits.

We should be really clear on *why* this came about. I noted the fissuring and neoliberal economic policies that substantively shifted the arrangements in workplaces. In the United States, we have antiquated labor laws and policies that were based on very traditional employment models, yet so many workers in our country today are not in those traditional employment arrangements. So, that's one element. The other is the growth of an anti-union/union-busting industry that has perpetrated massive attacks on collective bargaining rights—which has been going on for over four decades now. What that means is it's been made much harder for workers to come together collectively in their workplaces and form unions. It means we've seen increasing attacks in retaliation against workers who speak up in their workplaces around issues. We saw this with the pandemic—for instance, the Amazon worker in New York who spoke about health and

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“These attacks on our democracy—whether it be voting rights or any other of the many different ways that such attacks are showing up—are another form of silencing the voices of working people, not only in the context of work but in the context of society as a whole.”

safety issues and was immediately fired. Workers and whistleblowers across U.S. industries have alleged that they experienced retaliation for raising concerns about their health and safety.[5] The increased attacks on collective bargaining and the increased retaliation that we see when workers speak up in their workplaces have made it very difficult for workers to find their voice in workplaces and to help to shape workplace policies.

I also want to connect this to what's happening in our democracy as a whole right now, because it's important for us to understand that these attacks on our democracy—whether it be voting rights or any other of the many different ways that such attacks are showing up—are another form of silencing the voices of working people, not only in the context of work but in the context of society as a whole. I think that the attacks on collective bargaining have had a huge impact on the health of our democracy generally. That's the *why*: the policies that were passed, coupled with a real push to squash unions, if you will, or the idea of collective bargaining rights.

What we can learn from this defeat for working people and their communities is: the importance of unions and worker organizations to counterbalance the growing concentration of power of corporate interests; the critical need for unions as an organized voice to represent the interests of workers; and the need to create the collective economic and political power necessary to build an equitable economy and politics. We need to promote a vision of our economy that is based on the values of respect, agency, and everyone's ability to sustain themselves and their families.

RR: Given this anti-union atmosphere, what do you see as the future of collective action? What role might traditional unions play? What role might alternative institutions, such as worker centers and worker cooperatives, play?

SG: Ultimately, all of us want to live in a healthy democracy in which our opinions and contributions matter—and collective bargaining is fundamental to building a healthy democracy, by creating pathways to elevate the decisions of workers alongside those of employers and others. This is particularly important in an era of global capitalism, where financialization (whereby the financial sector—banks, private equity firms, hedge funds, stocks and derivatives exchanges, and other conduits—takes up a larger share of the U.S. economy, and increases its influence over economic policy and economic outcomes),[6] fissured employment, and entrenched practices of patriarchy and white supremacy exist. It means that we have to rethink collective bargaining and collective action, and reimagine what they look like in order to meet the needs of modern workers. So, in my mind, collective bargaining rights and collective action are critical pathways to democracy. We have to expand how we think about democracy: it's not just a system of political practices but also *principles* that have to be applied to participation and decision-making in all aspects of people's economic lives. That means that collective bargaining and collective action should be seen not only as important in the workplace but also in terms of the other economic relationships that workers hold: as tenants, as students who have debt, as the many different ways workers interact with the economy. Within that context, collective action becomes critical: it is the ability for people to come together and negotiate with whatever entity has decision-making power over their lives—negotiate agreements that give them a voice in the process and a way to hold firms, banks, and landlords, for example, accountable.

That's what we're starting to see happen. We know that labor unions—historically and still today—are an important pathway to the creation of good jobs and access to benefits. And for so many people—especially so many Black and Brown workers—unions were a huge pathway to the middle class, and that continues to be true and important. But we've also seen the growth of worker centers,[7] and the impacts facing those historically excluded from labor laws and policies, as we've talked about. In this moment, especially with the pandemic, these impacts on people who have been historically excluded have become that much more apparent. We saw many Black and Brown workers, immigrant workers, and other low-wage workers excluded from fundamental rights and safeguards. Some of the early pandemic recovery policies, for example, and this anti-union offensive over the last two decades, have undermined worker protections in so many sectors of the economy—especially in lower-wage sectors of the economy, where so many Black and Brown and immigrant workers exist.

So, the growth of the worker-centered movement has been powerful in helping to right those exclusions, to find new approaches to collectively bring workers together and enable them to negotiate and to change policies. And this is fueled by an incredible renewal of energy in the labor movement. I see worker centers as playing a critical role in winning rights and raising standards in low-wage industries: they've been instrumental in raising the minimum wage and forcing wage theft ordinances, in winning a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights and paid leave policies, and much more. I think they've played a big role on all those fronts in a way that gives us a window into what the future holds—one in which worker centers and labor unions can come together in a more powerful way. I think we are seeing new pathways to collective bargaining rights emerging here.

We're seeing collective action around us today in the increasing pressure for unionization—from Starbucks workers, to Amazon, to journalism outlets, to tech companies. We're seeing the power of collectivization in the demands for better wages and benefits in an economy that centers workers.

RR: What you're describing is the ideal strategy of bargaining for the common good, or thinking as a "labor community," as Naomi Williams might put it.[8] The idea that, politically, the divorce of economic and racial justice is a major failure—not letting workers think about how their lives are integrated with work, and vice versa, and how people and institutions who hold power over them are affecting them, too.

SG: Bargaining for the common good is in fact one of the most promising models right now. I would also lift up what we're seeing with the "Always Essential" campaign—another compelling example of essential workers coming together and declaring that "essential" doesn't mean disposable, and that they need protections. And there have been great victories, from New York to Harris County, Texas, in terms of essential workers creating a Health and Safety Standards Board.[9]

"We're seeing collective action around us today in the increasing pressure for unionization. . . . We're seeing the power of collectivization in the demands for better wages and benefits in an economy that centers workers."

SD: I would like to talk a bit about worker cooperatives—something we cover quite a lot at *NPQ*. The field is still fairly small, but the strategy is gaining prominence—it has certainly become a popular strategy among Latinx workers and workers of color generally. What can you say about the role of worker cooperatives?

SG: There's growing momentum around worker cooperatives, which is really promising to see—and I think it's a great example of economic democracy in its truest form. A lot of what we're talking about here is economic democracy, and I think worker co-ops are a critical model of this. In some industries and places, it makes really good sense—it's not applicable across the economy, per se, but where it does make sense, we've seen the power of what's possible. I've had the opportunity to travel to Mondragón, Spain—the birthplace of the largest ever worker cooperative—and to see the model up close and what the impacts of such a model can be in terms of addressing the inequalities and disparities that we know exist, and what it means when workers really do have that much control over an industry (including the services that are created in that

"We're seeing an historic act of refusal by workers right now, who will no longer accept the below-standard wages and protections they've been forced to accept for decades."

context).[10] I think there is immense power in this, and I think time will tell, as this movement continues to grow in the United States, as to where and how the model takes root.

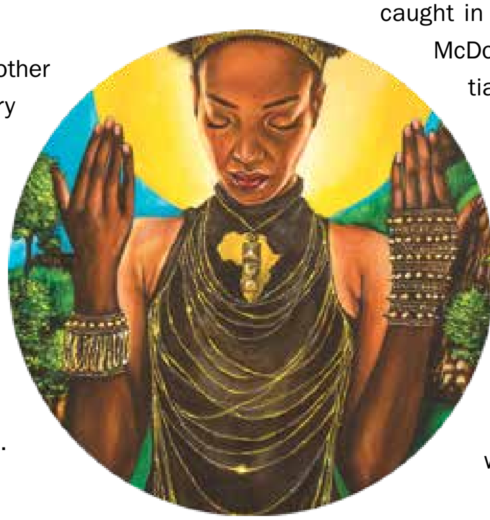
I do know that many of our grantee partners at Ford are in relationship with some of the worker cooperative movements, and that's also what's really exciting about this moment—the ways in which those in the worker justice movement are collaborating and learning from each other's strategies to help inform new breakthroughs.

SD: I often refer to the 1936–37 Flint sit-down strike, and the fact that the workers were able to control the tool die that was used for shaping the body of about half the vehicles on the GM product line—which made their victory inevitable, once Governor [Frank] Murphy refused to bring in troops to break the strike. So, that was a point of leverage, and these days it seems harder to find those points of leverage. Where do you see points of leverage to shift the arc back in the direction of justice?

SG: Your question brings to mind another major worker struggle nearly a century ago, connected to a deadly pandemic, which was the ten thousand coal workers in West Virginia who banded together to march in protest against the cruelty and injustice they experienced working in the mines. It was one of America's largest labor uprisings, and really unusual at that time because of the segregation of workers. But it did lead to incredible sets of protections that we take for granted today, like the forty-hour week and minimum wage.

In the same vein, we're seeing an historic act of refusal by workers right now, who will no longer accept the below-standard wages and protections they've been forced to accept for decades. A lot of reporters and the media are calling this moment "The Great Resignation"; but in reality, millions of workers feel that America quit on *them* a long time ago, and I prefer to talk about it as "The Great Stagnation" *for* America's workers—because it's the stagnation of employers, policy-makers, and others who are just not changing the conditions for workers in this moment.[11] What's exciting is that, in fact, there *is* this leverage right now, happening before our eyes—and workers are demanding that businesses compete with each other for their services, and are refusing to accept anything less than living wages, solid benefits, better working conditions, and flexibility. And we're seeing sectors in which wages and benefits have swung up.[12] There is much work still to be done, for sure—but this is a clear example of the power of collective action. And it's one example of where I see leverage right now.

In the past, you thought about leverage in terms of employer and employees, and what a company can do and can't do. But today, with the financialization of the economy, we have to ask ourselves what *should* and *can* a union contract cover? This gets back to the point about bargaining for the common good, which poses that question—as in, How do you leverage union contracts in smart ways to actually address a broader range of issues that fall outside of the contract but impact workers? Who are we negotiating with? Often, workers are not actually negotiating with the decision makers, and they're caught in a shell game. It's what we saw with McDonald's workers: they think they're negotiating with franchise owners, who say, "We don't make those policies, it's headquarters"; and headquarters says, "It's not us, it's the franchise." Then there's the role of private equity and hedge funds that own many of these companies and have a big say in decision-making, as we saw with Toys "R" Us workers not long ago, and with United for Respect, which did that really immense



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campaign.[13] The question of who we are negotiating with and how that informs leverage is another really important element to be thinking about in this moment.

So, what does a union contract cover, who are we negotiating with, and then who actually gets to be included and seen as a worker? Who has the right to actually negotiate around these things? Depending on the sector, there are different ways we leverage. Again, bargaining for the common good is a great example of where all of these things are being tried in really smart, thoughtful ways, and bringing about real wins. Whether it's the Florida public services union—SEIU Local 8—demanding that the city and state stop providing subsidies to companies that rely on fossil fuels as a core component of their business model, or Minnesota's SEIU Local 26's "ban-the-box" campaign, demanding that the company remove questions from employment applications pertaining to employees' criminal record—these are things that, although not historically within a union contract, they were able to negotiate. There are many other examples, of course, but I think that's how we begin to answer that question of what are the new leverage points in the economy as it is today. As our economy changes, it's going to require the collective action and experimentation of workers and these kinds of campaigns to really sharpen those leverage points over time.

RR: Since you've already spoken about the creativity and ambition of the contemporary working class struggle, I wonder if you could talk a bit about how the composition of the working class has changed in the past few decades, and the implications of this change.

SG: The composition has shifted over the last few decades. Part of the worker center movement was a response to the growing numbers of Black, Brown, and immigrant workers who were in many sectors of the economy where work protections have not existed. Broadly speaking, if you look at the worker center movement and who they represent, that gives you a sense of the composition of the working class.

But what I would really like to focus on is Black workers, who are 12 percent of the overall workforce but represent over 17 percent of all frontline industry workers.[14] Combined with the limited access to healthcare, Black workers and their families continue to be at higher risk of COVID, and of falling into poverty if they face disruptions at work. Within two decades, Black and Brown workers will become the majority of the working class, yet movements to transform labor policies do not have representative leadership from affected communities.

"But what I would really like to focus on is Black workers, who are 12 percent of the overall workforce but represent over 17 percent of all frontline industry workers. . . . Within two decades, Black and Brown workers will become the majority of the working class, yet movements to transform labor policies do not have representative leadership from affected communities."

One exciting initiative that Ford is proud to be supporting is the Advancing Black Strategists Initiative. It's a partnership among Jobs With Justice, the Institute for Policy Studies' Black Worker Initiative, and Morehouse College's International Comparative Labor Studies program.[15] They're looking to create the next generation of Black economic justice and labor strategists to lead campaigns and demand collective power building, particularly in the South. The goal of this initiative is to support the development of a new school of thought—one that's anchored in the principle that working people's ability to organize and collectively bargain, alongside voting and other forms of civic participation, is a prerequisite for a healthy society and economy. I feel like we want to support more initiatives like this that help us embrace the changing composition—not just to acknowledge but to actually *support* how the movement infrastructures get built to ensure that Black and Brown workers are shaping future economic and labor policies in this century.

RR: There's a lot of talk about reimagining capitalism. But what if capitalism is the reason that the arc of the universe bends toward economic injustice?

SG: What we need is a new form of stakeholder capitalism that recognizes the importance of all stakeholders, including employees, the communities, and suppliers.[16] It's important to see workers as a core stakeholder among actors who are shaping the economy, shaping workplaces, shaping policies. We also need a form of capitalism in which boardrooms are changed. A year ago, a third of the Fortune 500 companies did not have a single African-American director, and I can assure you that if you don't have representation at the board level, you're not likely to see material or sustainable change in the C-suite and within the company more broadly.

We've also got to change the rules of the game so that people have the opportunity to compete on a level playing field. I think these are some of the fronts that we see as opportunities, as we talk about reimagining capitalism in this moment, to make sure that we're really meeting the needs of workers and helping to support the environment that creates opportunities for workers to achieve dignity in their lives.

SD: But *capital* is in the name of capitalism—it really does privilege the owners of capital. Is there space for thinking beyond it?

SG: Let me be clear: We want to support workers *within* the logic of capitalism. I think that's what worker justice groups are doing—taking the lead from unions and worker organizations. There is a lot of interesting discussion happening around post-neoliberal economic thinking, and there are actors within philanthropy who are beginning to understand and learn about some of those efforts that are taking root.

As philanthropy, we support the movement, and so we're taking our lead from the movement as to where they see the openings and opportunities for them to shape economic models that they're confronting on a daily basis. That's really where we're at in this moment, while paying attention to some of these conversations about new economic models that are taking root, and doing our part to position and ensure that worker groups are at the table in those conversations—alongside racial justice groups, feminist organizations, and many others—so that, as new economic models are being thought out, we don't replicate the historic exclusions of the voices that we know are critical. If we want a better future, we need to make sure that those who have been most impacted and historically excluded are at the table shaping the models moving forward.

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DETAIL OF "EVE ON THE ROAD TO ZION" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

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The Rise of the Gig Economy

by Erica Smiley and Sarita Gupta

Technology is brilliant and enables scale, but too often new technologies have just scaled or amplified long-standing problems rather than disrupting them, shifting inequities entrenched offline to the new online platforms. So far, it has been optimized for efficiency and convenience for the employer, but we believe that it can be optimized for equity for everyone.

For the past few years we have been inundated with rosy books and articles about the gig economy.[1] They feature vignettes of people working flexible hours to pick up extra cash: the graduate student who drives for Uber in her spare time, the stay-at-home parent who brings in extra spending money with EasyShift, the high school student picking up odd jobs on TaskRabbit. Whether it is being praised as the newest innovation in work-life management or as a massive new industry that will displace traditional work relationships, the gig economy is widely touted as the latest great phase of modern work.

If this were actually true, we would praise the dawn of a new era—especially one where, for once, more people could have access to equal parts work, rest, and recreation. But this trend is actually just a collection of familiar exploitative business practices repackaged as a positive

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Companies lure workers by projecting their apps as the new fast way to achieve the American Dream of being your own boss. The problem is that these so-called self-employed entrepreneurs have very little autonomy.

twenty-first-century development. Technology is brilliant and enables scale, but too often new technologies have just scaled or amplified long-standing problems rather than disrupting them, shifting inequities entrenched offline to the new online platforms. So far, it has been optimized for efficiency and convenience for the employer, but we believe that it can be optimized for equity for everyone.

Gig-economy business models serve the interests of their investors and shareholders at the expense of their workers. What we have learned from workers who work on gig-economy platforms is that this notion defines everything: the work conditions, structures, policies, and compensation. What this means for platform workers is the following:

- They are managed by an algorithm and rarely able to talk to a live person.
- Customer ratings can determine their pay.
- They are penalized for canceling a job even if they felt unsafe.
- There is little transparency regarding the policies, protocols, data collection, and surveillance.
- They have no access to their own data, which means they cannot take their experience or reviews from one gig-economy platform elsewhere.

Under the guise of innovation, the gig companies are reinforcing the same pernicious dynamics that working people have faced for generations—twenty-first-century Taylorism.[2] Companies lure workers by projecting their apps as the new fast way to achieve the American Dream of being your own boss. The problem is that these so-called self-employed entrepreneurs have very little autonomy. They are not setting their prices or their schedules; sometimes they cannot even choose what car they drive. The company maintains control over those decisions.

A 2020 study of gig workers commissioned by the San Francisco Local Agency Formation Commission and conducted by the Institute for Social Transformation at the University of California–Santa Cruz bears this out. For example, the study found that platform companies providing services like rideshare and food delivery frequently withdraw work offers, threaten workers with deactivation, and reduce their bonuses when they decline specific job offers—something workers are supposed to have the freedom to do under California law.[3] In September 2019, the California State Legislature passed Assembly Bill 5, which was aimed at including gig workers in protections designated for employees.

There is only one situation in which gig companies are willing to cede control to individual workers: when something goes wrong and someone needs to be held accountable. In those cases gig companies try to minimize their relationship with their workers. This is particularly clear in two recent lawsuits against Uber. In the first case, two women attempted to hold Uber accountable for the sexual harassment they experienced from a driver.[4] The company claimed the driver was an independent contractor—not an employee—and thus Uber was not liable. In the second case, workers sued the company for mileage

The gig economy is sold to workers as a type of empowerment, but the actual jobs are designed to hold them back.

and tip reimbursements that they currently have to cover themselves.[5] Again, the company argued that the workers are not employees—and that making them employees would undermine their business model by damaging driver flexibility and adding too many costs.

Classifying workers as independent contractors is key to many gig companies' strategies, because gig workers are paid the same as or less than formal employees and receive significantly fewer benefits such as healthcare, paid sick leave, or workers' compensation for injuries.[6] And at the end of the day, gig companies' goals are the same as always: to keep their costs low while maximizing profits.

In 2018, the California Supreme Court took an important step toward limiting corporate executives' ability to misclassify individuals who are actually employees. In the Dynamex decision, the court implemented a basic A, B, C smell test, noting that a person is an independent contractor only if they (A) are free from the control and direction of the hiring entity in connection with the performance of work, (B) regularly perform work outside of the hiring entity's business, and (C) are engaged in an independently established trade, occupation, or business of the same nature as the work performed.[7]

Again, legislators took this even further with the passage of California Assembly Bill 5, which limited the use of classifying workers as independent contractors rather than employees by companies in the state. Employees were entitled to greater labor protections such as minimum wage laws, sick leave, and unemployment and workers' compensation benefits that do not apply to independent contractors. The law codified a stricter set of requirements than laid out in the Dynamex decision. This bill was overturned in November 2020 by Proposition 22, a ballot initiative heavily funded by gig companies.

Rideshare drivers also made gains during the COVID-19 pandemic given their status as "essential workers," ultimately winning the right to claim unemployment benefits when laid off. This victory took them one step closer in their fight against misclassification as independent contractors, thus expanding their protections under labor laws. Again, it was quickly subdued by the passage of California's Proposition 22 ballot initiative, which excluded many app-based workers from foundational labor laws.

In August 2021, the Alameda Superior Court of California ruled that Proposition 22 violated the California constitution and must be struck down in its entirety. While the decision will likely be appealed by the app-based companies, the decision represents a huge setback for companies who have been trying to rewrite U.S. labor laws and exempt themselves from labor standards that apply to all other employers. The decision also represents an important advancement in the gig-worker-led movement for employment benefits, fair wages, worker protections, and the right to exercise collective democratic power.

The gig economy is sold to workers as a type of empowerment, but the actual jobs are designed to hold them back. Flexibility for workers does not automatically gel with the on-demand needs of company executives. In fact, what working people want—and what the gig economy rarely provides—is more control of their time on the job. They want to shape decisions and redesign their jobs to meet the company and their personal needs. Both parties need room to negotiate conditions.

Unsurprisingly, gig executives militantly combat workers who attempt to form unions. Again, Uber is an illustrative example. When Seattle granted its drivers the right to unionize, the company instructed its customer service reps to call through a list of drivers to explain why unionizing was a bad idea (a spokesperson defended the practice in a statement, saying "it's not clear a traditional union can serve such a large and varied group of people.")[8] The company also has a history of deactivating—gig-speak for firing—drivers who lead unionizing efforts.[9] Uber's major competitor, Lyft, has been accused of similar tactics. (Spokespeople for both companies have denied the allegations.)[10] New York University (NYU) professor Aswath Damodaran explained that unions will ultimately hurt these companies' bottom lines, saying "they are likely to shake up the current revenue-sharing balance."[11] In other words, union workers get more of the total share, and that makes executives nervous. For them, it pays to keep gig workers from organizing.

So, while the gig economy is upon us, it is far from the worker-empowering revolution that companies are marketing and far less sizable.

However, workers at many gig companies are experimenting with different ways to negotiate over their conditions, from Seattle to New York to overseas.[12] They are proving that the only thing inevitable about the gig economy is that, as with business innovations of the past, working people will eventually figure out how to organize app-based and gig companies. These workers are designing a new generation of labor protections that will not only benefit workers at gig companies but also help to protect the interests of all part-time, temporary, or subcontracted employees.

NOTES

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Building Community Institutions of Our Own

by Rodney Foxworth

It is absolutely possible to move away from extraction, exploitation, and concentrated power and toward alignment, reciprocity, mutual benefit, and distributed power—and that may well lead to an economy and world in which race, gender, and place of birth no longer dictate individual and community outcomes.

I have long wondered how nonprofit institutions such as my own—a Black-led, multiracial organization whose mission is to build more equitable economies—might be able to help develop, invest in, and build alternative financial institutions and infrastructure designed for equity and community wealth. And I have also long wondered how we might engage broader constituencies and communities impacted by our work as coinvestors and co-owners. Admittedly, these feel like daunting questions to imagine and consider, given the long-standing systemic challenges and inequitable dynamics at play in the social sector.

Early on in my tenure as director of Common Future, I attended a funder-organized grantee convening focused on community wealth building. The participants represented some of the most respected institutions advocating for community wealth and equitable distribution of economic power. These institutions were powerful organizers, advocates, and strategists reimagining local, regional, national, and even global economic systems; they were a diverse group made up of grassroots organizers, community development financial institutions, think tanks, and policy advocates, and I was in awe to be in the presence of so much dedicated brilliance. Yet, there was something else that struck me: while these institutions, including my own, were powerfully advocating for and reimagining our economic system to center equity, distributed power, and community wealth, few were actively living out those principles.

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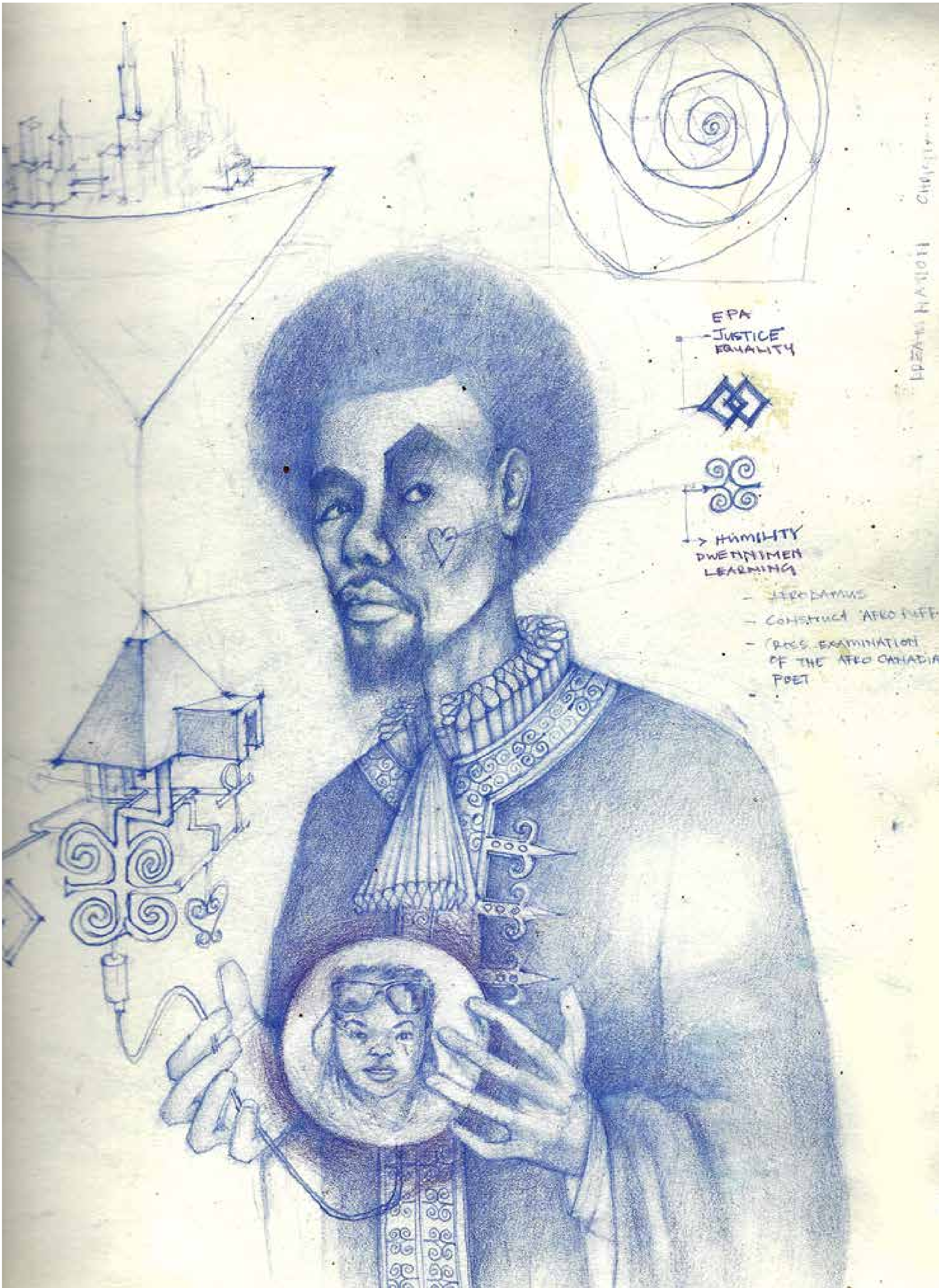

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The opportunity I see for nonprofit institutions . . . is to become practitioners and exemplars of the economy we want to create. In such an endeavor, philanthropic capital has an essential role to play *only so long as the financial resources serve as capital that is fully at the nonprofits' and organized communities' own discretion*.

Indeed, while many of these institutions supported their own communities and stakeholders to advance community wealth building and new economic models, they often practiced traditional nonprofit economic models themselves—principally, by raising philanthropic capital, most often from foundations. A few had modest fee-for-service revenue models—meaning that they performed contractual work, trainings, or consulting assignments on behalf of government or other clients that could pay for services rendered rather than making charitable contributions. However, much of the discussion that dominated the convening was on how to better organize and strategize to attract additional philanthropic capital, and I was left with a question: *Can community-centered nonprofits create alternative economic models better aligned with community wealth building*?

That question persists today. Common Future has a diverse body of work. We collaborate closely with a national portfolio of community-based organizations that strive to create economic equity and justice in their local communities. We provide strategic grants, catalytic investment capital, operational support, and thought partnership to a portfolio of community-wealth-building institutions. We work shoulder to shoulder with these institutions to incubate ideas, cocreate new initiatives and strategies, and develop collaborative actions toward shared challenges. But institutional philanthropy was and remains our primary source of capital and revenue.

Over the years, we've experimented with various fee-for-service strategies, and we have diversified our philanthropic engagement beyond institutions to include individual donors. As noted by Clara Miller—founder of Nonprofit Finance Fund and past president of Heron Foundation—generating revenue can be a key lever for nonprofits to shift power for themselves and their constituencies.[1] But establishing more clarified, expansive, and successful fee-for-service efforts can also miss the mark, because typically they are not directly tied to the goal of building economic power and community wealth—and, critically, the beneficiaries of these earned-income services generally aren't those for whom economic power and community wealth building would be most transformative. Instead, financially sustainable fee-for-service models are usually aimed at government, foundations, and other individuals and institutions with financial means. Indeed, we've found that fee-for-service models often do not have the transformational effect of liberating nonprofits and communities from philanthropic constraints.

FUNDING FOR ECONOMIC POWER

The opportunity I see for nonprofit institutions such as Common Future is to become practitioners and exemplars of the economy we want to create. In such an endeavor, philanthropic capital has an essential role to play *only so long as the financial resources serve as capital that is fully at the nonprofits' and organized communities' own discretion*—in other words, so long as the capital is tied not to programmatic outcomes aligned with philanthropy's interests but rather to helping build the economic power of the grantees. And how they then decide to use and leverage philanthropic capital must be up to the grantees themselves.

Common Future imagines a world in which people, no matter their race or ethnicity, have power, choice, and ownership vis-à-vis the economy. Since its founding, in 2001, we've advised, supported, and intermediated relationships and resources on behalf of more than two hundred community-wealth-building institutions across the country. We've worked directly with numerous place-based foundations to shift more than $280 million from Wall Street investment holdings to BIPOC and rural communities. It took us nineteen years to develop enough of a surplus to (in partnership with our board) grow our operating reserves to cover six months of operating expenses—and we established a fund to meet unanticipated opportunities and challenges without

***Access* falls short, because it does not necessarily equate to *power*.**

needing to rely on fundraising efforts. Of course, we did not predict nor account for the COVID-19 pandemic. We decided to use the full fund, $250,000—10 percent of our operating budget at the time—to deploy rapid response grants to our national community-wealth-building institutions led by and serving Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people, people of color, women, LGBTQIA folks, and rural communities.

And we did it quickly. While the total funding we were able to make available was small in relation to the scale of the problems facing institutions and communities, all told, the institutions we funded collectively employed over four hundred full- and part-time staff, and supported thousands of small businesses, entrepreneurs, artists, and nonprofits—all vulnerable to and facing a significant economic crisis.

In the months to follow, there was a steadily increasing drumbeat calling for increased access to capital for small businesses, nonprofits, and entrepreneurs—particularly those from communities prioritized by organizations such as Common Future. As emphasis on access to capital became more mainstream, one of the lessons my colleagues and I learned from our experience with our own funding was that *control* of capital was equally—if not more—important than *access* to capital. *We* determined the use of our board-designated fund; we did not have to negotiate with a funder or some other external party. We had the power and control.

Access falls short, because it does not necessarily equate to *power*. The community-based organizations we work with at Common Future demand and deserve economic power. The people inside these organizations are members of the communities they represent and serve. These organizations and communities oftentimes toil tirelessly to conform to the whims and interests of external parties to pull together adequate resources from funders and others for their

Imagine the possibilities if community-based organizations, nonprofit institutions, and community-wealth-building institutions of different forms were able to establish genuine economic alignment, economic reciprocity, and mutual economic benefit with our communities, stakeholders, and partners!

visions. Sometimes they have access to these resources, but rarely do they have control of them. And because they don't have control, they are typically constrained by what other individuals and institutions believe is best for their organizations and communities. During the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, communities of color and rural communities were largely ignored by banks and federal agencies.[2] Rather than put decision-making under the control of community-based organizations, resources flowed to and at the discretion of institutions far removed from communities that were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.[3]

Thus, control of capital was the underlying principle behind the Character-Based Lending Fund (CBL) that Common Future developed in 2021, in collaboration and partnership with ConnectUp! Institute, MORTAR, and Native Women Lead—three community-based small-business and entrepreneur support organizations servicing primarily Black, Indigenous, and Latinx entrepreneurs in Minnesota, Ohio, and New Mexico, respectively.[4] Rather than setting the terms and convenants ourselves—as, typically, investors do in an investment transaction—we recognized that we had an opportunity to share and cede our power as the primary resource holder to our three community-based partners. After all, they were essential to the fabric of their communities and intimately understood their needs and opportunities. We asked them to determine how Common Future's capital would be put to use. We gave them control and decision-making authority with respect to, for instance, what interest rates should be paid on the loans that were given, who received the loans, and the qualifications for receiving them. This process has continued to inform how Common Future collaborates with our investee-partners, with a strong focus on cultivating intentional relationships that are values-aligned, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial.

THE TENSION

Still, the primary driver behind Common Future's ability to build and subsequently share capital and economic power remains predicated on our capacity to raise and attract philanthropic resources. As was the case a few years ago, strategizing how best to attract additional philanthropic capital continues to be at the forefront of Common Future's business and revenue model, even as we set clear goals to build economic power, agency, and independence. Despite using philanthropic capital creatively to achieve our aims, the tension is palpable.

Unrestricted, long-term gifts have been essential for Common Future to establish a modicum of economic power, agency, and independence. Indeed, we've been privileged to be able to raise unrestricted philanthropic funds to support and advance our vision of economic justice for all—especially as a Black-led, multiracial, and majority POC organization: According to the Echoing Green and Bridgespan report *Racial Equity and Philanthropy: Disparities in Funding for Leaders of Color Leave Impact on the Table*, Black-led semifinalists for the Echoing Green Fellowship reported revenues that were "on average . . . 24 percent smaller than the revenues of their white-led counterparts," and "[t]he unrestricted net assets of the Black-led organizations are 76 percent smaller than their white-led counterparts."[5] While the report is specific to Echoing Green applicants, it speaks to the broader racial disparities in the nonprofit sector.

Imagine the possibilities if community-based organizations, nonprofit institutions, and community-wealth-building institutions of different forms were able to establish genuine economic alignment, economic reciprocity, and mutual economic benefit with our communities, stakeholders, and partners![6] How might such a transition place power into the hands of communities and institutions most impacted by economic and racial injustice? It is absolutely possible to move away from extraction, exploitation, and concentrated power and toward alignment, reciprocity, mutual benefit, and distributed power—and that may well lead to an economy and world in which race, gender, and place of birth no longer dictate individual and community outcomes.

In fact, it is already happening. There are several examples of nonprofit organizations building economic partnerships with Black farmers and land stewards across the U.S. South, to establish new and democratic forms of financial infrastructure to secure ownership of land and property that benefits residents, farmers, and institutions alike. Land—and Black ownership of land, specifically—is an area that is largely ignored by philanthropy. Land ownership is a mechanism for building wealth and economic power—and it is also used as a means to deny communities rights and resources. Rather than waiting for philanthropy to step in, groups like Potlikker Capital and Manzanita Capital Collective are organizing themselves in various ways as economic change agents—jointly purchasing land with their stakeholders, setting up cooperatively managed financial mechanisms to consolidate opportunities and create scalability, and relying on aligned institutions and impacted communities to create and maintain power and control. Similarly, groups like Higher Purpose Co. and the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation have leveraged their institutional capacity to assert economic power on behalf of the communities in which they exist.[7]

For over a year, my colleagues at Common Future worked with Concerned Capital, an organization doing outstanding work in the area of employee ownership and business succession planning. Unfortunately, nonprofit institutions typically don't consider themselves economic entities capable of creating positive and reinforcing markets among each other, instead often mirroring the same philanthropic practices that are grounded in concentrated power and charity rather than mutual economic benefit and shared power building. Thus, we provided Concerned Capital with a strategic grant, and thoroughly supported and advised them throughout a fundraising process that netted them a seven-figure gift. This is the type of work Common Future is missioned to do, and we take great pride in the contribution we were able to make in this example. But what if this partnership had been structured differently? For example, rather than making a strategic grant and providing pro bono professional services, what if we had structured the arrangement as a recoverable grant and revenue-sharing agreement contingent on the impact of the services and partnership provided? In such an arrangement, we would have established economic alignment, reciprocity, and mutual benefit with our partner.

Such arrangements between nonprofits and their partners, stakeholders, and communities would enable unrestricted philanthropic capital to be used for more disruptive/transformative purposes than simply acting as primary revenue sources. They would enable community-based organizations, nonprofits, and community-wealth-building enterprises to develop self-reliant economic ecosystems between and among their communities, partners, and stakeholders that can be catalyzed by—but not wholly dependent on—philanthropy. They would allow these organizations to build economic power and wealth for, with, and alongside their communities, partners, and stakeholders, rather than relying upon the largesse of philanthropy. It would provide a pathway for all involved to have ownership, control, and power.

For BIPOC-led and -predominant nonprofits to truly catalyze community wealth, we must prioritize building economic power, creating alternative business and revenue models, and establishing economic reciprocity and mutual benefit with our stakeholders and partners. Otherwise, we will contribute to perpetuating the charitable-industrial complex and fail to become equal partners with—or more bleakly stated, continue to be subjugated by—donors and philanthropy.

I'm reminded of how financially precarious Common Future was during the first year of my tenure. For starters, I was a new leader succeeding the organization's founding executive director, which is always a challenging task. Our funding sources were concentrated in fewer than a handful of institutions, and all of their commitments lapsed beginning my first year. We worked diligently to renew their commitments, but we had more to achieve than what was budgeted for—namely, undergoing a rebranding process that would set the stage for our long-term organizational health. Of course, we didn't have the financial resources to accommodate a rebrand, no matter how necessary it was at the time (and has proven to have been). Fortunately, we had a donor who understood the value of our request and funded a portion of the rebrand—and, just as important, introduced us to an aligned creative agency start-up. This pairing was crucial—while we couldn't afford the rebranding engagement at the time, the agency understood the long-term value in working with us. But they were a BIPOC start-up themselves, and couldn't afford to execute the work without appropriate compensation. We collaborated to determine an aligned, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial economic arrangement: they stretched their fee structure to nearly eighteen months (a lifetime for an agency), and we championed them to prospective new clients. The agency has grown and evolved in the years since, becoming an instrumental partner in the movement for racial and economic justice. We worked in a manner that prioritized mutual benefit and partnership. We recognized our capacities as institutions to drive economic outcomes for each other.

The story of having to come up with money for rebranding is our particular story at Common Future. But our story speaks to far broader issues in the field. Really, what we are talking about here is a need for working capital—that is, the availability of cash being invested strategically by nonprofits, independent of the confines of program deliverables, to expand economic self-sufficiency over time.

The type of mutually beneficial economic arrangement described above is essential for institutions like Common Future—but we need systemic solutions for the entire nonprofit sector, especially in community economic development and economic justice, not just good fortune that happened to benefit our organization. Of course, we are grateful for the donor's support that enabled the transition we needed. We're not an endowed institution—few Black-led organizations are, as evidenced by research conducted by Bridgespan—and every strategic grant we make and every bit of patient capital we deploy currently requires us to fundraise the return of capital to ensure our own institutional sustainability for the short and long term.

It need not always be this way. Without these types of models and ways of operating in place, philanthropy will continue to not only hold the purse strings but also the power to capitalize change. Fortunately, nonprofits are well positioned to develop meaningful and mutually beneficial economic relationships among themselves and the communities they serve to create long-standing economic power that is shared and transformative.

NOTES

1. Clara Miller, “The Looking-Glass World of Nonprofit Money: Managing in For-Profits’ Shadow Universe,” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, June 12, 2017, nonprofitquarterly.org/looking-glass-world-of-nonprofit-money/.
2. Joe Neri, “A Moment of Choice: Racial Equity, CDFIs, and PPP Lending,” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, April 30, 2020, nonprofitquarterly .org/a-moment-of-choice-racial-equity-cdfis-and-the-ppp-lending-fiasco.
3. Ibid.
4. Chris Winters, “Lending on Character, Not Credit Scores,” *yes!*, November 15, 2021, yesmagazine.org/issue/a-new-social -justice/2021/11/15/banking-bipoc-businesses. And see also Jaime Gloshay and Vanessa Roanhorse, “Moving Beyond the Five C’s of Lending: A New Model of Credit for Indian Country,” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, October 6, 2021, nonprofitquarterly.org/ moving-beyond-the-5-cs-of-lending-a-new-model-of-credit-for-indian-country/.
5. Cheryl Dorsey, Jeff Bradach, and Peter Kim, *Racial Equity and Philanthropy: Disparities in Funding for Leaders of Color Leave Impact on the Table* (New York: Echoing Green and Boston: The Bridgespan Group, 2020), 5.
6. This is not pie-in-the-sky thinking. The cooperative movement, for example, has had reciprocity (“cooperation among cooperatives”) as one of its core principles dating back to the nineteenth century. For more, see Darnell Adams, “What If We Owned It?,” *Nonprofit Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 80–93, nonprofitquarterly.org/what-if-we-owned-it/.
7. See “Supporting Farmers of Color: What is Potlikker Capital?,” Potlikker Capital, accessed May 30, 2022, potlikkercapital. com/; “Shifting power and capital to advance racial & economic justice,” Manzanita Capital Collective, accessed May 30, 2022, manzanitacapital.co/; “Our Mission,” Higher Purpose Co., accessed May 30, 2022, higherpurposeco.org/; and “Building Generational Wealth,” Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation, accessed May 30, 2022, heirsproperty.org/.

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Reclaiming Our History of Mutualism

A Conversation with Steve Dubb, Rithika Ramamurthy, and Sara Horowitz

"Once you start thinking in a more reciprocal way, you start to understand that mutualism is not about charity, it's about human beings' strengths—our powers, our magic—and that mutualism calls on these to be in reciprocal relationship. Mutualism is about people being very much connected to one another."

This conversation with Sara Horowitz, founder of the Freelancers Union and author of Mutualism: Building the Next Economy from the Ground Up *(Random House, 2021), and* NPQ*'s Steve Dubb and Rithika Ramamurthy, delves into the history of mutualism in the United States and how we can bring practices of mutualism back into our economic system.*

Steve Dubb: I'd like to begin by talking about your process. Can you talk about the Freelancers Union that you founded back in 1995, and how you went from there to starting to write a book about mutualism in 2018?

Sara Horowitz: I started to build the Freelancers Union after I was made an independent contractor, in 1994. Instead of just getting angry, I was able to call on a lot of tradition that started me on a mutualist path. I went to the labor school at Cornell [the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations], and I have worked for unions since I was eighteen. This makes sense, because I grew up in a union house—my father was a labor lawyer, my grandfather was vice president of ILGWU, a garment workers' union, and I always thought that if there was a problem, you organize to solve it. And that is very mutualistic. It never occurred to me that you would externally expect somebody else to solve the problem for you. So, I started to build the Freelancers Union, and I immediately started to pull from the strategies of my grandfather's union, as well as from Amalgamated, the other garment workers' union at the time.

"ANCESTRAL WATERS FROM AKSUM" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

"I think mutualism is an economic and political system that builds solidarity among people within their community. It starts with a community—that's the first element. The second is there must be some kind of exchange. . . . And the third is that you have a long-term time horizon, because you're passing wisdom from generation to generation."

The garment unions of the 1920s, it turns out, had the strategies we needed in that moment. I began organizing freelance workers in those strategies—and by that I mean that I started to build the Freelancers Union as an anchor to aggregate workers into their own community, to then build up their economic might together (and on that base their political power), and to have a long-term time horizon. And those are the three elements of mutualism. But it's important to understand that it's in the economic piece where solidarity resides. I did not go to the foundation world and request money for a campaign. And I did not conceptualize an advocacy strategy that did not have roots in the workers' own experience. So, by the time I started writing a book on mutualism, it had become clear to me that we needed mutualism, we needed these strategies.

But it was so daunting to know where to start! And I realized that you have to begin around the ideas and the culture, and start having a conversation, and gather the early adopters who can see that there's something there. And going through that hard work is what got me to write the book.

Rithika Ramamurthy: **Mutualism has many roots, ranging from the nineteenth-century anarchist theorists, such as Proudhon,[1] to immigrant self-help traditions. I'm a nineteenth centuryist myself, so I was excited to see your revision of this idea. How do you define mutualism?**

SH: I think that the idea of reciprocity gets at it. Once you start thinking in a more reciprocal way, you start to understand that mutualism is not about charity, it's about human beings' strengths—our powers, our magic—and that mutualism calls on these to be in reciprocal relationship. Mutualism is about people being very much connected to one another.

I think the way we can interpret mutualism today is that we need a very activist government—but the job of the activist government is to build the mutualist sector. I think mutualism is an economic and political system that builds solidarity among people within their community. It starts with a community—that's the first element. The second is there must be some kind of exchange. It can be dues, it can be services, it can be time, it can be distributed ledger tokens—but there has to be an aspect of it that includes obligation to others, regardless of personal feeling. Simply, you're connected economically. And the third is that you have a long-term time horizon, because you're passing wisdom from generation to generation. So I would say it pulls from a lot of traditions: it has some small "c" conservative values of responsibility—small government, in a way—but it also pulls from the left, because it embraces the basis of the labor movement, the cooperative movement, mutual aid, and the progressive faith communities.

RR: **Part of Marx's critique of Proudhon was that these ideas of free association are well and good, but they get captured by the logic we're all living in, which is capitalist. So how would you distinguish the principles of mutualism from the idea that, yes, humans free-associate with each other, yes, they need each other for exchanging services—which starts to go in the direction of someone like Adam Smith,[2] for whom the market is the place to facilitate those things.**

SH: I have a child who's a history major in college right now, and it's been helpful for me to see how little grounding in Marx people have these days. I don't understand how anybody can analyze the world without having an understanding of Marx. Conservative, liberal, whatever you are, if you don't know your Marx, you don't know history. That's the way I view the world. But where I think the distinction around *association* that Marx—or the later Marxists, who I think really built up heavy-duty, often totalitarian institutions—didn't understand, is that association as the *basis* allows communities to build up their power themselves. And you see how that lack of understanding has played out. A great example is in Nicaragua, after the Sandinistas came in. It had all these associations of worker groups—cobblers, for example—who would negotiate for all the materials they needed collectively. And as soon as the Sandinistas came in, they crushed those organizations. That is not the kind of left we need—and it's 100 percent not the left we need in this era—because you can love centralized big government all you want, but that is not the economy we

"We've set the table in such a neoliberal way, and the things that we are fighting for are not starting from the empathetic moment of how somebody is experiencing their day. What tells our whole story is what our day is like. And Americans right now, they're anxiety ridden, they're anxious, they're insecure, they're oriented to conflict and to dislike and distrust. And those are very bad days."

have. We are moving toward a very decentralized economy, and that's why we have to dust off the old Proudhon and a lot of these old traditions—because they give us the starting point to recognize where we're going.

And I'll give you another example. In New York City, in 2017, the Freelancers Union passed what is probably the most protective legislation for freelancers ever in this country, called "Freelance Isn't Free." And it has teeth. If you don't pay your freelancer within thirty days, it's double damages for you in attorney fees. New York is about to pass it statewide. How did that happen? Well, it only happened because so many freelancers in New York City were unionized and organized, and so many were in coalition. New York City already had the teachers' union—AFT, the American Federation of Teachers—and SEIU [Service Employees International Union], and the business community decided to recognize the fairness of paying people after they had done the work, and did not lobby against it. Those coalitions only happen when you have a base.

SD: You think the economy is less centralized? I think it's more centralized. . . .

SH: The economy is more centralized by monopolists, but public authority and technology are decentralizing. A great example is what happened with COVID-19 vaccines. We gave the job to Big Pharma—so, centralized—and we said, "You handle it." And guess what? People said they didn't trust their local CVS. They just didn't have a warm feeling when they walked in the door. So, they had to then pivot and say, "Okay, we'll also distribute through the Black church, credit unions, union halls, and co-ops, because we know that's where local communities are." That's the decentralization. And we've stopped building that since the 1960s. The right has attacked these groups, particularly unions, but in addition, the left has done a really good job of making sure that they don't get the funding dollars, the cultural recognition they deserve, until now. The foundation world has generally focused on advocacy campaigns rather than institution building, giving foundations control over strategy instead of empowering local institutions to decide strategy. COVID-19 showed that mutual aid groups can spring up. They started to arise because of the great need for food, medicine, and connection, but soon were delivering infrastructure for vaccines, mental health outreach, and more organized food distribution. That's the wonderful opportunity here. We need to focus on helping these groups institutionalize, so they can become mature fixtures in their communities.

SD: In your book, you talk about the ILGWU, a union that's near and dear to my heart, too. My great-grandmother was in the ILG. And you say that's a model for the mutualist society that you're advocating for. Could you elaborate on the connections?

SH: I think that one of the most important things, and so relevant to today—which, again, was demonstrated by the garment unions of the 1920s—is getting back to this idea of the whole person. So, you started with a great union negotiating and collective-bargaining, getting dues, and then negotiating and building political power to get the state to support their initiatives, so that workers could get worker housing. And in their worker housing, there were classes, there was education—there was a recognition that workers needed art and culture and one another. And you see that with 1199 [Healthcare Workers Union] and with Bread and Roses.[3] And that, I think, is a notion and practice missing in our society generally, and which for me is one of the most important things we need to get back to—the idea of *what your day is*. Your day is actually an economic phenomenon. So: What kind of food are you eating? Do you have a local food cooperative? Are you in housing that is affordable and designed to build community? Are you able to see somebody about your health who's *really* paying attention to who you are and what's happening to your mental state, and who will ask you about your connections to other people? Because, in fact, that last is one of the biggest predictors of your health. But we've gotten to the point where we've set the table in such a neoliberal way, and the things that we are fighting for are not starting from the empathetic moment of how somebody is experiencing their day. What tells our whole story is what our day is like.

"All in all, we have to get clear about the role of mutualism, because mutualism is absolutely what undergirds democracy. Without a social sector, you have totalitarianism or authoritarianism."

And Americans right now, they're anxiety ridden, they're anxious, they're insecure, they're oriented to conflict and to dislike and distrust. And those are very bad days.

RR: You have written that we've lost our mutualist memory as a society. And it sounds like you were elaborating on the psychopathology of that just now. You've noted that there were once over two dozen union-owned banks, and now, other than Amalgamated Bank, it would be hard to find any. So, what happened?

SH: We need to tell ourselves a more nuanced story about the New Deal, one that is not just centered on government. FDR did a very important thing. He said—not literally, metaphorically—that in the United States we have a three-lane highway. He said there's government, business, and the social sector. And he made it so that business couldn't get into the social sector's lane, and government couldn't get into the social sector's lane. This meant that the government was, and still is, not allowed to form a union. In America, that's illegal. In America, a company cannot form a company union, which is what a lot of conservatives right now are arguing for. And that, to me, is the best of government. But starting around the late '60s (and this continued through the mid-'80s), the New Left didn't often recognize mutualism, and they started to see that there was a way to just have government solve people's problems.[4] And it wasn't crazy, right? You could go to scale, you could solve huge things. So, it's not to say that that's *bad*, or that we should not have government. But we should really be starting to say, "We now understand data and metrics. Let's measure how many unions and cooperatives and mutual aid groups there are. Let's look at how we are helping faith communities get together and solve problems locally. Let's measure it. Let's grow it. Let's have candidates run for elected office, saying, 'I'm a mutualist, and I'm going to make this happen in my community.'"

Reagan in the 1980s is, for me, the biggest heartbreak. He encouraged massive demutualization in the insurance industry, violating the three-lane highway. Effectively, we made it extraordinarily difficult for mutual insurance companies to raise growth capital, while raising capital on the market was easy. As a result, we saw a tidal wave of demutualization.[5]

So, for me, it's about maintaining that three-lane highway, and it's about paying attention to when government or business moves into that lane and takes it over and hurts the mutualists. All in all, we have to get clear about the role of mutualism, because mutualism is absolutely what undergirds democracy. Without a social sector, you have totalitarianism or authoritarianism. You can't have a two-lane highway of only government and the private sector. That is antithetical to democracy.

SD: It's interesting that the phrase "social sector" today is often used not to define mutualism but rather to define the nonprofit sector.

SH: I think that started with Reagan. In 1981, Reagan started to outsource what was government to the nonprofit sector. And it was between that and the demutualization that we ended up where we are today. I think we have to recognize, vis-à-vis the social nonprofit sector, that we are becoming a barnacle on the side of the for-profit sector in many ways. We throw galas, we fund think tanks, and so forth, which promote wealthy people's agendas and ideas about what is impactful. The pie chart is relinquishing too many pieces of the pie, and the nonprofit sector is failing. Look at income inequality—there's just no way to say that we've done a good job. We haven't done a good job; because, ultimately, it's about building up constituencies and making the democracy responsive. And the nonprofit sector has so many preclusions around political activity and advocacy and transforming the economy.

Let me be clear: I love the nonprofit sector. There are wonderful people in it, and very many wonderful organizations. But too many pieces of the pie are getting into the wrong hands. We just have to get that pie in order.

RR: So, with all of this in mind—not just the failed ameliorations devised in the post-Reagan era but also where we have ended up right now—how do we go about building an ecosystem of new mutualism? We're not in the New Deal era anymore. We're no longer in the nineteenth century. You've noted that there's a risk that a new form of gig-worker organizing could go the way of the nineteenth-century Knights of Labor[6] and decline if they don't find a way to

“Where mutual aid is concerned, people are *operationally* practicing mutualism, but they’re not necessarily seeing it as such. We have to help people have that consciousness, and that, I think, will start to change the culture.”

generate their own revenue. What policies can these groups demand to advance their work?

SH: I think rather than the language of demand, we have to start to be builders. And I think the first step is not to critique but rather to start with the question, What can we do *right now*? I think it’s really important to recognize that there are many good strategies—so, not saying that this or that is the *only* strategy is critical; rather, pointing out a missing strategy and that we need it. The first step is to start to think about what one needs as a human being, and extend that to everyone. Start small. The conversation about scale, to me, is just not helpful. You start, and then you build your base. You could create a Substack newsletter that starts to have a collective own the revenue from the content and a dues structure, for example. And you can start to think about providing tokens based on contribution, and then attach voting rights to tokens, so that we begin to have this very interesting way to flip organizations around and say, “The local community needs to build this.”

There’s a role for philanthropy and others to play, especially with regard to start-up funding and infrastructure, but the community has to start to self-organize. And then, I think, the philanthropic world could attach 20 percent to each grant, which would be general support for mutualist activity, to help get community groups started on building with a mutualist strategy.

I’ll give you another example. When you look at what happens during natural disasters, it tells the story of mutualism.[7] First, something terrible happens. Then, the community starts to organize: Who needs food? Where are the people? How do we get them medicine? What do we do? They immediately start to go through their faith communities, the union halls, whatever infrastructure there is, and start to build out mutual aid. After this rich tapestry has been created, FEMA comes in, and they say, “Thank you so much, we’ve got it now. We’re going to outsource this to the for-profit sector, because they’re the experts.” Instead, why don’t we start to build up the pipeline for, say, disaster response—because disasters are going to happen—and really learn what this pipeline is and how we see this tapestry working, and build that out, so that rather than fading away it starts to be the epicenter of growth.

Once you start thinking mutual, so many examples of opportunities emerge. Let’s look at the infrastructure bill. If we were mutualists, we would have allotted a good amount of that infrastructure money to the historically Black colleges and universities, for their endowments. We could have done this easily—it would have been a couple of checks—and it would have been historic for America and for the Black colleges. But we didn’t, because we thought it was more important to send money through government agencies. This is simply the truth. So, there are all these opportunities. Think about quantitative easing. We purchased a ton of toxic assets, which grew to be quite valuable in about eight years—and then the Federal Reserve sent it to Treasury, as it must do, and Treasury sent it to Congress. We had enough money to solve for the opioid crisis, for building a national light rail system. We could have had reduced return of capital for investors, capital that the social sector, unions, nonprofits, faith, mutual aid could have used to build out what they needed. But this didn’t happen—not because people are evil, but because we are not good at thinking mutualistically.

RR: Going by your example, people’s instinct after bad things happen—and maybe even in order to create good things—is to act mutualistically, but our institutions and the way that we run civil society and the social sector are not primed for that. So, what’s the gap there between thinking and then material reality? How do you bridge that gap?

SH: That’s a really good question. I think part of it is that we have this notion of who’s an expert, and of how we need to engage experts. So when you think about the FEMA example, the thinking is, this group knows how to clean up, and this group knows how to get food to people really fast. Okay. But the local community people *know* their neighbors on the street and *know* what’s going on. They know what food people *actually like to eat*. We’ve lost the human empathy piece. Also, where mutual aid is concerned, people are *operationally* practicing mutualism, but they’re not necessarily seeing it as such. We have to help people have that consciousness, and that,

"In any system, you would, of course, want to make sure that there is no discrimination—that discrimination is illegal by law, by regulation, and by culture. We don't just build a mutualist, organic system and everything is now fine. We're humans. Things won't be fine."

I think, will start to change the culture—because once you've experienced mutualism, you really understand the benefits.

SD: In your book, you write a bit about how a weakness of mutualism is that it sets boundaries of who's in and who's out. Historically, mutual aid groups were often ethnically bounded. How do we address this tendency of mutualism to not just let people in but also keep others out? There are obvious implications in terms of racial justice and economic justice, here.

SH: First, in any system, you would, of course, want to make sure that there is no discrimination—that discrimination is illegal by law, by regulation, and by culture. We don't just build a mutualist, organic system and everything is now fine. We're humans. Things won't be fine. So, that's something we're always going to have to address. Second, what's very interesting is that mutualist organizations are often quite diverse, because their communities have shared needs for mutual aid, collective bargaining, affordable food, and so on. Unions have had a history of discrimination, that's true—but if you look at unions, and you look at employment discrimination, it turns out that if you're a unionized worker and you've been discriminated against, you actually do better when you have a union, because the union helps you fight your employment case. The faith community, too, tends to be so much more diverse than both a lot of progressive groups and right-wing groups that are one-issue oriented. But I think that's a really important point you raise, and I think it goes to notions of organizing, which often cross into a charity mindset, in which "we" are the staff, "we" are the experts, "we" are helping to organize this or that community of vulnerable people. And I think mutualism says, no, no—it's good when people come together in commonality and have the ability to be in solidarity. I think that's really important. That is in the American immigrant tradition. When you look at every immigrant group that has been successful in moving into the middle class, it's so often through their lending circles. And so you want to build on these traditions. The wonderfulness of diversity is enabling that to happen. I wouldn't want to live in a world where we tried to make everybody monotone. I don't think that would be achievable, and it wouldn't be a world I'd want to live in.

SD: You talk about the New Left. Part of the strategy—to break down the White Citizens' Councils and so forth in the South, in the 1960s—was for the federal government to very consciously *go around* local power structures. It often failed, but that was the goal—toward (hopefully) empowering African Americans in the South who had been disenfranchised. And, of course, this includes unions, particularly trade unions. There's a whole history there of trying to keep people of color out. What do you think has been learned from that experience, and how can we do better?

SH: I think that we can't ignore that we have to have nuance in our strategies; because, of course, when you look at the civil rights movement, it was made up of the mutualist movements. From civil rights back from when slavery was in existence, it was mutual aid that allowed people to bank, to bury their dead, to have faith in the AME Zion church. So, you have to hold both things—you have to understand that mutualism isn't an orthodoxy. I'm not a libertarian—I don't think that you just "let it be." I think that's the point of democracy, of having many different actors. And if a group is engaging in hate, or violence, or discrimination, they should be prosecuted. But I also think that when people get together in their church and they break bread and they keep track of each other's kids and they help each other find jobs, it's because they know who is in the church. And I don't think that's bad. In fact, I think that's wonderful. And so you need to be able to hold it all.

RR: We've acknowledged that mutualist organizations have something special about them. They've decided to operate by a unique set of principles. So, how should mutualist organizations operate as institutions? That is, how do they uniquely approach and foster principles of leadership, longevity, the kinds of things that any social institution that wanted to last would have to consider? For example, going back to your natural disaster question, people free-associating spontaneously in the wake of an event is not the same as building an institution together as a mutualist organization, like a church or a union or a co-op. So, how do mutualist organizations think differently than capitalist organizations or corporations? How do they uniquely approach leadership, or the kind of long-term time horizon that you've talked about, and other things that institutions always have to consider if they want to survive?

"What I think is so different about mutualism is that it asks of individuals to take responsibility and to grow, and then to take that growth and to teach the next generation."

SH: A mutualist organization can start up, and it can be a knitting circle, where people have some kind of way that they get together. And they have a little newsletter, and they have dues, and they get together and have a holiday party. And they're not interested in institutionalizing—they're not creating a worldwide knitting circle. And that's okay, because that really works for them. But many groups start out just like that knitting circle, and then evolve—like the Rochdale cooperatives (which, of course, created the Rochdale Principles, which are the worldwide basis of co-ops today). It was a store; it didn't start out with an impact investing model and seed capital of millions of dollars, right? You start, and then you give people the opportunity for leadership.

A good example is what happens in unions. When a union starts to organize, the first thing organizers do is identify who the workers look to. And the leaders are often the people who—in a hospital, for instance—clean the floors, work in the cafeteria. Then you start to ask them to take on more responsibility, where they then might be on the negotiating committee. They may start getting a handle on electoral politics in their area. There's a pipeline for how people who are not technically "leaders" can become leaders organically.

So, what I think is so different about mutualism is that it asks of individuals to take responsibility and to grow, and then to take that growth and to teach the next generation. And that's why—whatever your feelings are about unions—unions are the building blocks of transforming workers into leaders and leaders into democracy builders. Ditto the cooperative movement. Somebody teaches you how to do a budget, how to think about money, how to start to understand what the revenues and the expenses are. Where are you going to learn that? People think that you are supposed to learn that in a college finance class—but why?

RR: It sounds like what you're saying is that a mutualist organization operates as a sort of leadership institution by centering and building off of the daily experience of the collective. So, beginning from people's everyday and then building outward as an institution, rather than assuming that people fit preassigned roles, or that they don't have what it takes to do the kind of political or economic organizing that you're talking about—and taking that power away from them. I think you're right that a strong trade union sector often translates to more democratic action, because it's providing people with an institution through which they can empower themselves more than just going to the ballot box once a year.

SH: The other thing is, areas that have more mutualism in them also have much healthier economic development systems in place. Because it turns out that if you are a hub for a cooperative, people are already engaged, and because they're human beings, they're already starting to look at the other issues around them. There's this place in Arizona called Arcosanti, where one of the founders, Paolo Soleri, made bells out of metal and clay from the local area.[8] People started buying the bells, and the revenue was recycled back to the community to support artists to live and work there. The town, which started in the 1970s and is still unfinished, is in the middle of the desert, and it's designed on a human scale and functions along Soleri's ecological principles. For instance, at night, residents open all the doors so the town completely cools down. Then they close everything up. So, it's naturally air conditioned and they're using less energy. The town is designed to make use of the buildings for shade, so that plants that wouldn't normally be able to grow in the desert can thrive. For me, this is a metaphor for what it looks like when human beings are the ones who get to design something—because once human beings are involved in the design of their own spaces, they make different decisions than, say, developers.

I think another thing that trips people up is we've all become so neoliberal, in that everything now has to be scaled. Everything. And there's an emphasis on monolithic bigness. With mutualism, though, what you start to see is that it's actually the quintessential "long tail": it is about groups doing things hyperlocally, and then starting to share and build up infrastructure as supports their needs, rather than with the aim of growing for the sake of growth. Impact and scale are now too often imposed on communities for whom those goals are irrelevant at best. That's why I think the distributed ledger is interesting. We have to be critical of Bitcoin because of what it does to the environment, because of the greed associated with crypto—but there are elements of these technologies that we can be using and that fit completely with building mutualism. They're hand in glove. And I think we'll be able to keep track of people's contributions, tie that to voting rights, start to aggregate capital, and have it all be listed in very

"We have to get to a place where we're freer in our own heads. We are so constrained. People don't feel like they can dream and be free. And we have to be okay with dreaming. It's okay not to be taken seriously. The people who aren't taken seriously are the ones who change the world."

transparent ways—which is how people and communities can start to really have control over what they're doing. And I think we shouldn't be abdicating that. We should be learning what that is, and having a hand in it.

SD: So, what would a culture of mutualism look like? And what are the key elements that create and sustain that culture? Consider the Bank of North Dakota—why did it occur? It occurred because of the co-op movement. There was a socialist political party backed by farmer co-ops called the Nonpartisan League, and they gained control of the state government. Today, the co-ops are still there, but their culture of mutualism is much diminished. What is needed to keep that kind of culture of mutualism in place?

SH: Government needs to give mutualists a job. It needs to say, "Americans must get retrained." And you know who's going to do that retraining? Unions, cooperatives, the faith community. You know who's not going to do it? The for-profit sector.

RR: You began researching your book before COVID-19, but obviously, the mutual aid efforts that arose throughout the country during the pandemic and continuing through it made mutualism far more visible as a principle. Mutual aid started to be something that people talked about and practiced in a way that I hadn't seen, at least in my lifetime, thus far. What opportunities do you see emerging from that increased visibility?

SH: Someone recently pointed out to me that if you look at what's happening in Ukraine right now, it's being massively organized around mutual aid. I think we're getting to a place where we can see *in our own lives* how it can be successful. In other words, it's not abstract. It's actually how somebody is going to get their medicine. It's actually how you can get food to people. And I think that the next thing is to try to get it into more of an institutional framework. I see funders sometimes saying, "Here's the fund, and we're just going to give it to the mutual aid groups, and they can decide how they want to spend it." But I think instead we need to start to bring the field together and look at what the field actually needs and how we best fund that field.

So, we start to say, is it about leadership? Is it technology infrastructure? And what kind of money is needed to institutionalize? Do we connect these mutual aid leaders to other leaders and start to embed them within a network? Mayors are in a perfect position to do something. They have edifices. I would love to see a mayor make it so that there are some places that mutualists can gather for free with some infrastructure. Ask them what they need. Start to help them get some jobs from government (meaning, help them to win government contracts to provide services, in terms of procurement, training, and healthcare) so that they're delivering something that's tangible.

Take our example of natural disasters. There's a wonderful group called Resilience Force.[9] They're in a perfect position to start to deliver training, because they're connected to the workers. But we don't go that route, because the Department of Labor has taken this work away from the mutualists. Why not have FEMA do a convention with the mutual aid leaders and Resilience Force and others to start to plan a mutualist strategy, so that within a year or so, initial pilots are in place? And then study them. I think these are the kinds of projects that start to seed the field.

And if these actors, mutualists, were given the task of actually *being their full selves*, like a co-op and a union can be their full selves, then you would see transformation. But the government doesn't do it, so now these groups have to start to build on their own. And that's where I'm a stickler about this culture of building. We have to get to what Bill Drayton talks about with "Everyone a Changemaker," and start to build.[10] And not do it *charitably*—do it *mutualistically*. Ask individuals, "What are your needs? Are you a student? What should you be organizing collectively? Can you form a study group that's focused on mutualism, and pass the hat and break bread once a month, so that you're demonstrating that when you buy food, collectively, it's cheaper and better, and you're starting to build a tradition? What are the things that you can do right away to get started? Are you in a faith community? Can you start to build something right into the institution?" I think we have to approach it from the bottom up, and we have to start articulating what that next role of government is. Not because we're going to win that political battle—we don't have the political strength right now—but because we have to start getting ourselves *ready* for that battle.

I also feel like we have to get to a place where we're freer in our own heads. We are so constrained. People don't feel like they can dream and be free. And we have to be okay with dreaming. It's okay not to be taken seriously. The people who aren't taken seriously are the ones who change the world. It's just the truth. So, be free, do what you want, be organic, be about love, you know? Don't be so judgy.

I think sometimes when you analyze politics, you can be all complex about it, and then you're like, Well, what's the strategy to be against that? And you know what? You always discover that the strategy is love. And it's actually a really sophisticated strategy. It's Gandhi in the Salt March, which took down the British Empire. It's the civil rights movement. If it's only about hate, it eats you alive—but if it comes back to love, it's a regenerative source of energy.[11]

NOTES

1. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government,* trans. Benjamin R. Tucker (Paris: Brocard, 1840; New York: Humboldt Publishing Company, 1890).
2. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Sálvio Marcelo Soares (London: William Strahan and Thomas Cadell, 1776; São Paulo: MetaLibri Digital Library, May 29, 2007).
3. The Lawrence Textile Strike of 1912, by primarily immigrant and women workers of Lawrence, Massachusetts, was prompted by a wage cut, and changed union history in that, up until then, trade unions did not think such workers could be organized. The term "Bread and Roses" came from a 1911 poem by James Oppenheim and a speech to textile workers in 1912 by union leader Rose Schneiderman: "The worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too." See Lawrence History Center and University of Massachusetts Lowell History Department, "Bread and Roses Strike of 1912: Two Months in Lawrence, Massachusetts, that Changed Labor History," Digital Public Library of America, April 2013, accessed May 7, 2022, dp.la /exhibitions/breadandroses.
4. Thomas Frank eloquently describes the process of how the working class and their institutions fell out of favor with the left elites. As a result, by 1973, both unions and real wages began their steady decline. See Thomas Frank, *Listen Liberal: Or, What Ever Happened to the Party of the People?* (New York: Henry Holt, 2016).
5. Mutual insurance firms were (and, for those that remain, still are) owned by their policy holders. Demutualization began to occur at scale under Reagan in the 1980s, and has continued in the neoliberal era. Driving the shift was the need to raise capital, which was far easier to do on the stock market. To survive and grow, most leading mutual insurance companies opted to change their structure to a traditional for-profit. This meant that all returns went to outside investors instead of policy holders, and the insurance services themselves needed to focus on profit and return above all else. Because of demutualization, we lost a source of progressive capital controlled by the social sector. (The right was fine to see it go, and the left did little to reverse this trend.) For more information, see Krupa S. Viswanathan and J. David Cummins, "Ownership Structure Changes in the Insurance Industry: An Analysis of Demutualization," *Journal of Risk and Insurance* 70, no. 3 (September 2003): 401–3.
6. See John Curl, *For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America*, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: PM Press, July 2012).
7. See Sarah Stillman, "The Migrant Workers Who Follow Climate Disasters," *New Yorker*, November 1, 2021, www.newyorker.com /magazine/2021/11/08/the-migrant-workers-who-follow-climate-disasters.
8. Arcosanti, *Influencing the Built Environment*, "Soleri: Radical, Innovative, Visionary," accessed June 28, 2022, www.arcosanti .org/architecture/.
9. "The New Orleans Resilience Corps," Resilience Force, accessed June 28, 2022, resilienceforce.org/resilience-corps/.
10. David Brooks, "Everyone a Changemaker: Bill Drayton's Challenge to the World," Ashoka Canada, February 8, 2018, www .ashoka.org/en-ca/story/everyone-changemaker-bill-draytons-challenge-world.
11. See Cyndi Suarez, "A Love Ethic," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, February 10, 2022, nonprofitquarterly.org/a-love-ethic/.

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The Mutualist Ethic

Planting the Saplings for the Tree of Mutualism

by Sara Horowitz

A mutualist organization is always planting saplings that its founders will never see grow into mature trees. The shade of those trees is for the next generation.

This article was excerpted from Mutualism: Building the Next Economy from the Ground Up, *by Sara Horowitz (Random House, 2021). Reprinted with permission.*

A healthy mutualist organization must try to plan for at least two generations in the future. How? The organization can't rely on the leadership of a single charismatic, intelligent, or innovative founder. It must, instead, create a self-reliant institution that is bigger than any one person. It can do this by creating offices (president, treasurer, and so on) that outlive the people who occupy them, or by creating a board of directors (made up of the organization's members), which confers decision-making authority to a group. Some mutualist organizations, especially cooperatives, even adopt a set of principles to guide them; a founder may die or move on, but the principles that define the institution live on.

DETAIL OF "ANCESTRAL WATERS FROM AKSUM" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

Mutualist organizations . . . plan for the future by investing in themselves. They do this by *recycling excess capital* generated by their economic mechanism back into the organization.

Decoupling an institution from a single founding individual doesn't mean doing away with leadership. To the contrary, a mutualist organization must get comfortable with the idea of leadership if it is to survive, whether the leadership is in the form of an elected president, a board, a set of guiding principles, or some combination of all these. Why is leadership so important? One of the key aspects of a mutualist organization is its ability to self-determine. Without leadership, it's impossible for the organization to make adult decisions about where its money does or doesn't go. A mutualist organization's leader or leaders should be held accountable by the community of interest, and structures should be put in place to allow the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. Hierarchy in a mutualist organization exists not only to facilitate decision-making but also to provide a path toward leadership—and a way to transmit the organization's core values and missions—for a new generation.

To plan for the long term, mutualist organizations also need to take a long-range financial view by making investments that ensure they will continue to exist to serve future generations. When I started building the Freelancers Union, I was surprised by just how hard this is to do. Mutualist organizations today are starved for capital that can help them build or expand, because they need a kind of investment—an investment of patient capital—that just doesn't exist.

What do I mean by "patient capital"? All monetary exchanges, from financial gifts (investments made with an expectation of a zero-percent return over an indefinite time period) to usury (predatory loans made with interest rates so high that the borrower will be in debt indefinitely), exist on a spectrum along which the variable that changes is the rate of return. Between these two extremes is every form of economic activity that you can imagine—from foundation grants and Section 8 public housing to your neighborhood check-cashing place and the aggressive investments of Fortune 500 companies and venture capitalists.

We call these categories of monetary exchange *capital markets,* which is just another way of talking about where the money comes from. If you want to do something that requires capital, who is going to loan you a big chunk of money to do it, and what are they going to expect in return? Most of capitalism occurs toward the right side of this graph: fast capital and investments expected to produce huge returns in a few years (as is the case of a Silicon Valley start-up). Most charity occurs toward the left side. In the middle is a section that is curiously empty in the twenty-first century—sustainable capital: investments that will reliably make money but aren't going to make anyone obscenely rich over a short period of time. This is the mutualist zone. One of the only forms of patient lending available in today's capital markets is mortgages, which is why one of the first things many sophisticated mutualist organizations do is get a loan to buy a building. Otherwise, progressive markets—where investing meets social purpose—are almost impossible to find.

So mutualist organizations also plan for the future by investing in themselves. They do this by *recycling excess capital* generated by their economic mechanism back into the organization. One type of organization that recycles excess capital all the time is an endowment—an organization that makes investments and then reinvests a certain portion of the returns back into the endowment, growing it over time. But you don't have to have a billion-dollar endowment, as many universities do, to recycle

SLOW CAPITAL

- grants
- gifts
- alternative currency

SUSTAINABLE CAPITAL –MUTUALIST ZONE–

- self-funded mutualist organizations, like churches, unions, and mutuals
- program-related investments (by foundations)

FAST CAPITAL

- impact investing with expectations of high return
- capital tools for traditional businesses
- private equity
- venture capital

capital effectively. You just need to recognize that any extra money in a mutualist organization is for the community the organization serves, and the best way the community can use that money is in ways that will perpetuate the organization's continued existence. This could be through traditional investments, as in the case of a university's endowment, or it could be through a more general investment in the future, such as saving up to purchase a building for the organization, investing in relevant training for members, or putting the money in a pot set aside for members to use in case of emergency. What matters most is that when you have more money than you expect to, you use it to plan for the community's future.

A mutualist organization is always planting saplings that its founders will never see grow into mature trees. The shade of those trees is for the next generation.

SARA HOROWITZ is the CEO of Trupo. She was the founder and a former executive director of the Freelancers Union, and for over two decades has been an innovative leading voice of the growing freelance economy.

Ownership as Kinship

Restoring the Abundance of Our Ancestors

by Kamuela Enos and Miwa Tamanaha

The practice of ancestral sciences and integrated systems management is not romantic, does not live in the past tense, and is not easy. It is born of commitment and rigor—physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Kinship—like all relationships—requires work: of Indigenous peoples, of immigrants, of settlers, and of the descendants of colonizers. *All of us*.

What follows is primarily the intellectual work of Kamuela Enos, and presents in the first-person voice (his), with assistance from Miwa Tamanaha in producing this work in written form. Kamuela Enos and Miwa Tamanaha are spouses to each other, creative thought partners professionally, and coparents to their children in every space.

"YEMAYA" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

This article explores kinship from a Native Hawaiian perspective as a binding construct of "ownership." Kinship with place—and the integrity of the ecologies, wisdom, and people our places hold—stands as a central tenet of ownership often lost in our contemporary nomenclature born of capitalism.

An important underlying technology Hawai'i has to offer its contemporary self is kinship to land. Kinship is our unbroken connection to our "operating system," so to speak—the OS of our lands, our complex and interdependent relationship with the ecological systems that allow for life, our ancestral sciences (in service of living in and creating abundance). This connection persists and thrives despite almost two hundred and fifty years of brutal assault, including catastrophic population loss from introduced diseases, racist policies, political overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, and deliberate and continuing dispossession of land. It is the foundation for a just, abundant economy in Hawai'i.

Here I share my father's kinship story, my kinship story, and some of the lessons I have gleaned from living them. This story is a Hawaiian story, but it is repeated across our planet. Vested in kinship to land, the contemporary work of Indigenous communities is iterating prototypes and frameworks for a resilient, just economy.

MY FATHER'S STORY, MY STORY

In the 1970s and 1980s, my father was part of a broad movement of Hawaiians and non-Hawaiian allies who organized in protest of Native Hawaiian land dispossession perpetrated by the U.S. government and U.S. corporations in Hawai'i. In particular, my father sought the return of lands to *lo'i kalo*.

Lo'i kalo is the ancient Hawaiian practice of cultivating the staple crop of kalo (taro) via wetland terraces. *Lo'i kalo* was a core engine of precontact Hawai'i's economy. *Lo'i* systems are bounded by a waterway that starts at the headwater at the top of a valley, passes through terraced farms, and exits into an estuary. The nutrients that feed these parcels also nourish nearshore and pelagic (open sea) fisheries. From nearshore to mountaintop, this system is contained in the land unit of the *'ahupua'a* (basic self-sustaining unit)—where all of the complex carbs and lean proteins, building material and medicines, and implements for the creation of weapons can be developed in a hyperlocalized, highly skilled economy.[1] Absent the forces of industrialization and colonization, Native Hawaiians were self-sufficient, not only on our islands but also in our valleys.

My father's and his peers' efforts to reclaim *lo'i kalo* and bring it back to life was driven by the needs of the Native Hawaiian community of their time. Generations of displacement of Native Hawaiian people and families by colonizing forces had relegated many to conditions of dire poverty. I was raised in the public education system in a community that was predominantly Native Hawaiian, at a time when the dominant narrative told us our ancestors were savages and that our

DETAIL OF "YEMAYA" BY KOMI OLAFIMIHAN/WWW.KOMIOLAF.COM

We continue to restore the broad systems our ancestors deployed at scale and replicated across the archipelago—systems that allow for the production of goods and services, are greeted by an eager market, and are not extractive/ do not externalize the cost of production onto people and landscape.

occupation by colonizers could (if we acted correctly) afford us the comforts of modernity for which we should be grateful. The idea of restoring *lo'i kalo* in this context seemed absurd to many, but my father held to a conviction that reclaiming the brilliant innovations of our ancestors is central to restoring well-being for all people for whom Hawai'i is home.

On the land my father reclaimed and stewards today, Ka'ala Farm, I walked with my ancestors.[2] I learned to be attuned to how water flows, how nutrients move along those pathways, and how cleverly the waterways had been designed and constructed.

In the dominant economic model of the time, the role of the people of our community was labor. If you were lucky, skilled labor. Even ownership of businesses by local community members often required their participation in the degradation of the landscape and practices. This was the pathway provided for economic development—we were to understand it was *the only way*.

My father and his peers came to question why the *lo'i kalo*—the core engine of an economic system that served the people of Hawai'i for centuries—could not be a viable means of regional economic development that centers people, place, and ecology. They asserted that it could. The *lo'i kalo* of Ka'ala Farm and like spaces across the Hawaiian archipelago have taught and inspired thousands of young people. Today, more people on more lands are restoring the flow of water and growing food for their communities than has been seen in well over a century. The economic development to which my father and his peers demanded access is an ever-growing reality.

I continue to live this story; it forms the foundation of the ideas I share in the following section. The steps I outline are not a checklist or recipe. These steps articulate practical lessons and a path made by walking, learning from, and living into my father's story today toward a future we all cocreate.

AN INDIGENOUS VISION OF ECONOMICS

Step One: We Restate Our Value

Where some saw a savage past, my father saw regional economic development. Today, Hawaiian knowledge, practices, and brilliance are still often relegated to the past—albeit, perhaps, romantically—by boxing them up as "Hawaiian culture." *We continue to resist the box.* We have been bequeathed *ancestral sciences and technologies of integrated systems management* that we continue to innovate. We continue to restore the broad systems our ancestors deployed at scale and replicated across the archipelago—systems that allow for the production of goods and services, are greeted by an eager market, and are not extractive/do not externalize the cost of production onto people and landscape.

Step Two: We Uphold Standards—The Triple Piko Analysis

In bringing forward ancestral sciences and integrated systems management to our contemporary context, we must continue to support standards with rigor (recent history is rife with examples of appropriation of Indigenous ideas, innovations, sciences, and technologies). The *Triple Piko Analysis* is a framework with built-in principles of practice that protect it from cultural appropriation and subsequent mishandling.

Revered Hawaiian Elder Uncle Kekuni Blaidell taught me the term *piko*, which means "portal." He noted that the ancestors of Hawai'i had identified in the physical body three portals connected to the past, the present, and the future: the fontanelle (*Piko O*), the navel (*Piko I*), and the genitals (*Piko A*). They define kinship to past people, present people, and future people, and represent a unified transect in which all decisions are to be vetted: continuity of the work of your ancestors; application/practice and relevance to those alive with you now; and generative abundance provided for future generations.[3]

Piko O: Alignment with ancestral prerogatives. This first layer of analysis asks you to identify the Indigenous practice(s) you intend to bring to a contemporary space. To protect from co-option/appropriation, this layer of analysis requires you to be *specific*. *Piko O* requires you to have researched that

There is a continued need to build strong containers for ancestral sciences and integrated systems management in a contemporary context.

practice, to have immersed yourself in that practice, and to share the lineage of your teachers. Ownership, responsibility, and genealogy of knowledge/practice must be put front and center. Figure 1 (below) provides in schematic form an analysis of how Native Hawaiian society operated prior to the period of European colonization.

Piko I: Empowering contemporary generations. The second layer of analysis asks you to articulate how your practice will provide agency to Indigenous communities. How does it affirm, restore, and grow that practice toward the creation of meaningful economic development, educational opportunity, and political support that accrue power to Indigenous people and our ownership of and kinship to our resources, ideas, and stories of our homelands? This work also requires mapping the existing challenges as they are outlined in Figure 2 (next page).

Piko A: Providing a foundation for future abundance. The final layer of analysis asks you to demonstrate how your practice will provide for and protect the agency of future generations to live in and create abundance. At this layer the aperture is widened to encompass not just a specific community, but all peoples. How might the global systems of which we are part move toward alignment with our proven ancestral models for social/ecological/economic resilience? Figure 3 (next page) provides an illustration of our vision.

Step Three: The Just Container

There is a continued need to build strong containers for ancestral sciences and integrated systems management in a contemporary context. We must attend to the power structure of the organizations that carry these efforts, and how these efforts receive investment that protects and perpetuates community and practitioner agency, including agency to define our own success.

Figure 1: Biosystems Management in Precontact Native Hawaiian Society

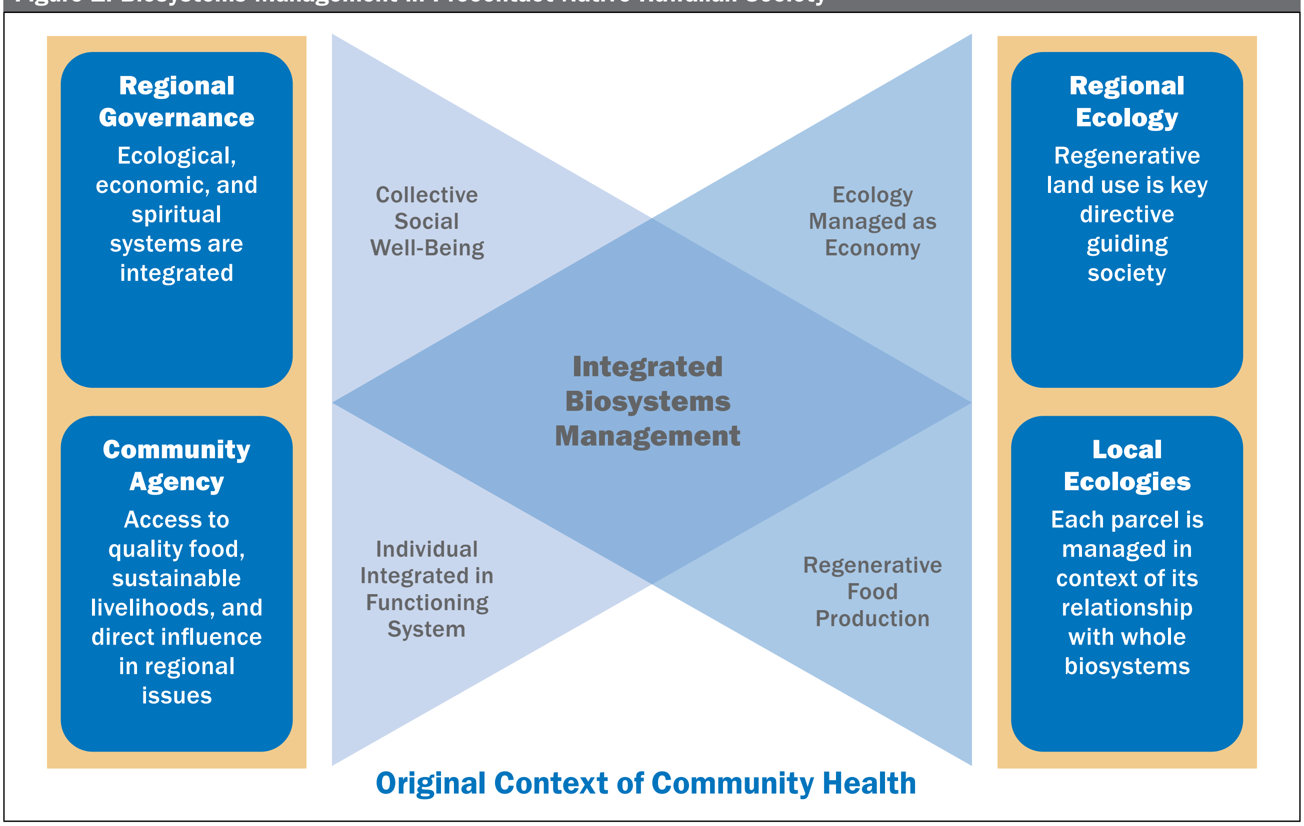


Figure 2: Resource Depletion and Poverty under Colonization

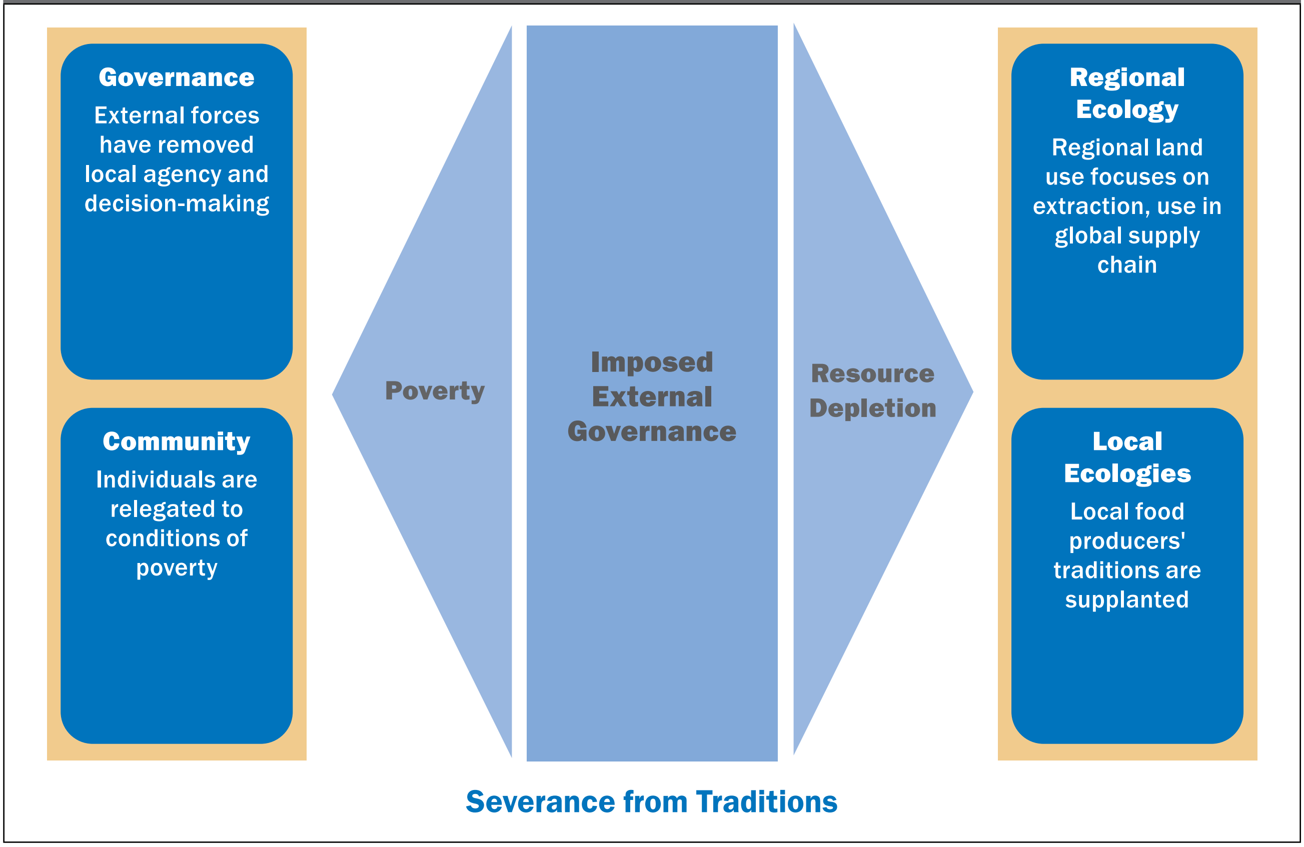
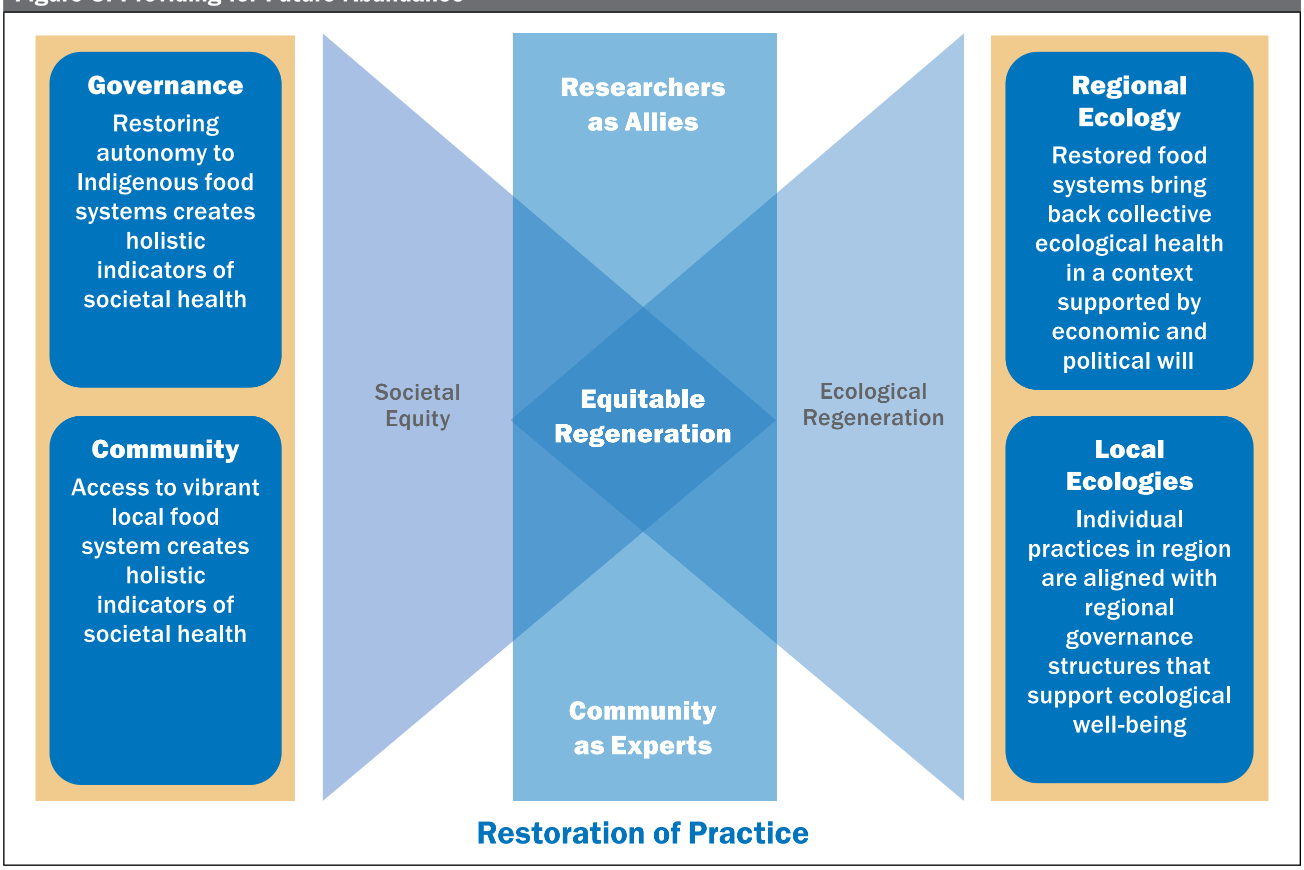


Figure 3: Providing for Future Abundance



I am convinced now more than ever that our kinship—to land and to each other—shapes our economic futures.

For over ten years, I worked at a social enterprise in my community, called MA'O Organic Farms.[4] Founded by partners Gary and Kukui Maunakea-Forth, MA'O recruits young adults from Wai'anae, a predominantly Native Hawaiian community, to run the daily operations of the farm enterprise in exchange for a full tuition waiver to attend our regional community college. MA'O has grown to become the largest commercial organic farm on the island of O'ahu. At MA'O, our understanding of our success is rooted in the celebration of *Makahiki.*[5] Prior to the U.S. occupation of Hawai'i, chiefs would gather the people in their domain during *Makahiki* time, and the community would show their bounty—what they had been able to produce—and demonstrate their fitness by performing feats of physical and intellectual strength. MA'O identified and adopted two contemporary *Makahiki* metrics to help measure the enterprise's effectiveness: fitness of people as measured by education level, and abundance of land as measured by sales of organic produce. The focus on metrics of meaning has allowed MA'O access to different tables of decision-making when it comes to the well-being of regional youth and articulating what is the best practice for a rural community.

Step Four: Live Our Agency

I don't discount the effects of the code-switching that is inherent in walking this path—the complexities and complications and, yes, the compromises. We are called to show up each day whole in our humanity, in a broken world. In all of this, we make the choice to *live* our agency.

Ka'ala Farm endures, and continues to pave the way for community economic development in Wai'anae and beyond. At MA'O, hundreds of students have received associate's degrees, affirmed their kinship, and honed their land stewardship practices. In the last few years, MA'O's farms have secured blended capital to scale from 24 acres of land to 281 acres. In the midst of a global pandemic that has shaken global supply chains, MA'O revenues have soared.

Today, I head the Office of Indigenous Innovation at the University of Hawai'i, where I work to advance and raise resources for our ancestral sciences and integrated systems management—bringing forward the solutions they hold in a contemporary context. I am convinced now more than ever that our kinship—to land and to each other—shapes our economic futures.

Among our learnings to date are the following:

- Native Hawaiian practices are sciences and technologies that sit at the cornerstone of a resilient economy for Hawai'i, and they create the conditions for resilience for Hawai'i (even as defined by other—external—cultures).
- These sciences and technologies thrive today—evidence of their resilience.
- Indigenous communities are now iterating prototypes and frameworks that are attracting the attention of policy-makers, philanthropists, and business leaders globally. Ally support (dollars, political backing, and effective policies and mental models) is needed (and requested) for growth.
- Kinship is a core tenet of an economy that is disruptive, generative, and global.

We see the benefit of this work every day. Ancestral sciences and integrated systems of management are improving soil quality for food production, creating new techniques for native seaweed aquaculture, and innovating climate-adaptation strategies—to name just a few innovations. *The outcomes are tangible. The time is now.*

The practice of ancestral sciences and integrated systems management is not romantic, does not live in the past tense, and is not easy. It is born of commitment and rigor—physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Kinship—like all relationships—requires work: of Indigenous peoples, of immigrants, of settlers, and of the descendants of colonizers. *All of us.* Zero-sum schemes, scarcity-minded policies, and extractive practices have led us to our current state. Now we have the opportunity to grow a resilient economic future seated in our ancestral sciences and integrated systems management—in the wisdom of our places.

Hawai'i has always been and continues to exist today as a multiethnic polity. In 1883, the sovereign Hawaiian government was overthrown by American plantation owners and business leaders, backed by the U.S. military. In 1993, the United States issued a law, informally known as the Apology Resolution, that acknowledges its role in the illegal overthrow.[6] *Still, today, Hawaiian lands are occupied by the United States and its military. Land claims remain unsettled. Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiian citizens of Hawai'i continue to work to shape a just, resilient future for Hawai'i.*

The ideas that we share here have been shared with us. First and foremost we must recognize the ancestors of Hawai'i in deified and human form that developed these systems and intentionally designed them to be bequeathable. We also must recognize Kamuela's father, Eric Enos, and the people he brought to us to be in relationship with, including Puanani Burgess, Uncle Walter Paulo, Uncle Eddie Ka'anana, and Bob Agres. We also recognize Lilikalā Kame'eleihiwa and Jon Osiorio, professors at the Hawai'inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge at the University of Hawai'i, Dolores Foley and Luciano Minerbi, professors in the department of Regional and Urban Planning, University of Hawai'i, and Karen Umemoto, a professor in the department of Urban Planning and Asian American Studies at UCLA. We recognize Kukui and Gary Maunakea-Forth and all the people of MA'O Organic Farms, the many people of, and the lands of, Ka'ala Farm, the Purple Mai'a Foundation, Hawai'i Investment Ready, our 'ohana KUA, 'Ewa Limu Project (Uncle Henry Chang-Wo, Wally Ito, and 'ohana Fuji), Kūha'o Zane, Huihui and Luka Mossman-Kanahele, Hālau 'Ōhi'a and 'ohana, Aunty Lynette Paglinawan, Dr. Manu Meyer, Kumu Miki'ala Lidstone, and our whole community of peers. Finally, we recognize the Kanaka'ole family—whose matriarch, Edith Kanaka'ole, shared the legacy that she held with all of Hawai'i, and who fundamentally and unabashedly exhibits ancestral practices of sciences and technologies that are rooted in profound spiritual relationship to the living landscape that preceded us, molds us, and continues to guide us in the restoration of abundance.

NOTES

1. For more on *lo'i kalo*, see "Ahupua'a: An Introduction: Home," Library & Learning and Resources, Kapi'olani Community College, accessed May 18, 2022, guides.library.kapiolani.hawaii.edu/ahupuaa; and "Ahupua'a," Kumukahi, accessed May 18, 2022, www.kumukahi.org/units/ka_honua/onaepuni/ahupuaa.
2. "Welina Mai!," Ka'ala Farm, accessed April 28, 2022, kaalafarm.org/.
3. It should be noted that there are many variations on the nomenclature, and the *Piko O*, *Piko I*, and *Piko A* framework was taught to me by my *kumu* (teachers).
4. "Growing Food, Growing Leaders," MA'O Organic Farms, accessed April 29, 2022, maoorganicfarms.org/.
5. "Makahiki," Ancient Hawai'i, Hawai'i History, accessed April 30, 2022, hawaiihistory.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=ig.page&PageID=534.
6. "1993: President Clinton apologizes for 1893 overthrow of Hawaiian monarchy," Native Voices, accessed April 29, 2022, nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/578.html.

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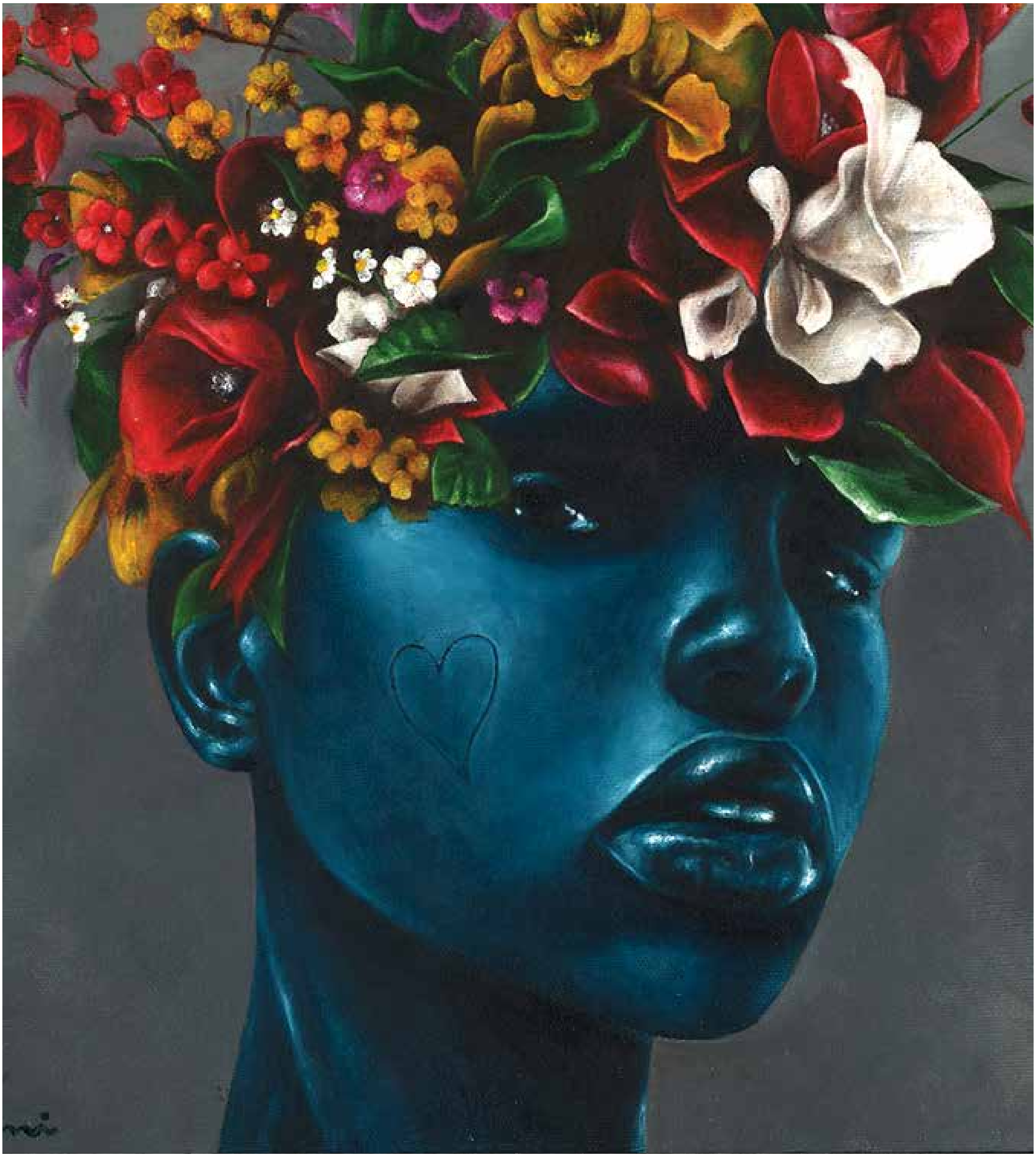
ENDPAPEЯ



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