CONVERSATIONS

From Graduate Practicum to Activist Research Collective

A Roundtable with Members of the Policing in Chicago Research Group and Our Community Partners

Michael De Anda Muñiz, Janaé Bonsu, Lydia Dana, Sangeetha Ravichandran, Haley Volpintesta, and Andy Clarno with Rodrigo Anzures-Oyorzabal, Rosi Carrasco, Tania Unzueta Carrasco, and Rey Wences

The Policing in Chicago Research Group (PCRG) is an activist research collective composed of faculty and graduate students at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). We conduct research on policing in support of campaigns organized by abolitionist social movements in Chicago. The research that we produce is intended to be useful for mobilizations and accessible to the broader public. We share our findings with organizers and community members through workshops, teach-ins, youth-led research projects, and public reports.

The PCRG began in Spring 2017 as a two-semester graduate research practicum called "Policing in Chicago: Social Justice Ethnography." The goal of the course was to provide students with practical experience conducting activist scholarship in dialogue with community-based partners. While the practicum was

141

required for first-year students in the sociology graduate program, it also attracted more advanced students in sociology, social work, education, and urban planning.

We began by organizing a public teach-in on policing in Chicago with three community partners: Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), Organized Communities Against Deportation (OCAD), and the Arab American Action Network (AAAN).[1] They discussed the impact of policing on their communities, changes they expected under Trump, and possibilities for resistance. Building on this foundation, the PCRG and our community partners agreed to work together on two projects: (1) examining the ways that gang databases are used by the Chicago Police Department (CPD) to target Black and Brown youth and by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as a pipeline for deportation, and (2) exploring the role of fusion centers as hubs for the surveillance of Arab and Muslim communities by the CPD and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).[2]

During the Spring 2017 semester, students received training in ethnographic, interview, and archival methods as well as a workshop on the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). We grappled with the possibilities and challenges of activist, feminist, decolonial, and community-engaged approaches to research and knowledge production. We also worked on developing skills for ethical and accountable interactions with communities in struggle, such as rejecting extractive research, challenging academic/community hierarchies, and centering the needs of communities. Over the summer, we compiled an archive of news articles and policy guidelines, submitted FOIA requests to the CPD and other law enforcement agencies, and conducted interviews with police officials, attorneys, researchers, organizers, and people directly targeted by police surveillance. We shared initial findings with our community partners and worked together to determine next steps for the research. In Fall 2017, the second part of the course focused on data analysis, writing, and public sociology. Public sociology involves a wide range of strategies for ensuring that research has an impact beyond academia.

Along with individual research papers, students produced public reports and organized teach-ins. In November 2017, BYP100 and OCAD teamed up with Critical Resistance to host a teach-in on the gang database. We presented our latest findings and shared a draft of our first report.[3] We also met with the Youth Organizing Program of the AAAN to report on our research into fusion centers. A few weeks later, the AAAN youth organized a town hall meeting where they presented these findings to a broader public. We also shared our research on the gang database at Circles & Ciphers, a youth-led organization that uses restorative justice and hip-hop to engage young people directly impacted by criminalization. During a community circle, we discussed our research on policing while the young people shared their experiences with surveillance, harassment, and police violence.

In January 2018, the PCRG transitioned from a research practicum into an informal research collective. With limited financial support and no course

requirements, student involvement became largely voluntary. Yet we continued addressing the research needs of our partners by writing FOIA requests, conducting interviews, and producing reports. And we broadened the scope of our work by facilitating participatory action research projects carried out by young people at AAAN and Circles & Ciphers. In June 2018, the most active and committed members of the PCRG decided to collectively author a book based on our research. Together, we have discussed the goals of the book, the process, the overall vision, the content of each chapter, and the challenges of coauthorship.

Much of our research supports the Chicago Campaign to Erase the Database. We continue working with AAAN on research into fusion centers, suspicious activity reports, and the surveillance of Arab and Muslim communities. But mobilizations against fusion centers have developed more slowly than mobilizations against the gang database. The research needs of the #EraseTheDatabase campaign became urgent when a community member was detained and threatened with deportation because of his inclusion on the CPD gang database. Launched in 2017 by BYP100, OCAD, and Mijente, the #EraseTheDatabase campaign calls for the abolition of gang databases.[4] Being labeled as "gang affiliated" can lead to police harassment, severe bail/bond and sentencing decisions, and barriers to housing and employment. It also disqualifies immigrants from the sanctuary protections provided by Chicago's 2012 Welcoming City Ordinance. The campaign seeks to eliminate gang databases as a decarceral tactic in the struggle for the abolition of police, prisons, detention centers, and immigration enforcement. Our research has generated three public reports on gang databases, helped move the City of Chicago Office of Inspector General to conduct an investigation into the CPD gang database, informed a class action lawsuit against the CPD, and supported mobilizations that led to the abolition of a gang database maintained by the Cook County Sheriff's Office.[5]

In April 2019, six members of the PCRG sat down for a roundtable discussion about the project, organized and facilitated by Michael De Anda Muñiz. Our discussion was guided by several questions that our community partners addressed during project assessments recorded in December 2018. As a result, we have included reflections from four of our community partners in this piece. Our conversation reflects our investment in creating a world without police and prisons and highlights various considerations that we confront while producing research that advances the campaigns of radical social movements. Contributors include:

- Members of the PCRG: Michael De Anda Muñiz (lead research and teaching assistant), Lydia Dana, Sangeetha Ravichandran, Haley Volpintesta, Janaé Bonsu (also national codirector of BYP100), and Andy Clarno (faculty coordinator of the PCRG)
- Community partners: Rey Wences (OCAD), Rosi Carrasco (OCAD), Rodrigo Anzures-Oyorzabal (OCAD), and Tania Unzueta Carrasco (Mijente)

*The Policing in Chicago Research Group began with an explicitly activist commit-
ment to provide research support to social movements while creating opportunities
for collective engagement and critical pedagogy. Can you talk about what initially
attracted you to this project? How did you see your role?*

Andy Clarno: As I was finishing my first book, I thought about what comes next,
especially with the security of tenure. My work in Palestine and South Africa was
deeply engaged with local social movements, and I've always been convinced that
the most important knowledge comes out of struggle. As I considered what comes
next, three things became clear. First, I wanted to forge stronger connections with
social movements in Chicago. Second, I wanted to imagine ways of producing
knowledge that are more engaged, more responsive to movements, and more in
line with the pace at which struggles develop. Finally, I wanted to move from an
individual to a collective model of research. I started to imagine a research collective
that could produce knowledge in support of organizing by local social movements.

Michael De Anda Muñiz: In 2016, Andy invited me to serve as a research and
teaching assistant for this project. Based on my politics and work with Andy, I was
excited about contributing to a project that I saw as necessary for graduate training
and community activism. I was particularly excited about the pedagogical aspect of
the project—building a framework that would produce innovative research
informed by critical approaches to research ethics and accountability that I often
found lacking in my own graduate training and in other public sociology,
community-engaged, or activist research projects.

Lydia Dana: Following the police killings of Rekia Boyd, Aiyana Stanley-Jones,
Michael Brown, and so many others in Chicago and beyond, I decided to commit
the next part of my life to studying and organizing against state violence. I applied to
PhD programs to utilize my status as a researcher in service of those goals. That's
what brought me specifically to UIC and this project. I wanted to study power, and
the project afforded me the opportunity to take this white face, sit in front of cops,
counter-surveil, and do a thing that was not risky for me to do.

Sangeetha Ravichandran: I've been an organizer around prison abolition in Chi-
cago through a collective called Love & Protect. We support survivors of violence
who are incarcerated, such as Marissa Alexander and Bresha Meadows. Having wit-
nessed the constant need for research as an organizer, I chose to pursue a PhD at
UIC to figure out the gray area between research and organizing and to learn how to
conduct research that helps organizers' grassroots work. When I heard about this
project's goals, I decided that it was a space where I could explore this.

Haley Volpintesta: I was already a graduate student in the department. I felt like
there was a lot of criticism around "mesearch" and public sociology. And I was

warned about doing work that was too important to my life and people that I loved. I was really excited to hear about the practicum on policing! I've been an activist for most of my life. I worked with young people in the sex trade and street economy. I was interested in how the project could offer opportunities to engage young people whose experiences of policing and surveillance shape their everyday lives. Most importantly, young people in Chicago and young people I knew were getting shot and dying. And time and again, they discussed police violence and the role of police in antagonizing community violence. This project offered an opportunity to think about how community-engaged work could address this problem.

Janaé Bonsu: I was already a PhD student at UIC. I remember being introduced to the project by Charlene Carruthers, then director of BYP100. She reached out to see if I was interested in participating in this project on behalf of BYP100 that would offer research support to social movement organizations. I was really invested in the role of research as an organizing strategy to help build stronger analyses and campaigns, so it sounded like a great opportunity for me to help my comrades learn more about how we could leverage research in our organizing.

Rodrigo Anzures-Oyorzabal: A lot of people reach out to movements like ours (Organized Communities Against Deportation) for help with their research projects and expect us to educate them on what it is they're researching. And then we do some supplemental work as well. I thought it was really good that your research team was clear from the start that you were going to do the research and trying your best to make sure that it was helpful for us. And there were other organizations involved, like BYP100. That was a very good sign as well. I think, to me, that's when it turned from just random research into a trusted partner in the campaign.

Janaé: Our chapter members didn't really have many of the skills needed for research. Like an active skill set, right? So the prospect of having a partnership that would help us do research and offer capacity that we just didn't have felt good because capacity continues to be an issue for mostly volunteer-based groups.

Rey Wences: I think capacity was definitely a big question. As the work started coming through, I think we began to see this is a thing that we have to do. Like, we need to do research, and the partnership is beneficial. I think it also expanded the way we think about universities.

Creating a sustainable, nonhierarchical research group while operating within and against academic hierarchies became key challenges for the PCRG. We often talk about power and inequality within the research group as well as between the research group and our community partners. What kinds of tensions have you experienced? How has the group dealt with them?

Sangeetha: The idea of a truly egalitarian research group is nonexistent for me. We exist in constant hierarchies, and while I have been a part of horizontal structures, I don't believe that is possible in the academy. I don't know if it is a goal for me personally. When I think about bringing organizers to the table, the tension inherent in the hierarchy of power accorded to academics and organizers is really important. While doing community-engaged scholarship, we must also take into account the constant abuse of organizers by researchers. That is always very tense for me. Will we academics get more out of this partnership than organizers? It's always going to be more for us, and so what are we going to do with that? As a group, we talked about these things. I don't know that there are other academic spaces that hash these things out and bring them to the critical consciousness of the entire group. So in that way, it felt like we did something productive with the tension.

Janaé: Can you say more about what you mean by "it's always going to be more for us"?

Sangeetha: I mean the reward for an academic publication is different than the reward for a report we generate for organizers. I feel like publications are privileged and afford us a certain kind of capital. I don't know if I want to quantify it by saying this capital is more than the impact of the report, but legibility to capitalism and the benefits of it feels like something that is different from what is happening on the ground.

Janaé: I appreciate that, but I disagree somewhat with what you're saying. From my perspective, yes, I do think that there is a lot of privilege in publications. But take the "Tracked and Targeted" report, our first report on the CPD gang database.[6] I felt more benefit from that report as an organizer trying to get attention and leverage for the gang database campaign than I did as a coauthor. In academia, there's a hierarchy to the types of publications that are valued. That report isn't in a peer-reviewed journal or a book chapter. It's a report on erasethedatabase.com. But as an organizer, I was able to take that report into city council, do teach-ins with it, and raise awareness. I experienced a lot more benefits on that side than as an academic. The notion that we will always reap more benefits or get more out of this because of our position in the academy is not always true. I do think that there are elements of it that are, but it's apples and oranges.

Andy: The hope is that this project can shift those benefits from academics toward movements. As academics, we are situated very differently than the people we are working with. We can write reports, publish articles, and move on, but people are still suffering from intense police violence, surveillance, racism, and poverty. One goal was to develop a project that would prioritize knowledge for organizing, rather than knowledge for career building and individual advancement. I don't know if we can measure that, but the goal has always been to support radical social change.

Sangeetha: I agree that there is value in creating models that shift power in the way that Janaé and Andy mentioned. I don't know that we achieved a nonhierarchical research group, but I do think we developed critical consciousness around it. Is that enough?

Haley: I had previously participated in a very different practicum. It was an already designed study, where everyone had their roles and responsibilities, where you were assigned jobs and might write a master's paper. This was completely different. One thing that I appreciated the most about this project is that we got to be reflective along the way and figure out what we weren't doing right or what was missing. I agree with Sangeetha's criticisms. I struggled with some of those same tensions. But community-engaged scholarship and activist research can look a lot of different ways. Through this project, we are bringing young people to the "Punishing Trauma" conference at Columbia University in New York next weekend. Some of them will be leaving Chicago for the first time. They are the experts and get to talk about their work as organizers and their research challenging carceral discourses and the straight-up lies that circulate about their loved ones and communities. That's really dope.

Michael: A lot of graduate courses are built for the students to eventually meet their benchmarks in the program. The tension for me, as the teaching assistant, regarded those students who were required to take the course but not necessarily interested in the methods or topic. Would we be unintentionally holding back their individual progress for the project's political goal? And was I okay with that? I think part of me was, because if we're going to push pedagogy and shift power, then it's going to happen. If we focused too much on students' benchmarks, the project wouldn't be what it is. We had to find ways to provide all students with beneficial training without taking away from the project's overall political mission. We addressed these tensions by making the course requirements flexible and having open and self-reflexive discussions.

Lydia: I had to figure out how to navigate my relationship to Andy. I felt over time that I was navigating relationships with four different people—the professor who was going to grade me, my boss once we got a small grant, my advisor-mentor who I wanted to impress, and lastly, a colleague. Ultimately, I figured out that the work just wasn't going to get done if I was doing this performance, and that I had to take some risks. What would it look like to think of my relationship with Andy nonhierarchically? That's maybe, as Sangeetha said, impossible and not necessarily the goal. For those trying to replicate this project with students, it's a balance between acknowledging a hierarchy and being self-reflexive, rather than trying to eliminate it.

Andy: The other piece that we have to recognize is that ultimately, we have a research team coordinated by a tenured white male professor, while the team

members are grad students, mostly women and people of color, who are in much more vulnerable positions. Politically engaged scholarship comes with risks, which fall disproportionately on all of you, and rewards that fall disproportionately on me. That's something that's weighed on me, and I don't know if we've talked through it enough or figured out how best to navigate it.

Drawing inspiration from radical scholars, especially feminists of color, we set out to build strong, supportive research partnerships with our community collaborators. Yet there are important questions around power, inequality, accountability, and expertise that cannot be ignored. Do you think the research team has remained accountable to communities? What could we have done better?

Rosi Carrasco: You always listen to our concerns, and that's something that we did not expect working with academics. You also pay attention to what we need. I remember talking to you at the beginning, and you asked us to tell you in which direction we wanted you to go. Most of the research follows what we want. That is really good, that you are paying attention to the needs of the organizations. For me, this team has always remained accountable to the community. You are always talking to us, following directions. I don't know what else could be done better.

Janaé: I am thinking about the assessment conversation that Andy and I had with Rey, Rosi, and other folks (sections of which are included here). The overall sentiment was that they felt that we, as a research group, were accountable in that we took direction from them and kept the feedback loop open. They appreciated that. The partnership lacked some formal structure. I'm not sure that is good or bad. I think not having a memorandum of understanding or contract made it free-flowing and flexible in a way that may have been different with more formality. The informality was good. Just the basic principles of not coming with an agenda and saying, "Here are the things we think y'all should be doing on this campaign. What do you think about that?" Coming in open to what the needs are and working that way. I think, by and large, this team has done a good job with regards to accountability.

Tania Unzueta Carrasco: I've learned in my organizing that sometimes when there isn't trust, people replace that with structure. Not that you don't need structure, but I feel like we have the trust because of the building we did. I think that was easier for me. I knew you were going to run things by us before publishing and that you were following our lead.

Haley: I attended a couple of the report-backs to be part of that accountability process. It was affirming to hear that our research was important to our community partners. Andy and I also had the opportunity to cofacilitate a teach-in with young people at an organization that works with gang-involved youth. We sat in a circle and discussed what we learned while folks shared their experiences. I would've liked to

do more of that. The one thing that I struggled with was that we relied on BYP100, OCAD, and AAAN to relay the information to the directly impacted folks that they work with, but what about all the other organizations in Chicago who are doing work with directly impacted folks who aren't at these meetings, who don't know about what we're doing, who never got a flyer, or can't make it to the teach-ins? There was part of me that wished we were thinking about the reach of the work more broadly.

Andy: One thing that's been exciting is the expansion of the coalition that we're working with. The #EraseTheDatabase campaign began with conversations between BYP100, OCAD, Mijente, and a few others. But now there are about twenty organizations from across the city. Our partners have brought us into conversation with many more organizations than we ever expected. It's also meant navigating relationships with organizations who didn't know the PCRG or agree ahead of time to work with us. The other piece of it, for me, is something special that Haley brought to the project. I had been so focused on connecting with organizers and movements, but I really appreciate the way Haley kept asking: "What about the directly impacted young people? What does this do for somebody who's constantly being arrested, surveilled, and harassed by police? We need to connect with them directly." That perspective has transformed the project. While deepening our dialogue with movements, we've also built links with young people who are directly impacted by racist policing. The projects that Haley and Sangeetha are coordinating with young people have added new forms of accountability to this work—not just to organizations, but to people who are directly impacted. That is hard and complicated, but it's so important.

Haley: There is a lot to consider. Directly impacted folks who are actively targeted by CPD or fighting cases have safe-passage issues and might not be able to be visible in the ways we imagine. This leads to privileging certain voices over others, particularly those who are more legible, who are innocent, not really gang members, et cetera. What questions get raised when innocence is centered? And how can we address the exclusion and marginality that is produced along the way? In creating safe spaces to bring in directly impacted people, we talk about young people's epistemological power, but where does that show up in the work and how do we make sure that people are safe? Standing up and saying that they're gang-affiliated will lead to all the things that we're trying to prevent. I feel like there's lots of creative potential to reach more folks.

Sangeetha: In terms of accountability, rather than containing research skills as ours within the academy, it's about dispersing skills that allow people to do research in their own communities. By redefining expertise, helping young people interview their community members so they can do what they want with it, continually

checking in with them, and performing support labor is where the project thrives. I think moving resources from institutions to communities is really important.

Lydia: One of the things that drew me to this work was the #SayHerName campaign, yet I'm struck that our campaign so far hasn't necessarily focused on issues that predominantly affect Black women. I have wondered how much of that is due to the focus of the campaigns that we are working with and the capacity of the project overall, versus a product of the very forces that #SayHerName addresses: a default and unconscious invisibilizing of Black women.

Andy: Also, for a long time, Janaé was an organic link between the #EraseTheDatabase campaign and the research group. That made sense. But in the last six months or so, there's been a shift. As Janaé transitioned into her position as national cochair of BYP100, she had to shift her focus from local campaigns to national organizing. We never talked about how the PCRG would remain connected to the gang database campaign without Janaé. I ended up stepping into that liaison role of going to coalition meetings, being on phone calls, and communicating with the campaign. That became the default. I often reach out to the group to see if someone wants to step in and represent us at events. But I feel like I could have done a better job of bringing the group into those day-to-day conversations. I don't know what kind of model we should follow, but it's something I'd like to talk about collectively moving forward.

Haley: I remember earlier conversations when we were thinking about whether people were comfortable saying they were working on the project. For some, there were questions about what would happen and how the research could impact our relationships with stakeholders who we still wanted to talk to, and things like that. We made some strategic choices, in part, because of our vulnerability as grad students, many of whom were working on their own projects. Then we haven't talked about that as the research group again, right?

Janaé: And I feel like there are people in the #EraseTheDatabase coalition who only think about Andy and me when they talk about the research group. I don't know how to say that the Policing in Chicago Research Group is an actual group of people. How should that work or acknowledgment be shared?

Andy: We had some conversations about it. Everything we've put out has been attributed to the "Policing in Chicago Research Group." It's collectively authored—I appreciate that, because this is collective work. But we should talk about it again.

What are some examples of the project's successes and limitations? What would you do differently if you were to start a project like this again? What recommendations would you offer to other academics pursuing this kind of work?

Rey: There are so many studies being done around movements. However, it doesn't translate—the information, the knowledge, the message, the assessment— it isn't accessible to people working in the movement. So I appreciate the way that you've made the research accessible. And also, research can take a really long time, and I've been impressed by the quick turnaround with your reports, which have been great. So I think those two for me have been really good practices. There are things that we can do to improve the accessibility, but that's also something that organizers and people working on political education can do.

Rodrigo: Another big thing is that the research has played well in the media. Any-time anyone writes about the Chicago gang database, they end up referencing the research team or something inspired by it. So I think it's also done a good job of framing things publicly.

Tania: I agree. And when we released the reports to the media, we released them together as part of the campaign. That was useful.

Andy: Definitely. Nobody would have paid attention to the research if it wasn't for the organizing that you all are doing. And the fact that organizers did layout for the reports and translated them into Spanish and put them on the website and released them with a press conference. People wouldn't know about the research without all that work.

Rosi: It is also important that the research team has been available for doing com-munity presentations or speaking at important events like press conferences. I think that coming with us and reporting collectively to the people has been very good.

Janaé: I remember how excited I was when I looked at the syllabus. Our readings were both focused on methods and on policing. I appreciated the theoretical frame-works and perspectives—the feminist, indigenous, activist, and decolonial approaches to research. Also just learning about taking good field notes. I definitely feel like I have a stronger grasp on what it means to be self-reflective in conducting research and really challenging this notion of what is empirical and what is research. There's this dominant notion of what it is, and the frameworks and the discussions, more importantly, that we had as a class helped challenge some of those notions in a good way.

Haley: I liked how we got to try all these different qualitative methods. I fell in love with the UIC archives, which was one of our exercises. I've talked to so many people about that in my organizing work and other projects. I know folks who are going and talking to the archivist, and that's so cool to me. And the ways that Andy organized the class became the template for how we approached the participatory action research projects. Whether we've accomplished all of the things we thought in the youth-led participatory action research, we still conducted media literacy

exercises, analyzed documents like the Cook County Crime Commission Gang Book, and learned how to write FOIAs. All the methods we learned in class informed what we took to the community.

Andy: I had never done FOIAs before, so I thought it was brilliant that Michael organized a workshop on how to write a FOIA. And it's amazing how central that became to our project. The project has been eye-opening for me, in terms of the power and limitations of a FOIA and what it takes to make it work—particularly legal support. We have a lawsuit pending against the CPD for not responding to two FOIAs. And we filed the lawsuit because of the connections we've built with community organizations. They hooked us up with movement lawyers who are taking on our case.

   The other thing that's been exciting is learning innovative research methods from community organizations that are gathering information. For instance, the campaign is calling on the city council to hold public hearings to learn about the gang database. And calling for the Office of Inspector General to investigate the CPD gang database. Representatives of the OIG were at a teach-in that BYP100 and OCAD organized with Critical Resistance. That's where we gave our first public report on the gang database. OIG staff then read the report, which included the campaign's call for an investigation. That led to a major investigation and a powerful report that the OIG just released. The methodological tools that we were developing in class have been massively expanded because of our engagement with social movements.

Sangeetha: I am thinking about the initial conversations and prep work we had with groups about their research needs. I'm wondering if it would have helped to have done that before the class began, because it took us a few weeks to get going. It would have still taken time to settle in, but I feel like it took a long time to get moving. I wonder if that limited what students wanted to do or felt they could do within the larger group. Maybe that initial unsettled energy disempowered people from being engaged in ways that they would have wanted and whose skillset we could have used.

Andy: There were pedagogical reasons to wait and have those preparatory conversations with the whole group so that everybody could be part of the design of the project from the start. There were also practicalities about the time it took to develop tentative agreements with AAAN, OCAD, and BYP100. The run-up and aftermath to the 2016 elections set the context for the conversations that Michael and I were having with organizers. So, I don't know that it would have been possible to do all of the preliminary work ahead of time.

Michael: I also saw the messiness of the first two to four weeks of the class as a pedagogical tool, not something we overlooked. I feel like we were intentional

about putting students through that, because, as Haley mentioned earlier, practicums usually have everything figured out beforehand. For many students who are new to research, it can seem like it is really easy to put a project together. This project showed that it's a messy process, especially with qualitative work. It was a challenge to find that balance of putting people through that messy process and putting together a complete research project.

Andy: If I teach the practicum again, we could do more preparatory work in advance. Because we have ongoing relationships with organizations, we could sit down on the first day of class and tell the students, these are the organizations we're working with, these are the campaigns that are coming up, and this is what we're going to do. Go do your work. But, as Michael said, it takes away from the experience of being part of the initial conversations and the development of the project.

Tania: I think for me it worked out well that you came in at the very beginning of the #EraseTheDatabase campaign. We were having conversations about the database with elected officials because of the Welcoming City Ordinance, but when they asked us for details about the database, we didn't have them. So we defined the first year of the campaign as a research strategy. The research took us from speculating about some of the facts to having them on paper and other people seeing them as legitimate because of the reports. That took us from the research phase to the solutions phase that we're at now. It would've been different if you guys had come in a year later. So I actually think the timing worked really well. It absolutely has to do with both coming in at the early part of the campaign and with Janaé being involved. If it wasn't because of Janaé, it would've been harder to share the credit. Because I do think one of the hard things when working with organizers and institutions is that the institutions are more established. They're the ones that get the credit, whether it's attorneys or universities.

Sangeetha: There are research needs that come up constantly. While we agreed to fulfill the initial research needs and have addressed some of the tangential questions that have come up, there are other research needs that pop up, and they turn to us. But we don't always have the capacity to meet those needs. That's a real limitation. Having Andy teach more classes might add to the capacity of the research group, but what if new students come in without an interest in studying the state or the police, and what if the research group does not grow? What happens to the research needs of these organizers? I think that's a real limitation.

Janaé: Internally, we haven't made an agreement of how long we as individuals are going to be a part of the PCRG. Two years from now, are we still going to be? Is it a lifelong commitment? Just like there weren't any formal agreements with our

partners, there isn't a formal agreement with us. I think it is important to think about how commitments are realized and what accountability to each other looks like.

Lydia: It's occurring to me that I'd hate for readers to think that it has to be either/or. If all of the structures are not set up, if there isn't a course like this, if you don't get the funding, and it doesn't work perfectly, then you can't do anything. If I'm a professor and I don't have that setup, but I know of a group of radical organizers who need a particular set of things and my students can produce a bunch of FOIAs, I want my students doing that. So I would say that this is maybe a both/and, and that this is a great model to build on, and there are and will be others that may look quite different.

Tania: I think knowing that this resource is out there would've helped us to define each piece of the campaign faster. Like I said, I feel like it took us a little bit to be like oh, we need to do this and there are these resources. We're learning how to tap into university resources. I think we're still figuring out what else we can do.

Conclusion

Rather than promoting the PCRG as a model to be replicated, we share our experiences to provoke conversations about activist scholarship and community engagement. We hope this roundtable offers academics interested in this type of work an opening to critically reflect on how they might create, maintain, and navigate non-exploitative and accountable partnerships in the service of social movement organizations.

To the extent that the PCRG has been successful, it is due to the collective efforts of three groups. First, a network of radical scholar-activists facilitated connections with organizers across the city. Second, members of the research team have contributed tremendous knowledge, labor, and connections to the project. Finally, the brilliant organizing of our community partners makes our research relevant and ensures that it has impact. A network of support, a dedicated research team, and effective community partners are essential foundations for a project like this.

Yet these foundations do not ensure success. The development of our project depended on the timing of our practicum, the composition of the research team, interpersonal relationships, and political dynamics in Chicago and nationwide. There is no guarantee that we could replicate this project under different circumstances.

Nevertheless, we can identify several principles that ground our approach to building a research collective and maintaining accountable partnerships with community organizations. First, open, ongoing communication is key to building trust within the research group and with community partners. Second, recognizing limitations and working through tensions is more productive than seeking purity and perfection. Third, ensure that the research is rigorous yet flexible, because activist

research has no blueprint and little institutional support but is under intense scrutiny. Finally, remain humble, listen to your partners, and remember that the needs of the community come first.

Rodrigo Anzures-Oyorzabal (he/they) was born in Aguascalientes, Mexico, and raised in Chicago. His most recent social justice work includes being the policy and advocacy manager for the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, where he worked with queer and trans youth to create more affirming school environments in Illinois, and deportation defense organizing with Organized Communities Against Deportations (OCAD). He is constantly inspired by the young people of OCAD and their families.

Janaé Bonsu is an activist-scholar based in Chicago. Janaé is a PhD candidate in social work at the University of Illinois at Chicago where her research focuses on the relationship between Black women's experiences of interpersonal and state violence, police trust, and safety strategies. She also currently serves as the national codirector of BYP100, a national member-based organization of eighteen- to thirty-five-year-olds organizing through a Black queer feminist lens.

Rosi Carrasco played key roles in multiple immigrant rights mobilizations in Chicago and nationally, including the massive demonstrations in 2006 and 2007. Carrasco has participated in acts of civil disobedience protesting deportations, has worked as an organizer with Organized Communities Against Deportations, and is currently working with Chicago Community and Workers' Rights to fight deportations. Carrasco has been working toward ending the use of the Chicago Gang Database since the campaign began.

Andy Clarno is associate professor of sociology and African American studies, and coordinator of the Policing in Chicago Research Group at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is the author of *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa after 1994* (2017).

Lydia Dana is working on a PhD in sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. In addition to her work with the Policing in Chicago Research Group, she studies relationships between social service provision and surveillance in the post-welfare context. Prior to her doctoral program, she earned a master's degree in gender and cultural studies while conducting advocacy and writing grants in support of racial, economic, and gender justice, and the preservation of indigenous land and languages.

Michael De Anda Muñiz is a sociology PhD candidate at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research interests include race, gender, and class inequality, culture, Latinas/os, women-of-color feminisms, and art. His dissertation examines the ways that Latina community-engaged artists in Chicago cross, blur, and challenge boundaries and operate within alternative artistic spaces.

Sangeetha Ravichandran is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago with an MA in art therapy. She has worked alongside survivors of interpersonal and state violence for over ten years. Her current research examines biosurveillance with a focus on connections between feminism, carcerality, and liberal counterinsurgency.

Tania Unzueta Carrasco is the policy director for Mijente, a national Latinx political organization. She ran the campaign against the Chicago Gang Database for three years. She is also a longtime, nationally known immigrant rights organizer, particularly for her work with undocumented immigrants in Chicago and around the country.

Haley Volpintesta is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at UIC with MA degrees in human rights and sociology. She has worked alongside youth impacted by state violence and the street economy for over fifteen years. Her research examines the limits of the law as a tool for governing sex commerce and protecting youth who trade sex.

Rey Wences is a queer and formerly undocumented national organizer known for their work against deportations and criminalization of the undocumented community. They are based in Chicago, Illinois, where they work closely with members of Organized Communities Against Deportations, a collective that organizes against deportations, immigration detention, and incarceration of immigrant communities.

Notes

1. BYP100 is an organization of Black eighteen- to thirty-five-year-olds dedicated to creating justice and freedom for all Black people using a Black, queer, feminist lens. AAAN is a grassroots organization that provides advocacy, education, and services for Arab communities in the Chicago area. OCAD is an undocumented-led organization that resists the deportation and criminalization of Black, Brown, and immigrant communities in the Chicago area.
2. The federal government created a national network of fusion centers after 2001 to promote the sharing, or fusion, of intelligence related to terrorism and violent crime between federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies.
3. Critical Resistance is a nationwide organization that works to dismantle the prison industrial complex.
4. Mijente is a Latinx/Chicanx organization that embraces pro-Black, pro-queer, pro-migrant, pro-worker values.
5. Reports available at erasethedatabase.com.
6. Policing in Chicago Research Group, "Tracked and Targeted: Early Findings on Chicago's Gang Database," February 2018. erasethedatabase.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Tracked-Targeted-0217-r.pdf.