



4-15-2022

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The University of Texas at Austin

Aylin Castro

University of Kentucky

Kelly Ferguson

University of Kentucky

Shawna Irissarri

University of Kentucky

Shruthi Parthasarathy

University of Kentucky

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.30.03>

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Recommended Citation

Chávez, Karma; Castro, Aylin; Ferguson, Kelly; Irissarri, Shawna; and Parthasarathy, Shruthi (2022)

"Creating a Power Map: An Interview with Karma Chávez," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*. Vol. 30, Article 4.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.30.03>

Available at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure/vol30/iss1/4>

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Creating a Power Map: An Interview with Karma Chávez

An Interview with Karma Chávez, *The University of Texas at Austin*

Interviewers: Aylin Castro, Kelly Ferguson, Shawna Irissarri, and Shruthi Parthasarathy

Karma Chávez is Department Chair and Associate Professor in the Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. Her scholarship is primarily informed by queer of color theory and women of color feminism. Methodologically, she is a rhetorical critic who utilizes textual and field-based methods. She is interested in studying social movement building, activist rhetoric, and coalitional politics. Her work emphasizes the rhetorical practices of groups marginalized within existing power structures, but she also attends to rhetoric produced by powerful institutions and actors about marginalized folks and the systems that oppress them (e.g., immigration system, prisons etc.).

Shawna Irissarri (SI): *So, we want to start off with the traditional class question. What does queer theory mean to you?*

Karma Chávez (KC): I think queer theory at its most basic level is a critique of normativity. And I think it begins from a place of saying that heteronormativity is a problem. That it is repressive not just to people who don't conform to heterosexuality- whether that's in terms of gender or class or race or ability or sexuality, I mean any of these sorts of vectors that we talk about. I think it begins with a critique of normativity. And then I think as it grows, it becomes a critique of our relationships to the state, and to other institutions. I think queer theory is necessarily antagonistic toward the ways that institutions and structures form our capacities for being able to relate in life-giving ways to other people and to be able to express ourselves in terms of our identities in ways that feel right to us. And I think at its best queer theory is also deeply antagonistic to capitalism, whether its anarchist strands or socialist strands, it engenders that sort of critique as well. And I think increasingly, the only queer theory that's worth its weight is queer of color critique, black queer theories and other racialized queer theories where gender and sexuality are not understood as anything other than inherently racialized. I do think there's a version of queer theory that is anti-identity, that is anti-family, these kinds of things, I don't think that version of queer theory gets us very far.

SI: *Okay, so I'm doing research on non-binary lesbian identity and how lesbian sexuality kind of informs gender and how there's not really a clear divide between gender and sexuality, but I want your opinion on whether you feel like there is a clear divide or not between gender and sexuality.*

KC: Well, analytically there is in a certain sense, right? So, we talk about them in ways that imagine them as separate. And that can be very useful politically, and it can also be useful as a thought exercise, but I think when we look at the history, specifically of lesbian identities, but we could talk more broadly as well, and if you read classic texts such as *Stone Butch Blues*, the

punishment of non-normative sexuality has always been about a punishment of non-normative gender. And that's because inherently the punishment of non-heterosexuality, for example, is because men and women aren't playing their gender roles. This is what I think the mainstream gay and lesbian movement has always gotten wrong and why they, to their own detriment, throw transgender and non-binary, gender non-conforming people under the bus is because we've always been subject to gender policing that is presented to us as about sexuality, and of course there is a dimension there too where people don't especially like the idea of men having sex with other men or women having sex without men, and men having sex in ways that aren't sort of the classic heterosexual way of doing it. And so, it is too about sexuality and that's where it can be helpful to parse those things out but they're so deeply imbricated that I think it doesn't do us a lot of good to parse them out all the time. And I should also say that despite that a lot of times the particular lineage of queer theory extends back to Freud and Foucault's post-structuralism. There's another very strong case to be made that queer theory emerges, specifically out of women of color feminism, which is always lesbian of color feminism.

Aylin Castro (AC): *Can you tell us a little bit about how you got into activism? Did you grow up around it? Or how did that relationship come to be?*

KC: Sure, I grew up in rural Nebraska. My mom is White and my dad is Mexican American, and we sort of very firmly identified as Mexican American so there wasn't any Chicano identity there at all. My dad is a union guy, my parents are very working class, my mom was a lunch lady. So I had a kind of politicization in that way, largely around class and parts. My dad didn't, until I was basically an adult, he never talked about racism that he experienced. Any of the racism that we experienced, my mother, you know, to her credit in many ways, in part because she didn't know how to deal with the question of race, but a part because she wanted to protect her kids, she just always explained it through class. So, if we were treated badly unless it was blatantly obvious where you couldn't say it was not about being Mexican, she said, "you know people just hate poor people and so you're a poor person and that is why you get hated." So, I grew up with that consciousness, but not overtly activist. I was involved in a lot of things in college, but really, when I got to graduate school at Arizona State, was when I was surrounded by immigration discourse everywhere, that is when I actually started participating in that movement. I did my dissertation related to the movement and spent many years doing research that was related to the movement. But, my kind of activist work was in many ways, its own thing, even if it was informed by my scholarship and in a lot of ways that is still the case. I think I use my position, both as a scholar, and as an able body person who can move tables and you know, call reporters and things like that that have nothing to do with being a scholar, to support movement work that I think is important. Oftentimes I am writing about that work too, or something adjacent to it but they are not always completely integrated, and I think that is actually a productive thing.

AC: *A follow up to that, do you feel like these coalition moments happen organically or are these something that we have to look for and work at?*

KC: I think it is a both/and. I think there are times when it is just so obvious that something needs to come together in ways that would not have, outside a particular situation in the world that exists, but a lot of times, even if that labor is not visible. Some of these connections come as a result of long histories, of people building relationships with one another, people doing political education to understand interconnectivity. And so that they are actually very prepared for when that moment comes. Now it is an opportunity to build something new that somebody would not have seen otherwise. That is probably much more common than the kind of happenstance, spontaneous coalition moment, because (for) any of our activism to be done well, it has to be strategic, very principled, very calculated and enduring.

Shruthi Parthasarathy (SP): *This is a little different from the questions that have been asked, but I really enjoyed the book (Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities) and I thought it was amazing too for the methodology, but also, as it was just very fascinating for me to read and I think it's a brilliant book. Could you talk a little bit about how you chose the objects of analysis for the rhetorical device and the manifestos? For example, the court cases that the question mentions and, how you arrived at choosing those objects of analysis? And what does it mean methodologically to use certain things and not use certain things?*

KC: Yeah, so, I'll give you a scholarly answer and then I'll give you a more real answer. So the scholarly answer, and this is also true, but what I'll say after this is in some ways more so the scholarly answer...is (that) I'm very invested in creating space in my scholarship for ideas; in forms of analysis that may not see the pages of an academic book or an academic journal. If I'm not doing it; now that's changing a lot, because the academic world is changing a lot, and so I don't write as much about contemporary immigration stuff anymore, because frankly, there's so many good immigrant activist academics, who have lived this stuff, that I as a U.S. citizen haven't lived that in some ways, I try now to do more space creating for them to get their work out (rather) than me having to say on things. But, even so, it's not that I don't write about these things, it's just, I approach it cautiously knowing my own privilege and positionality. But, with that book, I wanted to give voice to things in relation to both queer movements and immigration movements that I didn't think were getting a lot of play in the scholarship or in the world. Stuff that was very meaningful to me personally, but that I just didn't see it getting a lot of airtime and so that was a big part of how I selected things. The other piece of it, though the sort of real answer as I phrase it, is that I never had really planned to write a book and then I got this job at Wisconsin and I had to write a book. And all of a sudden, the dissertation which really wasn't book material, you know, I kind of make a book (out of it). And was I telling your class this? I can't remember... I've been in so many talks... About looking at Jack Halberstam's Facebook page? Yes, I did tell you the story. Yeah, and so that, that really is the real answer; is that I was like wait a minute, not only can

I do the kind of intellectual project voices, but that I can actually feature voices of people that I know and work I know really well that are doing this. And so, then it became a political project that I could sort of do as an academic project. I had these resources at my disposal, because of my connections through movement work that I was like, shit, alright, nobody else is going to write about Yasmin Nair in a way that really understands the complexities of her work, because she gets dismissed all the time for being too contrarian, too difficult, too utopian etc., etc. And, I was like, I actually understand her work and what she's trying to do, so I can write something otherwise, and that was because of personal relationships. That's not always the way, I mean the book I'm publishing that's going out in June, you know, I don't have any personal relationships with anybody in that book, but I think it's a worthwhile approach.

SP: *A follow up question to that; do you have any advice for scholars on consuming non-literary resources, but also, on utilizing non-literary resources? For example, if one were to do either a rhetorical analysis or a discourse analysis in their own work...what would you tell young scholars, who are trying to use and consume these materials?*

KC: In terms of...you mean like in terms of their relationship to the scholarship or their relationship to the object of analysis?

SP: *Both.*

KC: Yeah, I mean, I think it changes...as you go through the academic career, right? So, I think there's a lot less in some ways, open to you as graduate students because you're trying to prove yourself by the standards that exist. So, I think there's a way in which you have to show 'them' that you can do this thing in the way that they, and I'm using this "they" very intentionally like "they" whoever the fuck "they" are, so that you can show that you can do what "they" say, in the way it needs to be done. I actually think in some ways that's a really good practice for grad students, because all of the books on creativity, for example, say that you really can't find true creativity until you master what someone else says is a form. And so, like Matthew Fox has this great book on creativity, where he's like, you know, very few great artists have ever emerged until they understood what they were working against and I think of the academy in the same way. So, I think there's a way in which, especially your relationship to the scholarship, you might early on cite a bunch of shit that you don't want to cite and that you think is really fucking stupid. But it's the scholarship in your field that everybody says matters, and so you know what? Throw it in there, hold your nose, whatever it is. You get to a point later in a career, you can do what Sarah Ahmed (did), and you can publish an entire book that doesn't cite one white man in the whole thing. But, you probably can't do that now. Maybe you can, but you probably can't, and so it's also about knowing the kind of the trajectory of the scholarship you want to do. And I think the same is true for object choice. When I was coming out, you know in my field, I published a piece on queer theory. And, I think that was in the first like 10 or 15 pieces in the entire field of communication that had been published in queer theory. So, everyone was like, "um.. you know, you're gonna have a hell of a time getting a job kid...like no one's interested in, like, basically your

identity being your object of analysis...”. And my approach was just to be really good at what it was I did by their standard in that every scary thing I gave them in terms of object choice or in terms of scholarship I wanted to engage with, I gave them something familiar that they can hold on to, and that they knew meant that okay, I was rhetoric scholar, I did have the chops. But, I can remember when I was on the job market, you know, whatever 13, 14 years ago and I was sitting in a hotel room with the committee at some liberal arts college for a rhetoric position and the chair says to me, “So, what makes you a rhetoric scholar?” And you know, I was kind of... so, I started to say some things and she cut me off, and she goes, “No, no, I, I believe that you're a scholar of race and ethnicity. I just don't believe you're a rhetoric scholar.” And, it was, you know, interesting because of course, years later I got a job at the top rhetoric program in the country, not at that little liberal arts school. That was good luck on my part, and also, though, I was very strategic to never be able to get that question again. But as I've gone, you know I strayed further and further and further from “the thing” because “the thing” is not that interesting to me. The approach is and some of the tools are, but what people consider the field of rhetoric is pretty dusty. That was a long answer, but I hope that makes sense.

Kelly Ferguson (KF): *Your research seems extremely prevalent given that you are about to publish a book about quarantine amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and also, we read Queer Migrations right around the time of the attack on the Asian women in Atlanta. Do these instances push you to continue your research as a form of activism or does it wear on you? How do you do such critical research on such distressing/upsetting subject areas while maintaining mental health?*

KC: Yeah, it's a really important question...I think everyone has to wrestle with this question at some point, because if you're doing any work that is significant to you, it's going to have a personal impact. You're gonna get fucking pissed and you're gonna feel hopeless and all these other things. I think I'm a bit cynical about things and so my approach is probably not what you'll hear from other folks, and so I'm really, really resistant to phrases like “I'm so passionate about my work,” or “I love my job.” And the reason I am is because I refuse, those sorts of emotions in relation to labor. I'm passionate about issues; I'm passionate about justice.

But, scholarship was not something I'm passionate about. I write scholarship because I think I've learned that I have something to say that people listen to and that's been surprising to me at every step of my career, that people give a shit what I say about something, but with people giving a shit comes great responsibility. And, so, I continue to try to push, and I push because I know what matters to people. And, that's because of justice, and my commitment to justice. It's my commitment to justice in terms of stuff outside of the academy. So, queer and trans justice, immigration justice, racial justice. But, also, in terms of creating space in the academy for more people to do this labor, giving people the little bits of insight I've gained over the years, helping people to figure out how to write that cover letter, pushing on the dean when the dean does something that is fucked up for people, you know. But, those are all those are all labor practices,

labor politics, and my scholarship is a labor practice too. And it's not a labor of love, it's a labor of necessity. And, I think for me, keeping the distinction between my emotional life, my personal life, and my hobbies, you know, my garden and all these things... it gives me great pleasure in the work which I do enjoy, of course, but I'm not going to invest in it personally in that way. That has helped me to kind of maintain a balance, but I think that's a cynical view. And, I don't think it's a view that a lot of academics hold, and I don't offer it as a model per se, it's just what's worked for me.

KF: *I am curious about your thoughts about the term “latinx” and “latine.” Could you talk about why there has been so much resistance to the usage of “latinx,” and the politics behind using “latine”?*

KC: There's been, like, so much resistance to the term Latinx and the politics behind it. Yeah, I mean, you know, the easy answer, right, is that we're gender normative people. And the language itself was inherently gendered in ways that languages like English are not exactly, right? And, so, I think a big part of it is just tradition. But, I think the other big part of it is, we now use Latinx shorthand, right? Or Latine as kind of a shorthand...it's a political intervention but it's shorthand for what Latino was...what Latina has never been, but for what Latino was. And so, we use it that way and it kind of does this generalizing kind of neutralizing function. But I think part of the resistance comes from the fact that the folks who originally introduced Latinx were doing so from a trans and non-binary position, which is to say you know the “@” sign or the “a/o” ways that we were trying to be gender inclusive, we're actually not gender inclusive. And, so the “X” was really introduced as a way to centralize that kind of non-binary or trans experience. And, it wasn't meant, I think, there's a lot of people who resist the widespread use of Latinx the way it is because, once again, trans and non-binary folks are erased. And, I know I should say I know less about the kind of history of “Latine” and how that that kind of came to be. So, you might be able to educate me on that. But I do think that it returns to the first question, you know, gender oppression is central in this, it's really a gendered question. And, I just think, it's hard to say...I think there's also a class element to it. In the sense that, you know, I, we decided in my department...you know, we have three units; Center for Mexican American Studies, Latino Research Institute in the department and the kind of collective, we just called Latino Studies. And, we were very clear, we just decided to call it “Latino Studies”, in part because, in talking with our community, our local community, our working-class community, immigrant community... I mean, “Latino” doesn't necessarily resonate, let alone, “Latinx”. And so, there's an intellectualism to the “x,” or the “e,” as well, that don't track well with the community. So, there's resistance from a lot of directions, I'd say.

SI: *I was going to ask the next question relating to our current administration. I want to ask, how do you think the current administration may have affected immigration activism, if at all. We see that Biden is still perpetuating many of the harmful anti-immigration policies, including family*

separation. And I've noticed that a lot of mainstream activism begins and ends at "go out and vote," and the election of Democrats to office, and yet we see this administration isn't accomplishing the goals that we're wanting. So, do you feel like activists' momentum has died down at all, or is it consistent?

KC: You know, the democrats have never been the friends of the immigrant justice movement, that's the bottom line. I mean if you look at what Bill Clinton did with regard to immigration, then you look at Obama and now we have Biden, right? I don't know why the mainstream movement can't get it through its thick skull that Democrats are not our friends, and this happens every time a democrat is elected, whatever momentum there is dies down for a while. And then when it turns out they start to look at the reality before them, the material reality that this leader is just as bad, maybe not just as bad... Usually the main difference is that Republicans are vocal about it, and democrats say one thing and do another. It's confusing and so you always see this: there's a little bit of a celebration, they're trying to get in the White House, get in the door, make friends, and then the same shit happens. And then the movement picks back up, but the movements lost momentum because it, by definition, did that. And so a lot of some of my recent work is really focusing on a straight up critique of the mainstream movement because we allow Democrats to take our votes, take our friendship and give us nothing, and the kind of classic example of this in my mind is in 2014. People are getting pissed at Obama by 2014. And you have the first kind of, what the media calls, child migrant crisis right and then there's all this discourse about family, pro-family, don't deport my mom, stop separating families, blah blah blah. And so, then what does Obama do with his executive order in November of 2014 is he creates the new Priority Enforcement Program. Priority enforcement program was meant to replace Secure Communities. Secure Communities basically deputising local law enforcement to act like immigration officials, building onto A7G, which is a provision the immigration Nationality Act, which federally enables this and then Secure Communities expanded this program. So PEP was designed to be an alternative to this. But if you look at what the enforcement priorities were for the Obama administration, it was just prettied up in terms of the rhetoric, but essentially the exact same results. And then in advocating for that, Obama tacked it on to his extension of the deferred action program so that the undocumented parents of legal US citizen children could have access to deferred action just like DACA students do, which of course he knew was never going to happen, the courts weren't gonna let that happen. But people touted that part of it. And then he branded the whole thing with "we're going to deport felons, not families." And so he took that language directly from the immigration rights movement, which is all pro-family and all anti-crime (and the anti-crime position is anti-black), because that's what the immigrant movements are positioning itself against. And people ran with it, people endorsed it and all of a sudden, there were a lot of queer and trans migration activists who were like "what the fuck?" but they don't have mainstream airtime, and then we all know what happened with the Obama administration deportations, right? So, it's unfortunate that the movement can't learn these lessons and the same thing is happening over here and you know Biden might throw us more crumbs than Obama did because he's a white guy, and

he doesn't have as much political capital to lose, just to be really blunt about it, but probably not. It's not going to be as bad as Trump in certain ways, but it will be just the same in others.

SP: *In your scholarship that we have accessed, one thing I understood is that you're constantly critiquing the nation and the political formation of the nation state, right? Whether you're looking at it through immigration or citizenship and so, what was the process that you went through to look at the nation or the nation state as the focus of your study? I want to understand how, in the process of studying citizenship or of being documented and undocumented, how did you arrive at looking at the nation state?*

KC: Yeah, I mean it's complicated in the sense that you know we're in a time now where some you know, where we are several hundred years really into the formation... the process of forming the modern nation state, and you know, almost 200 years really into the kind of nation state formation, that we have now across the globe. That formation, I mean, I think we have to start from the premise that that formation is a temporal formation that didn't exist for millennia. And it doesn't have to exist in the future. I think if we begin from that premise, then it allows us not to take the nation state for granted and to dig into the logic of the nation state. And there's probably many logics of the nation state. I'm interested in the primary logic of its belonging, which I think is related to the citizen and the 'alien', right? And, that's not the citizen and the immigrant, it's the citizen and the 'alien' because many citizens effectively function as 'alien', right? So, I think we have to dig into the logic of the nation state, we have to imagine the ways in which that is our kind of fundamental enemy, that formation. But for that formation, we might have any number of other ways to identify ourselves to relate to each other...to construct belonging, right? And so, for me, that also then comes with a critique of national borders as fundamental because the logic of national borders is the logic of citizenship; it is the logic of the prison industrial complex. It's quite deep in terms of how we make determinations about who belongs, and who doesn't. The nation state is so immersive that it's very hard for us to think our way out of it. It's very hard for us to think about appeals that we don't make to that nation state. What I'm really interested in is how do we make appeals that actually put cracks in the foundation of that formation? My work is primarily done in relation to the U.S. nation state, but I think that's an important project writ large and that's where the intellectual project is a political project. So I don't know that I totally answered but that's how I think.

SP: *It does. In the book you've talked very beautifully about the ways in which belonging can and can't happen, and the limits and boundaries between each identity formation, and the languages that each identity formation uses to mobilize around. Could talk about these kinds of overlaps that you have recognized? How do you think young scholars who are doing this work can identify these sorts of overlaps? How did you arrive at looking at them, especially the way in which you locate yourself in the borders between these identities. You don't ever say, "Oh, these are bad*

people and these are good people.” I think that's what I was trying to ask. How do you do the analysis without these absolute frameworks? You take such a metered and beautiful way to think about it and I was wondering if you could talk about how you do the writing and the thinking through that process.

KC: Well, first of all thank you. That's really nice for you to say. I think what I'm trying to figure out is how we get out of dichotomous thinking because I always talked to my students about the ways that the binary opposition becomes the sort of foundational relation of Western culture. So, you go back to Ferdinand de Saussure and semiotics and then you get to Lacanian psychoanalysis and then you get to Levi Strauss's cultural anthropology, and then you get to Derrida's post-structuralism and Derrida sort of dismantles the whole thing. And he says, this is a framework you've created and it's not real. Yet we know these deep archetypal dichotomies constitute so much about the world we live in. So, in a way I'm deeply Derridean post-structuralist in a certain sense, right? I think that's part of where that comes from; I think it's so politically important. So, what motivated *Queer Migration Politics* was really a concern about the way that queer theorists were dismissing gay and lesbian politics as too presentist, too simplistic and all this shit, and I was like, well, yes that's true in a certain sense. On the other hand, there's all these ways that we can retool their appeals and show the different work that they could be doing. And I think that in showing that different work that opens up different ways for thinking and then it helps us to get to the next phase of trying to make those appeals differently. So, that's I guess my sort of post-structuralist (approach) which kind of grosses me out to say, but, it is kind of a post structuralist approach, I take to this, which is to get inside the logic of the thing and to never throw it all but to see where it actually is doing something that we can take and use differently.

SP: *Thank you! I'll ask one more question and then I think Aylin will wrap it up. In the lecture and in the class, you've talked about occupying institutional spaces and that currently, as you are more secure, you're able to mobilize the resources and do politics differently, compared to various other moments when your presence was precarious. Could you talk about occupying institutional spaces and the ways in which you have to navigate the institution? How has privatization and inaccessibility due to it, and the polarization on campus created by increased policing (particularly with regards to how immigration policies work out on campus spaces) impacted how students who are documented or undocumented get access to institutional spaces and what has been your response as a faculty member who's currently more secure now versus at earlier times in the institution.*

KC: Yeah, I think. It's really important to understand how institutions work, how power moves in institutions. I think a lot of times when undergraduate students and grad students to a degree, junior faculty, certainly... actually, pretty much everybody on campus doesn't quite understand how the institution works and I think that's by design. Even if you do a power map of your entire

institution, which I highly recommend you do if you want to do any activism on your campus. Figure out who is at the top. Figure out who those people are and what motivates them, anything you find out about them. Figure out where the power points are to pressure them. You know you don't want to ask a question to the President, that you should actually ask the Dean. You want to figure out how you get access to the Dean. Well, probably the best way is to make friends with the Dean's secretary. I mean rule number one on any institution is treat all the staff like they're gold, because they are. There is also an instrumental value to that too, right, they help you get access to things that you may not have access to otherwise. One thing is really to understand, whatever position you are, to understand how power works. And to understand both your own power because you always have power. If you're in an academic institution, you have some power. If you're an academic and at an academic institution, and to understand what the limitations in that power are. From a graduate student perspective, how secure are your contracts? For example if you stage a rebellion, is your contract solid gold? Are you going to be able to fight if they try to take your employment away, or if they try to kick you out? Is your background clean? Is there anything they can dig up? If the answers to those things are no, then you have to figure out what's going to be your role in whatever the thing is you're doing. And, related to that, it's not just individualist, it's about knowing your relationships to others. So, figuring out who your more privileged allies are among a grad student cohort, for example. You know, is there...this is this rarely happens, but is there a White guy, who really gets the politics, who is not going to take over, but who will listen to women of color leadership, queer leadership, and then press? If you can find one of those, gold! Very rare. But, it's also then about finding who your faculty allies are and thinking about their particular power relationships, too because a lot of times, graduate students connect best with assistant professors. Well, in many ways assistant professors are more precarious than you are because they're on probation. That word is very intentional and, so, because they're on probation, if they start supporting your activism...if they start, you know, challenging the chair, not only might they be getting out of favor with people in power they also might not be doing their scholarship which then becomes a great excuse to get rid of them. This doesn't mean you shouldn't build those relationships, but it's to do so, knowing the situation they're in and on and on. I think it's about horizontal organizing, constantly. I am still doing that, I'm trying to build relationships with people who we know, know how to get the things we want to get. I'll give you an example from today, actually. I was talking to the chair of Black Studies and there's a staff member in the Dean's office who has a lot of power. And we're all in a bad financial situation right now, and this person has a lot of power, about what money gets spent when, where and how. And, it's creating a problem for a lot of our departments. So today, we were talking, you know, I've talked to the Dean about this, she has talked to the Dean about this. Nothing's happened. So we were like, okay, well, who are the White male chairs that we can trust to see if they're experiencing the same thing and then, have him go to the Dean? And so, we came up with the one guy who we think is a pretty good ally and we're going to reach out to him to ask him if he's experiencing the same thing we are and then ask him to intervene. And that sucks that we as women of color have to do that, but it's also just understanding how to maneuver power.

Everything is about power in these institutions, and so you have to know how it works and how to use it.

SP: *That was such a good “Intro 101 to Student Activism!” I wish someone had taught us this. That made a lot of sense.*

KC: I wish somebody would have taught me this too when I was a student, but nobody did! Administrators are so happy to have students do a big protest outside of the president's office. President doesn't make that decision. The president's third man makes that decision, but that's fine. President's just walking out the back door of the office building. He might come out and say, “I thank you for your activism. We’re working on it. Oh, you want to have a town hall? Okay, you know what? I'm going to go give you that town hall!” Then it happens. We all did this! And, nobody wants us to know how to do it, otherwise.

AC: *We have one last question, your book, *The Borders of AIDS: Race, Quarantine and Resistance* comes out later this year, which we are all super excited for. What comes after that for you? Are you already working on a new project or, are you going to take a break and focus on something else for a bit? You did mention a lot of urban activism in your introduction of your book, is this something you are looking at as a future project?*

KC: The practical answer is that I am going up for a promotion to full professor in the fall. Even though this book [*The Borders of AIDS*] is coming out in June. They want to see that there is progress on a next book project. In the same way I had to manufacture *The Borders of AIDS* when I was going up for promotion to associate professor, I am manufacturing another book right now, that I may or may not fall through, although I think it will. I published a little book of interviews in 2019 on Palestine. I am very very invested in the struggle for Palestinian liberation. I think it is deeply, deeply implicated in all of the justice struggles in the United States, not just for philosophical reasons but for very material reasons, namely being that the State of Israel, basically creates all security infrastructure for the entire western world. And all of that infrastructure before it comes to the police department in your town, it's tested on Palestinians and everything is tested on Palestinians. All major police departments in the United States, they go to Israel to learn about policing. All of the border infrastructure on the US border is informed by the border walls and fences between different parts of Israel and Palestine. I'm interested in interrogating that relationship, but through something that seems sort of mundane in a way. Which is, rock throwing as protests at these borders. Two years ago Donald Trump basically said that the military could shoot rock throwers on the border, that a rock should be considered a firearm. If you know anything about Israel, Palestine, you know that specifically in the Second Intifada, rock throwing was the primary weapon. Some even said that to throw a rock was to be a Palestinian. I am interested in this gesture, as a gesture of protest and also how, well rock throwing in at least borders, is a rarely lethal act. It is not a lethal force. Very rarely it is. I think in Israel and Palestine there's been in the last 40 years, two deaths as a result of somebody actually getting hit in the head by a big rock.

Which is nothing compared to the number of Palestinians killed by big arms. On the US border there's no instances and yet this repeatedly becomes justification for lethal state violence. So I think I'm going to write a book about this. I don't know exactly what the thesis is, I don't know exactly what I'm doing with it but I'm interested in thinking about borders through this lens. And really putting Israel and US, Mexico in a productive conversation. I have to figure out how to make that sound like there's a thesis there and that there are chapters in progress by May 1st. But what I'd really like to, is not do shit for a while. I'd really like to just be in my garden and to start building stronger relationships in the community and building this department that I am chair of. We'll see what actually happens.