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Restoring Dignity in the Gardens of eKhenana

Jordan Buser
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Restoring Dignity in the Gardens of eKhenana

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Spring 2022

Table of Contents:

Acknowledgments.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	4-6
Literature Review.....	6-19
Methodology.....	19-21
Limitations of the Study.....	21-22
Analysis.....	23-37
Conclusions.....	37-39
Bibliography.....	40-43

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“There is no question of first revolution, then dignity: dignity itself is the revolution” (Holloway, 2003).

Abstract:

This case study investigates the lived experiences of eKhenana, a shack settlement under the leadership of Abahlali baseMjondolo, as they attempt to navigate the increasingly unequal urban landscape. The research presented is focused on theories of urban marginality, food sovereignty, and dignity. I advocate that, in the margins, dignity can be restored through the implementation of a communal garden. Presented as a case study, this research centers the voices and experiences of the commune. The paper first depicts a brief timeline of eKhenana, and explains how they have created not just a place to live, but a community and a home. The next section interrogates the intersections between the communal garden and the politics of dignity. Lastly, I provide an analysis of the repression and violence facing the commune. This research finds that the communal garden plays an imperative role in both feeding the community and restoring dignity. At the core of this paper is the recognition that in restoring dignity, we have the potential to change everything.

Introduction:

The communal garden of eKhenana, through the implementation of food sovereignty, has engaged in the restoration of dignity, realizing the radical potential of marginality. As a result of South Africa’s history of dispossession, violence, and Apartheid, the country now struggles to provide equal access to infrastructure, services, and opportunity. There exists a mass exodus of unemployed youth into the city, searching for opportunity and a better life. With no access to housing, land, or employment, many migrants are forced to the periphery, into informal settlements. Defeated by the precarity of food insecurity, people in the margins are denied their dignity and humanity. In the absence of the state, the communal garden presents a viable strategy

that marginalized communities can use to achieve food security, access the city, and restore dignity. In changing our relationship with food, the communal garden presents a practical alternative, and in doing so, challenges the very fabric of modern society.

The objective of this paper is to investigate the lived experience of food sovereignty, to gauge, through a case study of eKhenana, how the implementation of a communal garden intersects with the politics of dignity and marginality. Food sovereignty is rarely placed in conversation with urban Africa. The majority of attention focuses primarily on urban communal gardens in developed western countries. This research takes the discourse of food sovereignty, and the communal garden, into the margins, to understand the role of urban agriculture in a liberatory politics of the poor. There exists an inextricable relationship between urban marginality, food sovereignty, and the restoration of dignity. In eKhenana, the community is occupying the land, tilling the soil, and in the process, actualizing an alternative world defined by equality, democracy, and dignity for all.

This paper consists of four sections. The first, a comprehensive literature review, attempts to orient the case study by illustrating the potential for a dialogue between theories of urban marginality, food sovereignty, and the politics of dignity. In this review I will illustrate that the most radical potential for food sovereignty is its demands for dignity. Secondly, in the analysis of my research, I discuss how eKhenana has created, not just another informal settlement, but a community; one of radical openness where equality is realized. In the next section, titled sowing the seeds of dignity, I illustrate how the communal garden, by feeding and sustaining the commune, restores dignity. Finally, in the last section, I try to understand the violent repression currently facing eKhenana. Investigating the contestations that arise in the communal garden as eKhenana plants their radical vision for an alternative world. This case study argues that the

politics of food sovereignty is inextricable from the restoration of dignity. In eKhenana, restoring dignity in the communal garden is an inherently revolutionary force, one that has the potential to realize alternative worlds.

Literature Review:

There exists an extensive amount of research concerning urban marginality, the restoration of dignity, and food sovereignty, yet a failure to fully appreciate how these three forces intersect. Most of the current literature locates food sovereignty as an inherently rural phenomenon, unrelated to questions of urban marginality and the politics of dignity. Ignoring the intersectionality of food sovereignty limits its potential scope, and silences urban grassroots collectives who are utilizing the discourse of Food Sovereignty to restore dignity and demand equal access to the city. Looking at food sovereignty from an intersectional perspective means questioning how it interacts with urban marginality and theories of dignity. Bell hooks describes marginality as a site of radical possibility, and the politics of food sovereignty demands radical possibilities. As scholars and activists, we must listen down. The success of the movement relies on our ability to learn from the lived experiences of others, and promote a truly revolutionary politics of the poor. By providing an overview of the literature regarding land dispossession, urban marginalization, and the restoration of dignity, this review posits a more holistic understanding of food sovereignty. This will illustrate the implicit social and political objectives of the movement, and put food sovereignty in conversation with theories of urban marginality and dignity. Food sovereignty must be understood from the bottom-up, embracing the lived experiences of the poor, who use the politics of food sovereignty to survive repression and imagine an alternative world.

Land and Life in the Urban Periphery

To understand the urban context of food sovereignty, it is first important to define the underlying causes and consequences of rapid urbanization and to consider what Bell Hooks describes, as the politics of space.

A central question faced by South Africa in 1994, was how to reconcile the historical dispossession of land. In order to fully understand the precarity of urban marginality today, it is first necessary to place it within a historical context. The dispossession of land in South Africa dates back to the first dutch colonizers in 1647, in which, over time, African ways of life were systematically destroyed, denigrating previously prosperous societies to brutal labor in the mines (Ngcukaitobi, 2021). The land act of 1913 was further devastating, as it institutionalized unequal patterns of ownership and set aside only 7% (later 13.5%) of land for the majority black population (SA history.org, 2021). This act barred African people from purchasing land, and later, the creation of Bantustans in the land act of 1936, limited African people to the most infertile and unprosperous land (Ngcukaitobi, 2021). Victor Mlambo correlates today's rapid urbanization in South Africa to the historical and contemporary underdevelopment of “homelands” during Apartheid, which was brutally enforced by the Apartheid regime (Mlambo, 2018). Apartheid policies purposefully underdeveloped rural areas, diverting resources to the modernizing white city, while simultaneously creating conditions of poverty for over 13 million Black South Africans (Akinola, 2021). Despite the ANC’s progressive rhetoric of 1994, they ultimately failed to alter these unfair patterns of land ownership and development (Ngcukaitobi, 2021), and (Mawere, Madzivhandila, & Kugara, 2021). The current situation in contemporary South Africa, unfortunately, still predominantly reflects this unjust history. As a result of this historical marginalization, many people today remain poor, landless, and lack adequate housing

(Ngcukaitobi, 2021). By failing to properly invest in rural economies and landscapes, both historical and contemporary policies have created the conditions necessary for rapid urbanization, (Mitton and Abdullah, 2021). This has resulted in a mass of landless people migrating into urban centers, seeking employment and opportunity, but instead being pushed to the margins, and relegated to subservient citizenship.

By 2030, 71.3% of South Africa's population will be residing in urban areas, and by 2050 80% (Mlambo, 2018). This is a direct result of Apartheid policy and the ANC's poor attempt at post-colonial reform. Rural areas routinely fail to provide basic infrastructure and adequate employment opportunities. According to Mlambo, this has pushed many South Africans, especially unemployed youth, to migrate into the metropolitan centers, where between 1996 and 2012, 75 percent of all jobs created were created (Mlambo, 2018). Mlambo states that the fundamental causes of rural-urban migration include employment opportunities, access to educational and health services, and increased wages. Williams states:

Insecure employment and unemployment, poverty, the lack of alternate housing opportunities, social and economic exclusion, and the need to be located close to urban resources and opportunities, result in the urban poor claiming their right to the city through the establishment of informal settlements. Informal settlements, defined as unplanned residential areas “where housing, shelter, and services have been constructed on land to which the occupants have no legal claim, or which they occupy illegally” can therefore be seen as one of the many outcomes of unequal and uncontrolled urbanization.

(Williams et al., 2019)

While urbanization in the global north is often accompanied by economic growth, in post-colonial societies it “is characterized by lower levels of income, inadequate infrastructure

investments, and poor service delivery” (Plaatjies, 2020). Thus, many scholars have highlighted how rapid urbanization exacerbates crises of unemployment, housing, crime, and overpopulation (Mlambo, 2018). While wealthy residents tend to benefit from the urbanizing and industrializing world, poor unskilled migrants, excluded from development and growth, are left with no other option than to occupy informal settlements, with limited or no access to basic services (Mitton and Abdullah, 2021). Richard Pitthouse details how informal settlements are “a site of suffering”, because while there do exist positives, “the absence of the State means the absence of the services – water, sanitation, electricity, roads, drainage, refuse collection, health care and so on – that are needed for a viable urban life” (Pitthouse, 2008). Thus it is evident that within the urban context, capital functions to separate the masses from accessing dignity.

Abahlali BaseMjondolo was formed in 2005, by a mass of landless shack dwellers, in order to resist eviction, access land, and secure a viable urban life. The formation of Grassroots organizations in South Africa, such as Abahlali, is emblematic of the state's failure to govern as an entity of the people (Zikode, 2022). Fanonian scholars emphasize the dehumanizing violence of neocolonialism in South Africa, arguing that the liberation movement failed to alter unjust structures of power, and instead, acts simply as a screen between the people and the new black bourgeoisie (Gibson, 2011) and (Fanon, 1961). Nigel Gibson details how this process has left masses of South Africans landless, seeking opportunities in urban centers, but instead relegated to the periphery (Gibson, 2011). While some scholars emphasize the illegality of shack settlements, viewed differently, they are the rightful re-expropriation of stolen land, by the people, for the people (Zikode, 2022).

In the face of rapid urbanization and marginalization, Abahlali’s mission has been focused on securing access to land, housing, and dignity. Specific membership of the

organization is based upon participatory democracy. Informal settlements, after being educated on the goals of the organization, vote on whether or not to join Abahlali BaseMjondolo, then elect local representatives to the organization through which communities can voice their concerns (Zikode, 2022). Thus Abahlali is in its entirety, a grassroots operation. President S'bu Zikode thinks of the organization as a living politic, or rather, a politics of the poor (Zikode, 2022). This emphasizes that the central imperative of Abahlali is to forcefully return the power back to the people. Some of the preeminent work of the organization includes securing electricity, sanitation, and water for shack communities, as well as resisting evictions, foreclosures, dispossession, and occupying vacant land in order to implement communal ways of living (Zikode, 2022).

The specific community of focus in this research is Ekhenana. Named after the promised land of Canaan, eKhenana is an occupation in Cato Manor that was formed, with the help of Abahlali, back in August of 2018. Community members arrived when the area was just neglected municipal land, and have since organized to try and secure the rights promised to them in the constitution (Nomfundo Xolo, 2020). This involves the right to equal access over land, the right to adequate housing, and the right to sufficient food and water. The state government has failed on all levels to meet the requirements demanded by the constitution, and in many ways has subsequently left the mass of landless, marginalized, and poor South Africans on their own (Zikode, 2022). In the absence of government intervention, eKhenana is taking urban land reform to the grassroots. They have expropriated unoccupied land in order to access secure tenure, and engage in livelihood strategies (Nomfundo Xolo, 2020). This movement presents a threat to bourgeois capital and elite interests, and subsequently, the community has faced violent reactionary behavior from the state and its allies. This has involved targeted assassinations within

the community by members of the ANC, and violent attacks from the Land Invasion Unit (Abahlali BaseMjondolo, 2018). The community has faced forced eviction from the municipality on several occasions, this has included the use of rubber bullets and live ammunition, as well as the destruction and burning of property (Zikode, 2022). Despite repeated attacks, the community has continuously chosen to rise up, oppose capitalist hegemony, and build a prosperous community founded on principles of socialism. Close in proximity to the central business district, and autonomous from the municipality, even in the face of violent repression, eKhenana has been a site of radical possibility, challenging how we think about the margins. By planting, tilling the soil, and eating the fruit of one's own labor, the residents are transforming the community into a place of dignity, an actualization of the biblical promised land (Nomfundo Xolo, 2020)

Rethinking Marginality

The margin is misunderstood as a place of barbaric criminality. With the rise of informal settlements globally, resulting from rapid urbanization, the urban periphery has been painted as a landscape of untamed, ungoverned, incivility (Raeymaekers, 2019). Pojani and Baar discuss how there exists an exclusionary discourse around informal settlements. Elite urbanity is misconstrued with model citizenship, and thus, Shack Dwellers are “discredited or relegated to an inferior status by highlighting their deviance from the ideal model” (Pojani & baar, 2020). In order to sustain an exploitative urban landscape, the margin is depicted as a threat, as a space of violence and criminality, a wild untamed frontier (Perry, 2013). Distorted by the colonizer in this way, the “margins signify a (yet) unoccupied, peripheral space, which lays open, bare, to be colonized by a powerful and ostensibly more ‘civilizing’ force” (Raeymaekers, 2019). This logic of natural inferiority, of otherness, works to legitimize, reinforce, and reproduce the margins as a

place of illegality, in need of ‘salvation’ from western capital (Perry, 2013). Yet Bell Hooks questions the legitimacy of colonial assumptions that demonize and denigrate the margins while overlooking its creative resilience. Hooks encourages us to open our eyes to the lived experiences of marginality, to see the intricate beauty, ingenuity, and celebratory strength of urban precarity. In her words:

Though incomplete I was working in these statements to identify marginality as much more than a site of deprivation, in fact I was saying just the opposite: that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose - to give up or surrender as part of moving into the centre - but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds (Hooks, 1989).

Here, Bell Hooks is careful not to romanticize marginality, but instead recognizes the margins in its entirety, as “both sites of repression and sites of resistance” (Hooks, 1989). Rarely do we frame the margins as anything other than a deprived wasteland, rarely do we consider its radical potential. It is not by happenstance that marginality goes overlooked, it is by the overseeing eye of the colonizer, who violently corrects the imagined alternatives and radical potential of the margins (Hooks, 1989). Hooks describes how the colonizer speaks of the margins as only a site of deprivation, only a site of criminality and despair, in order to silence its radical

possibilities (Hooks, 1989). Hooks differentiates “between that marginality which is imposed... and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance - as location of radical openness and possibility” (Hooks, 1989). In eKhenana, a community on the periphery of urban life, where individuals' humanity is routinely ignored, residents have embraced marginality and embraced the radical possibilities that emanate from immeasurable pain and suffering. In eKhenana, when we speak of radical possibility, of “alternate worlds' ', we are speaking of the communal garden, of Food Sovereignty. eKhenana is a site of repression, a site of violence, but most importantly, a site of possibility and resistance. In the face of deep despair and deprivation, of urban marginality, with no job, no land, no home, eKhenana fights back by tilling the soil. Food sovereignty represents the actualization of radical possibility. Implemented in the margins of the city, it can engender a more just and equitable urban landscape.

Food Sovereignty

Research regarding Food Sovereignty Movements has grown rapidly since the early 2000s. While many scholars argue over an exact definition of Food Sovereignty, Christina Schiavoni simply describes it as the right of people to determine their own food and agricultural policies (Schiavoni, 2009). This definition was formalized at the Nyéléni Forum, as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Nyeleni, 2007). Some scholars critique Food Sovereignty Movements due to a lack of coherency within academia, and contradictions within the movement (Agarwal, 2014). Yet the literature has advocated that Food Sovereignty Movements do not need a coherent vision, singular definition, or uniformed strategy, because their central tenets emphasize local autonomy, and inclusive democratic participation (Patel, 2009) and (Kessler & Garnet, 2021). Therefore, food sovereignty

will manifest differently in different spaces, one cannot expect it to look the same in rural Indonesia and urban Africa. The historical legacy of Apartheid and dispossession in South Africa means that many urban citizens lack adequate access to healthy and culturally appropriate food (Siebert, 2019). Plagued by inequality and a “highly exclusionary food system”, there is a need for food sovereignty in urban South Africa (Siebert, 2019).

While the definition agreed upon in Mozambique is a good start, it ultimately fails to recognize how food sovereignty can function within an urban context to restore dignity, promote equality, and challenge the assumptions of capital. There is a consensus amongst scholars that food sovereignty demands the grassroots democratization of production and exchange (Kessler & Garnet, 2021), (Patel, 2009), (Via Campesina, 2007). The Food Sovereignty Movement includes peasants, landless people, rural and indigenous communities, as well as many others. It is a revolutionary movement aimed at transforming unjust economic, political, and social institutions (Kessler & Garnet, 2021). It promotes democratic organization, grassroots mobilization, and environmentally sustainable policies (Kessler & Garnet, 2021). This contrasts with current neoliberal capitalist modes of production and agribusiness that prioritize profits over communities.

In this research, I will utilize an intersectional approach to food sovereignty. This means understanding how food sovereignty interacts with social and political forces to challenge a hegemonic capitalist mode of production. An intersectional approach recognizes that securing access to food is the first step in a process of decolonization, a process that demands truly democratic institutions and social relations free from the purview of capital. I agree with Jim Handy, who says:

Food sovereignty challenges not just a particular development model, doesn't just challenge a particularly abhorrent form of neoliberalism, doesn't just suggest a new set of rights. Rather, it envisions fundamental changes in the basis of modern society ... Capitalism was dedicated to divorcing producers from any right over the goods they produced and encasing those goods in ever larger, ever more disconnected, ever more monopolized, and ever more destructive markets. Food sovereignty challenges all of that because it demands that we rethink what was at the very center of this transition; it demands that we treat food not simply as a good, access to which and the production of which is determined by the market, it demands that we recognize the social connections inherent in producing food, consuming food, and sharing food. In the process it will change everything (Whitman, 2009).

The politics of food sovereignty are intersectional because they fundamentally challenge how we think about society (Whitman, 2009). In spaces of extreme marginalization and inequality, such as the urban periphery, food sovereignty creates an alternative landscape based on principles of communitarianism and equality. La Via Campesina articulates food sovereignty within this intersectional framework. They state that “food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations” (La Via Campesina, 2007). Other scholars agree, advocating that food sovereignty is much more complex, interwoven with social and political institutions (Patel, 2009) & (Whitman, 2009). They articulate that at its core, food sovereignty is a radical egalitarianism that challenges deeply entrenched structures of power (Patel, 2009). Food sovereignty is not just the reclaiming of food production, distribution, and consumption, but rather a process that demands dramatic social change and a reimagining of how resources are distributed (Patel, 2009).

Christina Shiavonia views the fight for food sovereignty as a fight against “Imperialism, neo-liberalism, neo-colonialism and patriarchy, and all systems that impoverish life, resources and eco-systems” (Shiavoni, 2009). The politics of food sovereignty is intersectional, meaning it demands changes to how we organize our economic, political, and social institutions, in the process challenging the dehumanizing logic and inequality of capitalism.

The framework of food sovereignty adopted by La Via Campesina will provide the foundation for this research. They state, echoing human rights discourse, that the struggle for food sovereignty is the struggle for an “ethic of life” (La Via Campesina, 2013). The organization recognizes how food sovereignty “encompasses an agricultural revolution as well as a socio-economic and political transformation” (La Via Campesina, 2013). In this research, I will recognize, in accordance with La Via Campesina, that “There is no dignity without adequate food, and the right to adequate food is an essential human right” (La Via Campesina, 2018). In the actualization of food sovereignty, we fundamentally transform our relationship with the land, each other, and economies. As Hannah Whitman states, there is an “inextricable connection between food, culture and democracy” (Whitman, 2009). In changing our relationship with food, we are changing everything. This is exemplified by the campaign “food sovereignty means stopping violence against women” (Whitman, 2009). Here, La Via Campesina has pushed to the forefront the intersections between the communal production of food, and gender equality. This reifies the potential scope of food sovereignty, by illustrating how the movement can serve to revolutionize the unequal foundations of modern society. When we talk about food sovereignty, we are talking about a radical possibility, the possibility to engender a just, egalitarian, and democratic society, free from oppression; in other words, food sovereignty is not just about food. The commune of Ekhenana presents an interesting case study, as the literature has often failed to

investigate how Food Sovereignty intersects with urban marginality and the politics of dignity. Therefore this research will place Food Sovereignty in the urban margins, as the actualization of an “alternative world”, of radical possibility. As scholars have shown, (Patel, 2009), (Kessler & Garnet, 2021), and (Shiavoni, 2009), Food Sovereignty demands a bottom-up, inclusive, and democratic approach, that inherently opposes the deeply unequal urban landscape. The sowing of a communal garden produces not only the material necessities for life, but also the spiritual dignity required to live.

Food Sovereignty and Dignity; An anti-capitalist praxis

A garden is a nursery for nurturing connection, the soil for cultivation of practical reverence. And its power goes far beyond the garden gate - once you develop a relationship with a little patch of earth, it becomes a seed itself. Something essential happens in a vegetable garden: It's a place where if you can't say "I love you" out loud, you can say it in seeds (Kimmerer, 2013)

Emiliano Zapato said, “the land belongs to those who work it” (Knoll, 2019). Implicit in this revolutionary proclamation is the language of dignity. In accessing land, in cultivating the land, you are planting the seeds of dignity. John Holloway, a scholar of dignity, states that by separating product from production, “Capital [separates] us from the richness of human social creation, from our humanity, from our dignity” (Holloway, 2003). In first recognizing how the process of global capital separates us from our dignity, Holloway, in this article, asks the pressing question of how, under the dictatorship of capital, can we “create a society based upon the mutual recognition of dignity” (Holloway, 2003). For him, radical change is incompatible with money, the state, central planning, or any Revolution from above (Revolution with a capital “R”). Holloway asserts that “the path of the state is not the path of dignity” (Holloway, 2003),

but then what is? How can we create a society abundant with dignity? food sovereignty, the communal tilling of our land, the shared cultivation, ownership, and enjoyment of all that our sacred land provides. By walking through our communal gardens, we are walking the path of dignity, we are asserting radical possibilities, a “fissure in capitalist domination”, and the active creation of an alternative world (Holloway, 2003). Within the context of urban marginality, Food Sovereignty demands the reclamation of dignity (Patel, 2009), (Kessler & Garnet, 2021), and (Shiavoni, 2009). Holloway declares that “the only productive force is the creative force of human doing”, and there is no greater force of human doing than the tilling of soil, the sovereignty over what you eat (Holloway, 2003).

In South Africa, 26% of households experience hunger, and in informal settlements, 32% of households report being food insecure (Jonah & May, 2019). As a result of rapid urbanization and spatialized poverty, access to food, particularly in the urban landscape, is determined by a household's access to cash. In the context of an official unemployment rate of 35.3% (Republic of South Africa, 2022), money as a prerequisite for food, determines that a large share of South Africans go hungry, especially those who live on the margins (Jonah & May, 2019). Thus, in their survey of 12,361 households, Coretta Jonah and Julian May propose the implementation of urban communal gardens and food sovereignty programs, as a means of alleviating poverty and hunger in the urban periphery. If families, communities, and individuals do not have access to food, the foundation for human life, how will we ever achieve the dignified society that John Holloway advocates? The literature has failed to engage the intersections between urban marginality and the radical politics of food sovereignty, which places the restoration of dignity as a central tenant (Shiavoni, 2009). When Holloway says that “the creation of a society based on dignity can only take place through the development of social practices based on the mutual

recognition of that dignity” (Holloway, 1998), he is advocating for the communal garden. When Marx says that “The direct antithesis to the empire [is] the Commune” (Marx, 1871), he is advocating for the communal garden. Food Sovereignty is synonymous with the communal politics of liberation, implicit in its agenda is a counter-hegemonic discourse that undermines the dehumanizing logic of capital (Schiavonia, 2009). By tilling the soil of urban marginality we are creating radical possibilities. If “dignity and capital are incompatible” (Holloway, 2003), then what are the alternatives? In the communal garden, we are planting dignity. Capital maintains its authority by threatening to leave, asking without me how will you survive? The communal garden responds by shouting we will plant, we will till the soil, we will feed ourselves, we will survive (Holloway, 2003). eKhenana is at the forefront in creating an alternative world, therefore we must listen to the margins, to understand how the community has planted in their garden a “society based on the mutual recognition of dignity” (Holloway, 2003).

The goal of this literature review was to illustrate the intersections between Food Sovereignty, urban marginality, and the restoration of dignity. Too often, the literature locates food sovereignty as inherently rural. This undermines its radical potential as a discourse that shack dwellers can use to assert a right to the city. Bell Hooks locates marginality as a site of resistance and possibility, and in eKhenana, the communal garden represents the actualization of this alternative world, one outside the purview of capital. There has been a mass migration of unemployed youth into the city, looking for opportunity and a higher standard of living. Yet, upon arrival, many migrants are forced into the margins of urban life where they lack adequate access to food, housing, and dignity. This review illustrates the intersectionality of food sovereignty. It depicts how theories of food sovereignty, and the communal garden, intersect with the radical potential of the margins to restore dignity.

Methodology:

For this research, I engaged in a miniature case study of the eKhenana commune. This included participatory observation, both formal and informal interviews, as well as a limited amount of ethnographic fieldwork. The goal of this research method was to attempt to become as immersed and comfortable in the commune as possible, and to foster strong relationships with the residents and leaders of the community. The vast majority of my data was collected through a semi-formal one-on-one interview process. I interviewed six people in total, two women and four men. I chose to conduct my research in this manner in order to try and collect as much data as possible within a short period of time. My research was conducted in three different locations. First, the Abahlali baseMjondolo office, where I spent time engaging the political leaders and directors of the larger organization. Secondly, the Durban Magistrates Court House, where the community of eKhenana repeatedly went to oversee the cases currently being heard against their members. And finally, the space where I spent the majority of my time, the commune itself. By engaging with this research in three very different unique spaces, I was able to extrapolate a more holistic understanding of food sovereignty.

My interview process was two fold. I would begin by asking several background questions, these included questions about where the participant is from, general inquiries into family history, and small talk, simply to try and create a more comfortable environment between the interviewee and myself. My next series of questions would be focused on two themes, the implementation of the communal garden and its effects, and the violent repression faced by the commune. My direct participation in the commune had several advantages. It allowed me to gather data not only through a formal interview process but also through direct observation. I spent two weeks visiting Abahlali baseMjondolo and working in the commune of eKhenana. During this time, I formed strong relationships with members of the commune and leaders of

Abahlali. While it took a significant amount of time to gain the trust of the commune, I believe, after a period of time, the residents of eKhenana and I formed a comfortable relationship, characterized by shared laughter and mutual appreciation. In exchange for interviews, I would sometimes provide a bottle of Stoney's ginger beer and biscuits. There were significant advantages to this chosen methodology. Mainly, I was able to understand the importance of the communal garden not only from interviews, but from first hand experience in the community. This enabled me to critically investigate the confluences and differences between what I was told, and that which I saw, felt, heard, and lived. The most glaring weakness of this methodology is that while I was attempting to emulate ethnographic fieldwork, after finishing interviews and participatory observation, I would leave the commune and return to my accommodation along the beachfront. In this sense, I was unable to entirely leave my space of privilege, and did not, as is necessary for ethnographic research, live and experience the real daily life of the commune. This leads me into the limitations of this case study.

Limitations of the Study:

There were several limitations to this study, these factors prevented me from fully engaging with my research question, and limited my ability to go as in depth as I would have preferred. Firstly, the violence and repression facing eKhenana and the communal garden played a predominant role in structuring the outcome of this research project. Dealing with the murder of Ayanda Ngila has significantly altered community behavior and their maintenance of the garden. There was a palpable fear within the community, and it is difficult to think that this did not significantly shape the outcome of my research. The violent repression challenged my misconception that the garden was thriving, and pushed my research into a new direction, one that investigated state violence. Ultimately though, it limited my ability to fully engage with residents and experience the lived political philosophy of the commune.

Secondly, as is true of all ISP projects, I was limited by time and resources. I did not have the time necessary to build a foundational relationship with the commune and its leaders. This ultimately prevented my interviews from being as elucidating as I would have hoped. Furthermore, my positionality as a white American man created a power dynamic that inherently affects the research process. I could tell that men were more eager to talk to me, and more comfortable in the interview process. The women of the commune, most likely due to my race and gender, felt visibly uncomfortable and shy during the interview process. One of the major limitations to my data, was that because of this, I interviewed all of the women in the commune together, which created hectic, and at times confusing answers. Related to this, there was an obvious language barrier between myself and the residents of the commune. While my interviews with the leaders of Abahlali were conducted with little or no language barrier, in the commune, I found myself and residents often confused or disconnected in attempting to translate between English and Zulu. It was clear to me that there were some things residents felt comfortable saying in Zulu but not English. As a result, I elicited the help of local resident Sniko to translate and clarify areas of confusion. This just means that some of the information presented in this research is not direct from the participant, but rather the result of translation and is therefore susceptible to misunderstanding.

Finally, the flash floods between April 18th and April 22nd significantly limited my research. During that time, approximately one week, I was unable to visit the commune, and the garden was flooded. This further limited my ability to work in eKhenana and observe how the garden functions. During the extent of my research, due to the floods and repression, the residents of eKhenana did not spend as much time in the garden as I had anticipated.

Nonetheless, I still believe this research, mainly through personal interviews with members of the commune, provides important assertions about the role of food sovereignty in eKhenana.

Analysis:

Creating a Community

In isiZulu, eKhenana refers to Canaan, a promised land of milk and honey, where all are cared for and treated as equal. This is a fitting name for the settlement. Formed in 2018 on the margins of the city, in the grassy hills and embankments of Cato Crest, eKhenana was established out of necessity. Community members arrived when the area was just neglected municipal land, and have since organized to try and secure equitable access to land, housing, and opportunity. eKhenana is the grassroots actualization of urban land reform, something the ANC has failed to address. Confronted by significant economic and social precarity, residents have reclaimed neglected municipal land, close to the city, in order to foster an equitable society and secure opportunity for themselves and their children. A majority of the residents in eKhenana came to Durban in order to materialize a better life. Community members who I interviewed emphasized employment opportunities, better schools, and proximity to the CBD as reasons why they chose to leave rural homelands and family houses.

“This place is nearby the city, the clinics, the school, the higher education, we want to live a better life, we want to be seen as people” (Personal communication, April 20, 2022)

For many, eKhenana represented a site of maturity and growth, where one could stake claim to their own livelihood, and forge a path forward for both themselves and their children. Living with his family of eight, in a two room home, one resident felt a need to inhabit a new space that he could call his own.

“I noticed that this place is not comfortable and I need my privacy. As a boy, I have to get my own place. Luckily, I heard that there was a place like this...where I can get my own house and feed my own chicks...so that I can stand up for myself” (Personal communication, April 19, 2022)

It is difficult to reconcile the prescribed expectations of adult life and parenthood, within the grueling economic reality of peripheral life. Yet eKhenana provides a landscape in which this is possible. A landscape where individuals are closer to employment opportunities, resources, and schools.

“I came here because I have a child, Kwanelo, who lives with disability. In town there is no special school so...I decided to come here to find him a special school” (Personal communication, April 21, 2022)

The lived experiences of many eKhenana residents follow a similar story. The legacy of Apartheid maintains separate and unequal development. As a result, eThekweni represents the only viable space in which families can seek out a livelihood. Across South Africa, informal settlements have been established to support the growing number of urban youth seeking employment, yet there is something exceptional about eKhenana. It contrasts significantly with other settlements in that the residents aspire to create something more than just a place to live; they dream of creating a community. A place of equality, with a shared economy and collective living. A place of dignity.

The aspiration of eKhenana is to create a commune, an egalitarian society that opposes the deeply unequal logic of capital. eKhenana cannot be defined as an informal settlement, in doing so, you dilute the communities implicit and explicit revolutionary objective. This involves the creation of communal institutions and a reciprocal economy of gratitude. They have

implemented horizontal relations free from oppression. There is true democracy in that everyone's voice is heard. Residents hope to sow the seeds of radical possibility. They recognize that the restoration of dignity, of humanity, is unattainable in a world where the sanctity of equality is ignored.

“It is a communal place where everyone is equal. And that is restoring dignity, because dignity is about adults being equal with others” (Personal communication, April 6, 2022)

The occupation was established in recognition of humanity. Walking through the grassy fields of Mkhumbane (Cato Manor), weaving between the resolute structures of recycled aluminum and concrete, you can't help but feel a natural abundance of warmth, an overwhelming sense of belonging and safety. The commune of eKhenana is not only a place to live, but a place you are proud to call home.

“Yes, it is a home...the people I live with is what makes it a home...I've found my other brothers, my other sisters here in eKhenana...I feel warm when I am here in eKhenana...I feel safe” (Personal communication, April 19, 2022)

Khenana is a site of joyous resistance. It is a community in every sense of the word.

“The things I like about eKhenana...the state of living, we do things together, like cooking, going to the garden, we care about each other...we all do things together, it's all communal and everything, one person doesn't suffer while others do nothing, we share everything, we sit down, and we talk as a community” (Personal communication, April 20, 2022)

Born in the margins, eKhenana's communal politics of the poor presents a viable alternative to the dehumanizing, subordinating logic of capital. It questions the legitimacy of a system that separates us from our labor. A system that disconnects us from our land, ourselves,

and each other. If free from repression, eKhenana could blossom into a thriving commune, founded on principles of collective humanity. But unfortunately, instead of focusing on developing this revolutionary community of the poor, eKhenana has been forced to divert the entirety of its attention and resources towards resisting unlawful eviction.

The vision for an equitable, just, and prosperous commune was met by violent retaliation from the overseeing eye of the state. The anti-land invasion unit began its work immediately, with swift brutality, as the protectorate of elite interests. According to residents, they burnt shacks along with people's property, destroyed supplies of food, all while shooting live ammunition and rubber bullets at fleeing residents.

“In my community eKhenana, [they] doesn't recognize us as citizens of Africa, of South Africa...The first time we were occupying this land, government says we have no right to stay here, [they] demolish our shacks, burned our clothes, our things, that's why I am saying brutality” (Personal communication, April 20, 2022)

The rule of law has been disassociated from the lived experiences of the poor, and systematically ignored by the local municipality. Despite challenges from the court, the city continued unlawful forced evictions and the burning of property. In the face of such brutality, where property is burned, and lives are lost, it has been an immense struggle to implement the political objectives of the commune. Fortunately, a court order on April 24th of 2020 ensured eKhenana security of tenure, albeit only interim, until alternative accommodations are found. Despite its shortcomings, the community now has greater freedom to implement their vision for a radical alternative. The communal garden is at the forefront of this revolution. The sowing of a communal garden functions to restore dignity and actualize the political, social, and economic objectives of the commune.

Sowing the Seeds of Dignity

“The garden is the first step in what we want to achieve, it is like a foundation, because in the fight with the capitalist system, one of the most potent weapons the system uses is poverty...I know for a fact that a lot of us as the working class are trapped by the system because we are hungry...if I am able to control what goes into my stomach, it is huge, it is a big step” (Personal communication, April 9, 2022)

There exists a sacred relationship between us and the earth. As we till the soil, we nurture something far more complex than just food to eat. In sowing the communal production of food, we can reap the restoration of dignity. In the wake of violent destruction and forced removals, eKhenana emerged as victors, and with their newfound security of tenure, established a communal garden, embodying the spirit of eKhenana in the fertile land that they could now call home. The objective of the garden is two fold,

“One, to ensure that the families in the community are sustained by harvesting and giving food to poor headed households, and second...to actually sell the surplus like your spinach and your cabbage...those are sold and the proceeds are shaped in a communal way” (Personal communication, April 6, 2022)

The success of the commune is interwoven with the success of the garden. If the spinach, butternut, and amadumbe grow strong, so too does the mind, body, and soul of eKhenana. The municipality may be able to restrict poor people from accessing the city, they can deny them their fundamental rights, threaten their lives, and rob them of their humanity, but they cannot destroy the spirit of the garden. With this fertile land, the potential for eKhenana knows no boundaries.

“When there is land...you can survive without government” (Personal communication, April 6, 2022)

When there is land, communal land, there exists the potential for freedom. By engaging in the liberatory politics of food sovereignty, you are subverting the logic of capital. You began to create radical alternatives that exist outside government, outside the overseeing eye of state capitalism.

The idea of the garden emanated from a politics of hunger. Marginalized by further unemployment during the pandemic, people simply could not access food. The garden is a communal solution to one of the most precarious contradictions of capitalism. You need food to survive, but because food is considered a commodity, to access it requires money. In the context of Durban, a city with staggering unemployment, this means a lot of people live food insecure.

“Most of us are unemployed, but need money to buy everything, buy food, when you are unemployed where do you get the money?” (Personal communication, April 19, 2022)

Leaders of the commune, with initial support from Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST), planted the first seeds with the stated purpose of fighting the encroaching threat of hunger.

“We started our communal garden in 2020, covid time, the hunger became more, so we decided to grow our food, to avoid the hunger; it has really helped us, because we go outside to buy mealie mealies and rice, but our potatoes and spinach is there, and it feeds most of the community” (Personal communication, April 20, 2022)

At the onset, establishing the garden presented significant challenges. There was a dearth of both practical knowledge and material resources. Most residents had never engaged in agriculture before, and to exacerbate the issue, the community could not afford the required tools. For the most part, eKhenana's grassroots implementation of food sovereignty was one through trial and

error. The garden is run communally, with a system of rotational labor. It is not uncommon for those who are unemployed to spend their entire days in the soil. The garden is run jointly between the womens and fathers league of eKhenana, and as a result, the community has emphasized the equitable distribution of labor between men and women. While the garden originally was just for subsistence, over time, it became more and more prosperous, and with an abundance of spinach, it soon blossomed into a financial asset.

“Our wish is to grow a lot of veggies, a lot of spinach, and serve those to some of the bigger stores, we are going to eat them, but we plan to have a part of them go to sales”
(Personal communication, April 20, 2022)

Revenue from the communal garden is then split evenly amongst all residents of the commune, and reinvested into communal projects and the circular economy. So far, the communal garden has produced enough to not only feed the entire community, but also, to create a communal poultry farm, a roadside truck shop, and a Frantz Fanon school, where political leaders can educate the masses. The radical potential of these projects must not be understated. In their communal garden, eKhenana is actualizing an alternative world, a world free from exploitation.

“We work collectively, women, youth league, fathers league, joking, singing...nobody has that feeling of oppression because we understand what we are doing, and where we are going... to us, it's more like a duty that we have to fulfill, we are on a mission of changing our lives” *(Personal communication, April 9, 2022)*

Food sovereignty means control over the production, distribution, and consumption of food, and in doing so, fundamentally disrupts the separation of producer and consumer. In planting a communal garden, you can once again rejoice in the fruits of your own labor. This disruption restores dignity. You do not need to wait for employment, for a check from the

government, instead, residents of the community are tilling the soil themselves, working towards an autonomous and equitable society. Working in the garden is not a place of exploitation, but rather, a joyous space of laughter, song, and exclamation.

“I love working in the garden, the garden means a lot to me, where I come from we do not have much time to go to the garden and work, so I have learned here in eKhenana to work here in the garden to grow plants, and I still want to learn more about the soil, about the plants, about the garden things, I enjoy to plant the seeds, I enjoy planting, I can plant the whole day” (Personal communication, April 20, 2022)

Residents carry with them a deep appreciation for the garden. It not only saves the community from the grueling subordination of hunger, it also nourishes a sense of belonging. Working in the garden is a reclamation of your humanity. The people of eKhenana can't help but smile when they discuss the garden.

“When the spinach is grown, or grown enough to be sold or eaten, my heart just, it feels good” (Personal communication, April 20, 2022)

Nestled between a meandering creek and sporadic homes, the garden symbolizes all that the commune hopes to achieve. It is a source of pride. A site of strength, resilience, and hope. The community eagerly works to till and care for the soil, because at the end of the day, the garden represents the heart and soul of Khenana.

The struggle for food sovereignty is the struggle for dignity, and the struggle for dignity is in itself revolutionary. By engaging in the community garden, and tilling the soil, the residents of eKhenana are taking part in the revolutionary politics of dignity. Food sovereignty is a space of radical openness, a place of restoration, where even the most marginalized can recover the

shared recognition of humanity. The communal garden restores dignity to the people of eKhenana by ensuring that no person ever goes to sleep hungry.

“Now I don't feel any hunger, it's because of the garden and because of Abahlali”

(Personal communication, April 20, 2022)

How can you feel dignified when you are systematically denied the foundation for human life? By treating what we eat as a right rather than a commodity, we began to see ourselves, and society, in an entirely new light. For residents, escaping the paralyzing grip of hunger and accessing food is inextricable from the restoration of their dignity.

In interviews, residents agreed, they correlated sovereignty over food to the restoration of their dignity.

“The garden has a role in restoring dignity, like I said, I am able to go to the garden and plow, I am able to go and reap what I have plowed, In that way, I am not going to the bed hungry. I am willing to do everything that is coming my way to develop the community,

slowly, slowly I am trying, I love this place, yo, I love this place” (Personal communication, April 19, 2022)

Here, it is evident how the struggle for food sovereignty and dignity are one in the same. To live a dignified life is to secure access to food.

“Everything that we eat comes from the soil, it comes from the garden. If you have the garden, you do not have beggars... To me, to go and ask for food, whether it's people I know or strangers, your dignity is damaged, it becomes damaged. But if you have food to survive for a day... it helps a lot, in your struggles... because you have separated the struggle for getting food” (Personal communication, April 9, 2022)

In providing food for eKhenana, the garden changes everything. It is the first step in restoring dignity and reclaiming marginality as a site of radical possibility.

“We believe they have restored dignity. No child goes to sleep without food, no child does not go to school because they lack money, no child that will not go to school because they are hungry. They have the projects. It is a communal place where everyone is equal. And that is restoring dignity” (Personal communication, April 6, 2022)

In a system that survives by divorcing people from their humanity, from their dignity, the most revolutionary action one can take is to reclaim that which makes them human. This is much easier said than done. eKhenana has been relegated to a space of invisibility, where their starvation, suffering, and lives don't matter. From a position of marginality, reclaiming your dignity is a constant struggle. It is inspiring then, to witness just how successful the communal garden has been in sowing the seeds of dignity. It presents a viable path forward, where South Africa's landless peasants can assert a right to the city, and more importantly, to assert their right to dignity.

“You know when you are full in your stomach, you feel like you are a human being, you are not ashamed of anything, that in my way, that is dignity alone, because if you are hungry, you are scared to even speak to make decisions, but if you are full in the stomach... you know what you're doing and you do it right” (Personal communication, April 20, 2022)

The history of South Africa is the history of separating indigeneous communities from their land. In doing so, you create a class of landless laborers, who in order to survive, rely not on eachother, not on the soil, but on a wage.

“Here in South Africa, when they came, they know for a fact, that to turn these people into slaves, they have to take their land, their livestock, so they are forced to come to us on their knees” (Personal communication, April 9, 2022)

This process remains essentially unchanged. In South Africa today, the masses of landless peasants have become slaves to wage labor, with the always present fear of going hungry as their overseer. Yet by occupying land, resisting forced removals, and organizing outside of the government, in tilling the soil and having sovereignty over the communal production of food, eKhenana has restored dignity and subverted the unequal logic of capital. Because the communal garden restores dignity, it is a revolutionary force. This directly challenges the authority of the municipality. By restoring dignity in the gardens of eKhenana, the people are demanding that their humanity be recognized. They are questioning the legitimacy of a society that uses and discards them as if they are objects. Because of this, because the garden has helped to actualize an alternative world, a place where everyone is equal, it is now under attack. In recognizing its revolutionary potential, the municipality is now working to eradicate food sovereignty in eKhenana, and silence the politics of dignity.

State Violence and Repression

“The garden has been destroyed indirectly, and directly...They know that for us, the garden is one of our pillars of strength...they know that if they destroy it, we...we will see that our vision, our dream, is too far” (Personal communication, April 9, 2022)

The municipality recognizes eKhenana as a threat. They have occupied land in the interest of the public good, which inherently challenges the control of the African National Congress. As a result, the garden, the foundation of all that eKhenana has and will achieve, is under violent attack. In march of 2022, Ayanda Ngila was brutally murdered in the garden. Then,

only three months later, Nokuthula Mabaso was assassinated. Both Ayanda and Mabaso were leaders, activists, and revolutionaries. As leaders in the communal garden, their deaths represent a strategic decision by the municipality to target the dignity and autonomy of eKhenana. The community has successfully organized outside the purview of the state, outside the control of capital, and therefore its leaders pose a direct threat to the entire fabric of modern society.

“The ANC does not want us to mobilize the commune. The ANC wants to see us starve so that we come back to government and beg for government grants and so forth. When people start organizing and wanting to sustain themselves and wanting to build their own sort of economy, the ANC destroys it...the ANC is against food sovereignty” (Personal communication, April 6, 2022)

For the people of eKhenana, the land they are occupying is now a home. They have built a spiritual connection within the community that is sustained by the land. It is more than just a place to live. From the perspective of the municipality, eKhenana is not a community at all, but rather a barren space, whose economic potential is being wasted by the commune. The municipality wants to remove the shack dwellers to build a new development complex, yet the residents are adamantly organizing the commune against this proposal.

“I will not say they want to develop, they want to steal our land away from us, they want to chase us away and build their own businesses, but that doesn't benefit a lot of people, it benefits themselves only” (Personal communication, April 19, 2022)

Developing flats on the land that is currently being used in the communal garden would render the residents of eKhenana landless and hungry.

In removing the people from the land that feeds them, that sustains them, they are in effect silencing the political objective of the garden. The municipality wants the land in

eKhenana in order to extract profit, and they are willing to achieve this by any means necessary. They know that in destroying the communal garden, they are destroying the commune. Subsequently, the garden has been attacked both directly and indirectly, and is now struggling to sustain itself and its revolutionary agenda.

“They destroy the poultry, they killed all the chickens, they destroy the garden, it’s overgrown now with weeds” (Personal communication, April 19, 2022)

In eKhenana today, every communal institution is in jeopardy of ruin. The roadside stand was ransacked. In the past, it was flourishing, supplying a basic income for the community. Now, it stands empty, desolate, and locked up. The Franz fanon school, previously a model of mass education, now goes unused. And the communal garden, once described as the commune's pillar of strength, has been systematically dismantled.

“We’ve never been in a situation like this, we are in downfall” (Personal communication, April 19, 2022)

If the communal garden is in downfall, the commune is in downfall, and the garden has been nearly destroyed by the municipality. Ayanda was murdered while trying to reconnect an irrigation pipe that supplied water to the garden. The pipe was targeted because without it, the soil would become infertile and crops would die. With no access to food, there would be no energy for the struggle.

“Of course, it was an attack. To destroy the irrigation pipe, you are saying that you are against the garden. And when the person comes to fix it, and you kill the person that was coming to fix the pipe, then it is a clear sign that you are actually destroying the community as a whole” (Personal communication, April 6, 2022)

The murders of Ayanda and Nokuthula represent a direct attack on the commune, and the effects of this violence have rippled throughout the entire commune. Residents are afraid. The assassinations of eKhenana's leaders have sown a deep fear within the community. While the garden used to be a space of laughter and song, it's now scarred by the violence. People avoid the garden because they fear for their lives. Faced with such immense violence and pressure, eKhenana has had to put a hold on its political and social objectives.

“Currently, unfortunately, our garden is struggling due to the oppression we are facing...Our minds are focused on one agenda, which is how to defend our land”
(Personal communication, April 9, 2022)

Implementing food sovereignty requires an immense amount of time and resources. It has become increasingly difficult for eKhenana to care for and maintain the communal garden in the context of such violent retaliation. The democratically elected leaders of the commune, Lindokuhle Mnguni and Landu Tshazi, are currently in hiding. They are unable to return to eKhenana to grow the commune and restore the garden because they fear for their lives. The community is traumatized. Many residents are in constant fear, and fear is a paralyzing force. It has worked in alliance with the municipality to limit the revolutionary potential of eKhenana. It is difficult to live when you are first struggling to survive.

The municipality also indirectly targets the communal garden. By arresting residents for fallacious crimes, and drawing out the court proceedings, the municipality keeps eKhenana's leaders in jail, and preoccupied, rather than in the commune and garden where they can further develop alternative institutions. Residents are forced to spend all day attending court proceedings, instead of in eKhenana, where they could be sowing the seeds of revolution. Anytime you organize outside of the African National Congress (ANC), you become a target for

violence. It is unfortunate that the main struggle in eKhenana is resisting the ANC. This detracts from the actualization of the political objective of the commune, mainly the restoration of dignity.

Dignity is an inherently revolutionary force, and the first step in achieving dignity is the ability to go to bed with a full stomach. The municipality, in destroying the communal garden, is destroying the revolutionary potential of eKhenana. Although the communal garden has been devastated by the recent violence, the community is determined to resist. They see it as their responsibility to restore the garden, and to once again plant the seeds of dignity.

“We believe in that garden...it’s our revolutionary duty, there is a political objective that we want to achieve” (Personal communication, April 9, 2022)

The communal garden is a force to be reckoned with. It embodies the spirit of the commune, and it will serve as the foundation for all that eKhenana hopes to achieve. The constant threat of violence has taken its toll, but the communal garden is still there. It will always be there, because the residents know that their livelihoods and their dignity depend upon it.

“We have no option but to succeed, because if we don’t, we will be telling others not to try...This is the start” (Personal communication, April 9, 2022)

eKhenana is a site of radical possibility. The political objective of the commune is to achieve an equitable, just, and democratic society. When the leaders of eKhenana talk about revolution, they are talking about the communal garden. The importance of food sovereignty, of having access to food, cannot be understated. eKhenana exists in the margins, in a site of deprivation. The garden, by restoring dignity and creating an autonomous, thriving community, challenges the very politics of marginality. It has consequently become the focus of violent retaliation. It is inspiring that despite this violence, the garden continues to survive. The residents will continue to sow the

seeds of dignity, because deep down, they know that the tilling of the soil has the potential to change everything.

Conclusions:

The struggle for food sovereignty is the struggle for dignity, and the struggle for dignity is in itself the revolution. When we are theorizing marginality, we cannot only think about it as a site of deprivation. Yes, it can be a space of precarity, of impoverishment, but out of this immense pain and suffering there exists a radical potential. It is a space where alternative worlds can be realized. When we are talking about the radical potential of the margins, we are in fact talking about the communal garden, about the restoration of dignity. The communal garden, by feeding the commune, by nurturing a sense of community, is restoring dignity. The residents of eKhenana have formed a connection with the land, one of reciprocity. As they work the land, and till the soil, so too does the land work on them. Dignity is inextricable from the politics of food sovereignty. It is impossible to feel respected, to feel human, when you have no access to the bare foundation of all life. By tilling the soil, eKhenana is sowing the seeds of dignity, sowing the seeds of revolution.

The communal garden is in its entirety, a politics of the poor. Subverting both the state and capital, the commune does not rely upon others, it reaps the rewards of its own production. Food sovereignty presents a viable alternative to the unequal urban landscape. It enables marginalized communities to assert a right to the city. This research proposes that marginal communities, within the urban landscape, can utilize the communal garden to challenge the dehumanizing logic of capital and restore dignity. By sharing the experience of eKhenana, I hope to illustrate how the politics of food sovereignty and dignity intersect to actualize an alternative world, one defined by equality and the recognition of our shared humanity. Within the context of South Africa, the most unequal country in the world, and in some respects a failed state, food

sovereignty can begin to stitch together a new world. I only hope that more communities in the urban landscape are able to engage in its liberatory potential.

In creating these new worlds we must listen down. As scholars, activists, and politicians, it is imperative to embrace the lived experiences of the poor. It is here in the garden of eKhenana where radical possibilities are realized. By radical possibility, I mean the restoration of dignity. The work of marginality is heavily contested, and the restoration of dignity is a constant struggle. In this struggle, the state uses violence and repression to silence alternative worlds. It is essential that we amplify the margins, that we till the soil and engage in a politics of dignity. Food sovereignty demands that we rethink our relationship to land, to our communities, and to ourselves. It demands that we recognize the shared humanity inherent in the production and consumption of food, and in doing so, it demands the restoration of dignity.

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