WORKING CLASS IMMIGRANT ORGANIZING
IN THE WAKE OF THE WAR ON TERROR

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
(Geography)

at the
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
2022
Approved ______________________

Adviser Title  __Professor________

Dept. of Geography

Date ____15 December 2022____
Acknowledgements

This project is the work of love and community. First, this project would not have been possible without the participation and support of friends and comrades at Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM). I want to thank Fahd, Rishi, Anshu, Kazi, and everyone in the DRUM office for the countless conversations they had with me, sharing their insight, knowledge, and time to think about organizing in the contemporary conjuncture. I also want to thank Akash and Jensine for being inspiring collaborators, co-conspirators, and friends to think and write with.

My family and friends have been amazing throughout this process. I am lucky to be in community with friends in Madison—Erin, Kela, Luke L., Luke H., Danya, Stephe, Sameera, Sam, Gareth, Ruth, Marco (among others)—who have offered encouragement in every way possible. I am grateful for my friends in New York City who always made sure I had a place to stay and company to be with—Dan, Oliver, Meredith, Ben, Sabina, and Steven. I am also thankful for my friends Charlie and Eleanor, who have spent hours on the phone listening to me talk about this thesis. This project could not have been possible without the support of my partner Rachel, and my parents, Ram and Pushpa, who have given me all I could ever need and more.

I also want to thank my advisor Keith Woodward for pushing me to stick with this project and encouraging me to improve on it in ways I didn't think were possible. I am grateful for our conversations and relationship which continually makes me a better thinker, researcher, and writer. I have also been privileged to have Sarah Moore and Jenna Loyd as my committee members, and I am grateful for their time and insight on this project.
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Introduction

“…We first, we think about the people who lost their lives, we feel the same thing as the American people. We get hurt about everything. I hope we help the government to do their job, but after they finish the investigation, I hope they will release us…And thank you for everyone listening to this message…”

— Detainee #3

I came across this testimony from a detainee at Passaic County Jail while digitizing Desis Rising Up and Moving’s (DRUM) archives in New York City. It was collected as part of DRUM’s efforts to free immigrants who were caught up in post-9/11 anticipatory securitization sweeps from detention centers, jails, and prisons. While 9/11 was important to their early work, Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) was formed in 2000, as a “brown peoples’ organization based in the rapidly browning apple of NYC” to address the intersecting crises of: anti-immigrant sentiment, low-wage jobs without basic rights, police brutality, and educational discrimination (DRUM 2000). Over two decades, the organization has built a multigenerational membership of over 3000 adults, youth, and families from across the diaspora of the South Asian communities, encompassing Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Guyana, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Trinidad & Tobago, and beyond. DRUM has developed a model of South Asian and Indo-Caribbean undocumented workers, women, and youth led organizing for rights and justice from the local to the global. Cross-community alliances with marginalized people in the U.S. and across the Global South are a cornerstone of DRUM’s strategy for social and economic justice.

Sitting in a corner of DRUM’s second-floor office and community space in Jackson Heights, I used a floppy disk and zip drive reader to move the organization’s records from the

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1 From “Cassette #5: Detainee Testimonies: 2002”
early-2000s onto the organization’s central storage. While sifting through the box, I found a series of cassette tapes and a portable cassette tape recorder and player. I played the tapes while digitizing the other records, listening to recordings of radio interviews about protests and community events, dance playlists made by DRUM youth members, and detainee testimonies detailing life inside various New York City area jails, prisons, and detention centers.

I remember pausing when hearing this particular testimony, unsure of what to think. It was a confusing statement, different from the other two on the cassette. The speaker, a detainee at Passaic County Jail, blurs the assumed differences between detainees presumed to be terrorists and Americans. The speaker seems to at once support his own detention while advocating for his release. The brief statement is ambiguous and contradictory—proposing both solidarities and dissonances with the American people, the War on Terror, and the various state agents enrolled in security apparatus mobilized after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Listening to the statement nineteen years after it was recorded and nearly twenty years after 9/11, this detainee’s testimony frames the lines of inquiry that make up this thesis.

Throughout this thesis, I look to animate the complex lives of working class immigrants and their engagements with the vast expansion of the immigrant detention and security apparatus in the wake of 9/11. While 9/11 is often treated as an exceptional event, I move the needle back to two immigration reforms in 1996—the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act—which intensified the incarceration and deportation of working class and undocumented immigrants. Moreover, I ground this thesis in the experiences of working class immigrants and their role in movements for decarceration, abolition, and immigrant justice, from the post-9/11 period to the COVID-19
pandemic. Importantly, I highlight the continuing impact of the War on Terror logics and techniques of policing, incarceration, and deportation.

**Background**

South Asian American, or desi, identity evolves alongside white supremacy and capitalism in the United States. White supremacist sentiment, stoked by the Asiatic Exclusion League led to laws like the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act opposed to Asian immigrant labor. It extended to South Asian immigrants in the United States who had arrived to work on farms and the timber industry in California and the Pacific Northwest in the early 20th century. In 1907, white nativists as a part of the American Federation of Labor indiscriminately attacked Indian migrants forcing them to leave their homes and jobs in Bellingham, Washington (Bald 2013: 1-2). The 1913 California Alien Land Law also prevented Punjabi (along with Japanese, Chinese, Korean) farmers in California from owning land and becoming farmers (Prashad 2000: 72). This was compounded by the 1917 Immigration Act which made East Indians, in the eyes of the law, “alcoholics, ‘professional beggars,’ and the insane.” The Act linked racism with eugenics, classism, misogyny, and ableism to reject immigrants at the border. In 1923, the Supreme Court ruled that East Indians already residing in the United States were racially ineligible to become U.S. citizens, not only casting East Indians as undesirable, but naturalized as outsiders in the United States. Racialization was not just juridically coded in United States law but was internal to the constitution of capitalism. South Asian immigrants in the early 20th century were only allowed to be farmers and industrial workers because of their ‘racial’ characteristics, legitimizing social organization as natural by referencing the ‘racial’ components of its elements (Robinson 1983).
U.S. immigration policy took a turn in 1946 with the Luce-Celler Act, which made all Indians already residing in the country eligible for citizenship and developed a quota for Indian immigration to the U.S. The Act was underpinned by elitist ideas — “that U.S. immigration policies toward India should favor scientists, engineers, and businesspeople, and be driven by national considerations of trade and foreign policy” (Bald 2013: 5) — that were enshrined as policy in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which would give preference to “highly skilled aliens” to improve the economy, culture, and end the belief that the United States was a racist nation (Prashad 2001: 74). Technical workers from South Asia flooded into the United States in the 1970s and 1980s largely through employment offers in the science, technology, and medical fields. Congress tightened immigration restrictions in the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1976 and again in 1998 to create the H-1B visa, to import short-term highly skilled technicians to work in Silicon Valley. As Prashad states, “Highly skilled guest workers are now a structural necessity of the U.S. state and it is a blatant example of the slogan, ‘We want your labor, we don’t want your lives’” (2001: 81). These professional, middle class immigrants were incorporated into the racial order of the United States, protected from the most blatant and violent forms of racism, and naturalized as a “model minority,” a nonwhite position that justified lower wages and liminal immigration status and a nonblack position that exemplified cultural values like individual responsibility, entrepreneurship, hard work, and docility.

As more South Asians arrived in the U.S. through family relations and as a result of the increasingly austerity-impacted regions of South Asia, many have joined the working class. They work as street-side vendors, gas station attendants, waiters, taxi drivers, and more. Similarly, working class Indo-Caribbeans in this period have also migrated to the United States and Canada
as a result of uneven economic development and economic and ethnic strife in the Caribbean (Roopnarine 2003). This working class migration has borne the brunt of the policing and surveillance technologies that proliferated in the “War on Terror” following 9/11 (Reddy 2005). Government policies like the Patriot Act, the Absconder Initiative, and Special Registration program have resulted in mass deportations and detentions of South Asians in the United States. Shifting our analytical focus beyond the middle class professional diaspora of South Asians to working class desis can open up pathways to new solidarities and aggregations of interclass, interracial, and postnational identities (Dave et al. 2000). Moreover, DRUM’s organizing exemplifies this shift, showing how working class immigrants build movements for social justice in connection working class communities in New York City without compromising for reforms that would only support South Asians.

In integrating race and class to analyze working class immigrants’ radical acts of place making, I look to contribute the literatures in Asian American Studies and abolition geographies (Gilmore 2007; Gilmore 2022; Heynan and Ybarra 2020). Gilmore’s expansive theorizations of abolition geographies allows for an analysis of the shifting terrain of both racial hierarchies as “group differentiation to premature death” and capitalist uneven development (Bhandar and Toscano 2022). Encounters between the police, FBI, INS and working class immigrant communities describe not only the ways in which racial capitalism operates to maintain racial and class hierarchies in the U.S., but also animates the everyday capacities of working class immigrants to make freedom as a place (Gilmore 2005). Drawing on the Black radical tradition, working class immigrant place-making in the face of political and racial violence gestures to freedom dreams (Kelley 2002) that promise solidarities and collaboration with Latinx, Indigenous, and Black geographies and movements.
Methods

This research is shaped by the ten weeks I spend conducting ethnography with DRUM in summer 2021. During this time, I conducted interviews and participant observation, supporting DRUM with outreach efforts during the 2021 New York City elections. I also supported DRUM in organizing and digitizing their archives, reading through the material as I digitized. During my time with DRUM, I mainly spent time with organizers, rather than members. This is partially due to language barriers (the majority of DRUM members speak Bangla or Nepali), but also to make sure that I did not hinder the political development of members. Political transformation through work is an important part of DRUM strategy to develop the protagonism and skills of working class members. By limiting my participation in member-led activities, I tried to ensure space for members to try out new ideas, strategize, and learn new skills. I supported DRUM’s activities in any way that I could: taking notes for the collective at meetings, organizing print outs and literature, canvassing door to door, doing public outreach, among countless other activities. Some of the most fruitful periods of my research were informal conversations with members and organizers in the DRUM office. During these times, I had the time and space to share my research interests and connect them to concerns of DRUM. While very limited sections of my time with DRUM appear in the following chapters, the politics and social lives of working class immigrants that organize with DRUM inspire much of this thesis.

A note on positionality

While I did not begin my masters’ research with the intention of writing a thesis on abolition geographies, in writing, thinking, and collaborating with friends and comrades over the
past 2.5 years, there is no other way this thesis could exist. In retrospect, abolition geographies were looming in my thinking even before coming to this graduate program, necessary to my political work and social life. I came to Madison at the peak of the pandemic in August 2020. I had spent the previous five months in Boston without a full-time job, delivering groceries twice a week and collecting unemployment insurance. When the widespread protests over the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor broke out across the U.S., I joined the protests as a street medic and distributed health safety equipment in an attempt to limit the effects of the pandemic on the protests. Like many others organizing in this time, we saw massive potential in connecting the pandemic with the protests against police brutality and state violence. We connected with our neighbors to start local mutual aid networks to share resources necessary to make it through the early days of the pandemic and used those encounters as an opportunity for political education on police brutality and the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on working class black and brown lives.

I saw the pandemic as an opportunity to reshape our social relations, to reappropriate and redistribute local and state resources to the people, and also reconnect with each other, disalienate ourselves from our community, neighborhoods, and land. It was a continuation of the type of thinking I had learned when I was politicized in the climate justice movement—while the climate crisis disproportionately impacts working class, Global South, black, brown, and indigenous peoples, it also presents an opportunity to reshape our relations with each other and the land we live on around ideas of justice, solidarity, and mutuality. Moreover, in organizing for climate and environmental justice, we develop a sort of protagonism, a self-transformation that challenges individualism with a commitment to community (“Jemez Principles” 1996). We did our best to practice this across the sites we organized in, from the fight against the Enbridge
compressor station in Weymouth, MA to our campaign for fossil fuel divestment and reinvestment at Middlebury College.

It was not until collaborating with Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) for my research, that I fully came to terms with the revolutionary impact this type of democratic organizing could have. I entered my research with assumptions that I was suited to do research with DRUM in New York City because even though I grew up middle-class in California, I was a first-generation immigrant from South Asia with similar racial experiences as many DRUM members. But as I was conducting research, participating in DRUM meetings and events, canvassing with DRUM members in working class neighborhoods, drinking chai and eating momos with DRUM organizers, I realized that working class politics and members were the heartbeat of DRUM’s work. Through an emphasis on bottom up organizing, political education, a commitment to self-transformation, and building just relations with each other, DRUM’s organizing challenged me as an organizer, activist, and researcher.

In the process of conducting research and writing this thesis, I took a step back to consider what it means to collaborate with an organization like DRUM for research. Rather than relating to DRUM through my identity, the grounding center of this thesis is a recognition and commitment to working class immigrant politics and social life. While DRUM features throughout this thesis, what I hope to uplift are the contingent social, cultural, and material relations of working class immigrant life that “enliven a locality as a place” (Gilmore 2005: 179). In other words, in this thesis, I try to animate the ways working class immigrants make life livable and practice making freedom a place. Finally, in trying to be “dialectically rooted in struggles of everyday life” (Derickson and Routledge 2015, 2), I try to relate this thesis to issues that may have relevance to DRUM’s organizing and other working class social justice struggles.
In trying to contribute to social theory, I know that theory is only useful insomuch as it provides an analysis of the contemporary historical conjuncture and offers a method and practical intervention to societal crisis. As such, this thesis takes seriously the potential of working class immigrant place-making and theoretical practice (hooks 1991).

**Project(s)**

This thesis discusses the potential of working class immigrant organizing amidst the shifts in policing that emerge after the attacks on September 11, 2001. The War on Terror marks a period of intensification in the management and regulation of immigrants as surplus labor. Through existing and new technologies and tools of surveillance, detention, and deportation, immigrants who “look Muslim” are specifically targeted domestically as part of efforts to justify the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and legitimize the distinction between American and Other (Naber 2006). This thesis also shows how these tools and techniques continue to be used today, regulating immigrant labor alongside developments in racial capitalism. The following chapters offer a brief view into the various ways in which working class immigrants are making freedom a place and making life livable amidst racial capitalist violence.

In the first chapter, I turn to the weeks immediately after the attacks on September 11, 2001, when working class immigrant communities were targeted by state agents from the FBI, INS, and DOJ as sites of potential further terrorist activity. In anticipation of terrorist activity, state actors arrest “suspicious” individuals who may be “of interest” to the investigation of the attacks on 9/11 and other terrorist activity (Office of the Inspector General 2003). Drawing on a micropolitical approach that looks to destabilize the certainties of the war on terror state (Anderson 2017), I outline the confusing encounters (Woodward 2014) that unfold between state
agents, immigrants, their environments, and government bureaucracies through proliferating affects of suspicion. As opposed to a focus on preemptive securitization maneuvers that enroll bodies and individuals in relation to the state (Anderson 2010a; Anderson 2010b; Adey 2009), I contextualize the incoherent and illogical actions of state actors in the racializing affects and effects of suspicion and terror. Using the Special Report on the treatment of “September 11 detainees” and detainee testimonies from DRUM’s archive, I look at how encounters between state actors, immigrants, and other individuals at the nexus of state affects and state effects result in the profiling of Muslim, South Asian, and Arab detainees, while also capturing others for “looking Muslim.” This chapter was written with the intention of submitting it to *Political Geography*.

In the second chapter, I discuss the story of a delivery worker and DRUM member who was killed in a police-involved hit-and-run incident. Outlining the social and economic conditions of delivery work in New York City during the COVID-19 pandemic, I argue that immigrant delivery workers face an increased vulnerability to exposure to premature death in two ways. First, I detail the race and class logics of “essential work” in the pandemic and precarity in the platform food delivery economy. In doing so, I show how immigrant delivery workers are at risk of premature death because of the unsafe working conditions in the platform economy during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the increased risk of targeted racial policing. Second, I look at how community policing efforts, through bicycle registration, increase the possibility of violent encounters between the police and delivery workers. I situate bike registrations within a broader legacy of countering violent extremism and community policing programs that increase the vulnerability to exposure to premature death and violence for working class immigrants. Importantly, I look to contribute to the growing literature on the social
composition of labor in the platform economy (Englert et al 2020; Woodcock 2021; Cant 2019) by considering the role of policing in maintaining the social relations of racial capitalism. This chapter was written with the intention of submitting it to *Antipode*. 
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DRUM. (2000). Desis Rising Up & Moving (DRUM) flyer from 2000 with the slogan: ‘Making Change in the South Asian Neighborhood.’ *South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA)*.


Chapter 1: Between Suspicion and Terror: State Theory and the Lives of September 11 Detainees

I. Introduction

In the weeks that followed the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, law enforcement and immigration authorities in the United States came together to detain anyone they perceived to be associated with the attacks. Over 760 individuals were detained in the aftermath of 9/11, many of whom were Muslim, or of Arab or South Asian descent. These “September 11 detainees,” determined to be “of interest” by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) were “defined as aliens held on immigration violations in connection with the investigation of the September 11 attacks” and were detained for extended periods of time at federal detention centers, prisons, or contracted local and county jails, often without bail or formal charges against them (Office of the Inspector General 2003). The majority of these detainees (475) were located at two New York City-area facilities: Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn and Passaic County Jail in New Jersey.

In this chapter, I analyze a series of unnamed detainee testimonies collected by Desis Rising Up and Moving alongside the Office of the Inspector General’s (OIG) special report on the treatment of September 11 detainees. I then question how encounters between the “war on terror” state and South Asian, Arab, and Muslim immigrants produce and emerge from uneven affective relations that attempt to delimit the collectivizing potential of immigrant communities. I came across these detainee statements on a cassette labeled “Three Detainee Testimonies 2002” while digitizing archival material for the community organization Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM). DRUM, an organization made up of working class South Asians and Indo-Caribbeans, was founded in 2000 in New York City and was one of the primary organizations in the city that
worked with and organized South Asian, Arab, and Muslim detainees. Their work in detention centers began in early 2001, when they started their INS Visitation Program to provide case and family support to South Asian detainees in the New York City area. After 9/11, the organization began community outreach efforts to locate the hundreds of “‘disappeared’ South Asian, Arab, and Muslim community members being detained without charges in New Jersey jails” (Desis Rising Up and Moving 2015). They trained dozens of volunteers to visit detention centers in order to offer case support and legal representation to September 11 detainees and others entangled in post-9/11 immigration enforcement.

The detainee statements were used by DRUM and allied lawyers to publicize the conditions of INS-contracted jail by sharing statements about the experiences of Muslim detainees from inside the jails with the media. The testimonies on the cassette are often difficult to hear, obscured by the background noises of New York City or disruptions in telephone connection. In other places, their narratives are cut off by the recording. Through the technical and situational disturbances, the testimonies not only tell the stories of three men in detention following 9/11 but situate their experiences in the context of suspicion and terror faced by people in this period. This paper considers the stakes of understanding racialization in the contingent, intimate, and often incoherent affective relations between state actors and individuals which run concurrently to state effects of racial terror that discipline, surveil, and detain raced and classed bodies. How does suspicion, as a particular orientation of state affects, undergird the racializing effects of state actors that produce the “war on terror” state? In asking this question, what might the pervasive affects of suspicion tell us about the war on terror state’s nonexistence?

To understand these uneven affective relations found in the detainee stories, conditions of detention, and the OIG special report, I analyze how state effects of anticipatory racial violence,
detention and deportation, and systemic securitization structure populations into racial categories and spatially into detention centers, jails, and prisons. I argue that a focus on the pervasive affective materialities of suspicion unveil how state actors utilize terror in immigrant communities to orient populations to the war on terror state’s existence. In other words, state effects of terror in immigrant communities obscure the state’s inability to act as cohesive entity. First, I argue that while state terror is a useful analytic to understand the violence of state actors in the wake of the War on Terror, contextualizing it through state effects and affects allows us to deconstruct the state as a transcendental entity by turning to the minor, contingent moments where the lines between the state actors and individuals governed by the state blur. Second, I outline how suspicion operates as a particular orientation of state affects that tends to racialization. I look at how encounters between state actors, immigrants, and other individuals at the nexus of state affects and state effects result in the profiling of Muslim, South Asian, and Arab detainees, while also capturing others for “looking Muslim.” Finally, I discuss how the conditions of detention at Passaic County Jail depict the continuing proliferation of suspicion as a set of state affects, unsettling relations inside the jail between “regular” inmates, September 11 detainees, prison guards, INS agents, and the jail itself, while animating the effects of state terror.

II. Assembling the domestic war on terror state

“Our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.”

—President George W. Bush (2001)

Theorizations of the U.S. state have multiplied since the attacks on September 11, 2001, especially in the context of the U.S.-led War on Terror, counter insurgency, and terrorism studies. Critical work in this field reinserts the state in the study of terrorism, identifying the
extrajudicial use of political violence with the intention to cause widespread fear or for the purpose of intimidation (Blakely 2007; Jackson, Murphy, and Poynting 2010; Ahmad 2001). Others also identify a particular form of state terror that emerges in the context of counter-insurgency and counter-terror operations, like the post-9/11 “war on terror” (Poynting and Whyte 2012; Stohl 2008). Importantly, terror here is not a rhetorical device, but materially grounded in the politics and motivations of political violence. In the U.S., this notion of state terror has both been used extensively to further U.S. political and economic interests using counter insurgency and counter terror strategies across Latin America (Petras 1989; Menjivar and Rodriguez 2021), the Vietnam War (Pilger 2012), and in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11. State terror is also tied to histories of racialization in the U.S., from the so-called Indian wars (Robinson 2003) to Japanese internment (Naber 2006), where domestic communities in the U.S. are targeted alongside the enemy of the state abroad. As Naber writes, this process “legitimizes the distinction between ‘Americans’ and a constructed enemy Other/enemy of the nation” (2006: 236).

In the context of the post-9/11 securitization, the War on Terror operates along with the fear of the constructed Muslim Other signaling a historical conjuncture, directing attention away from an analysis of neoliberal capitalist restructuring towards racialized communities, in the U.S. and abroad (Lubin 2021: 17). As such, we can recognize how the War on Terror works through heteropatriarchal, classist, imperialist discourses and practices to target Muslim and Black peoples, understanding critically that these labels are dynamic and not mutually exclusive (Naber 2008). Anti-Muslim racism is an operative force in racialization during the War on Terror, unfolding at the intersection of state terror and the oppressions that Naber identifies as heteropatriarchy, classism, and imperialism. Anti-Muslim racism is not only connected to a “longer, global history of U.S. imperial policies in West and South Asia” but is also “in relation
to other, domestic processes of criminalization, regulation, and elimination of racialized peoples by the U.S. state” (Maira 2016: 5 cited in Nguyen 2019: 13).\textsuperscript{1} Enfolded into these racial hierarchies are those who are (mis)racialized as Muslim, including other South Asians, Sikhs, and Christian Arabs (Ngyuen 2019). Responding to the military and security campaigns after 9/11 that are commonly referred to as the US-led War on Terror, Naber and Zaatari (2014) reframe the limited statist frameworks to consider grassroots resistance to the War on Terror. In focusing on embodied and local feminist and LGBTQ activism in the context of the War on Terror, Naber and Zaatari push for a theorization of the war on terror state as a diverse set of processes, actors, institutions, and encounters, that includes the resistances, activisms, and networks of intersectional solidarities unfolding from the encounters with the war on terror state.

I turn to feminist geopolitics to argue that the “state is not a unitary object but is, rather, a set of practices enacted through relationships between people, places, and institutions” (Desbiens et al. 2004: 242). I use the “war on terror state” to think about the numerous state actors and individuals enrolled in the racialization of individuals as September 11 detainees. To challenge the reification of the war on terror state, I look to understand it in the context of state effects and state affects. State effects propose a unitary, cohesive quality to the state, and state affects situate statist encounters in social and differential affective relations that gesture to a further unfolding of affective materialities. More specifically, state effects gesture to the “mundane arrangements” that “help manufacture an almost transcendental entity,” which we refer to as the state (Mitchell 1991: 94). Woodward positions this conceptualization of state effects between the two elements of Foucault’s description of the state, as “a composite reality” and “a mythicized abstraction,” arguing that state effects also gesture to a state affect that helps to constitute statist institutions

\textsuperscript{1} Talal Asad (2007) connects anti-Muslim racism and violence to the crusades, which justifies a just war against those categorized as barbarian and savage Muslims.
and relations (Foucault 2007: 109 cited in Woodward 2014: 26). State affects, then, refer to the contingent, differentiating processes that “leave bodies differently affected despite their assumptions of state unity and coherence” (Woodward 2014: 26). The turn to affective relations requires contending with the contingencies of the social field when considering statist encounters.

In studying statist responses to events that “may emerge unexpectedly from…the circulations and interdependencies that make up life” (Anderson and Adey 2012: 25), many scholars have reviewed the role of biopolitics (Adey 2009; Anderson 2010a), emergency (Anderson 2010b; Anderson 2010c), and risk (Aradau and Van Munster 2007) as strategies to contend with contingency. In this context, Anderson (2010b) proposes the framework of anticipatory action as a statist response to the contingency of life, situating three logics, preemption, preparedness, and precaution, as possible ways to act on indeterminate or uncertain futures emergent from the complexities of social life. These approaches center a micropolitical approach to contingency and the politics of emergency, thinking through the minor, momentary relations that emerge from a site, “where lines between the state and people or lines between peoples perhaps blur, perhaps fray, are perhaps momentarily suspended” (Anderson 2017: 594). Moreover, through an investment in “weak theory” (Sedgwick 1997), these approaches to statist interactions and contingency propose situated and localized scenarios emerging from the relations and politics of a given site (Woodward et al. 2012; Marston et al. 2005).

Therefore, the affective contingencies of the social field need to be taken seriously in order to understand the racializing edges of state effects. State effects respond and build off the differentiating impulse of state affects. Affective relations are uneven, and these inequalities persist and intensify as a result of systemic and historic injustices and inequalities that delimit the
capacity of certain groups to affect the world (Woodward and Lea 2010: 162-163). Affect underlies the minor and subtle relations of exploitation and oppression between objects, bodies, peoples, and environments. Describing the affective politics of fear, Sara Ahmed outlines how affects work to align bodily and social space, regulating bodies in space through “an uneven distribution of fear” (2004: 70). In the U.S.-led War on Terror context, Ahmed shows how this uneven distribution is premised on existing Orientalist stereotypes about terrorism, violence, and fundamentalism, resulting in a new identity category for bodies that might “look Muslim.” Ahmed argues that the uncertainty of terrorism, the possibility of the “‘could be’ terrorist” is what leads to the “restriction on the mobility of those bodies that are read as associated with terrorism: Islam, Arab, Asian, East, and so on” (2004: 79, italics in original). This example animates the organization of social space through affective differentiation, the production of a set of bodies that are restricted in their capacity to affect and collectivize on their own terms. This uneven distribution of affect occurs along the contours of existing inequities and “histories of naming” that “create an implicit argument about the causal relations between terms (such as Islam and terrorism)” (Ahmed 2004: 76). The idea that certain bodies could “look Muslim” is based in random affective encounters that are then codified and perpetuated as the racist state logics of the security apparatus. Moreover, it’s along these contours and uneven distributions of affect that the racializing edges of state effects, state terror, take place—racially profiled and detained bodies suspected of being terrorists are categorized as September 11 detainees as a result of circumstantial (and in many cases, non-existent) links to the attacks on 9/11. Individuals are policed, arrested, and detained on the basis of contingent, differential affects of suspicion.

Suspicion provides the affective backdrop for understanding state effects as state terror. Suspicion, as a particular orientation of state affects, both allows for state actors to identify and
profile individuals along the contours of race, class, and immigration status, while also producing “waves of nonthreatening-yet-unreadable others” (Woodward 2011: 338). In this context, the domestic War on Terror is a statist remobilization of the affective uncertainties of suspicion to justify its existence. In other words, terror as a state effect reorients affects to reify the war on terror state as a transcendent entity. Berlant extends this logic, arguing that “the [Bush] administration asked citizens to feel terrorized too, and likewise to be hypervigilant in everyday life, taking up position as the state’s disciplinary deputies” (2005: 67). Berlant describes how in the securitization of everyday life, the enrollment of citizens as state actors in the war on terror is necessary for the production of national imaginaries safety and security. Uncertainty is necessary for the reification of the state and to secure bodies in relation to the state. For Robinson, “the notion of terror was reappropriated and reapportioned by the state” following 9/11 and is used to obscure the Bush administration’s deployments of selective racial violence necessary to secure bodies in relation to the war on terror state (2003: 165). Not only has state terror historically been necessary as part of the American state-building project most notably through institutions of African slavery and genocidal dispossession of Native American land, but state terror appears again following 9/11 in the expansive wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as domestically, in the widespread securitization, surveillance, and detention of Muslims. Caught up in this expansion of the security apparatus are others who have also historically been targeted by the state for violence based on anti-Black and anti-immigrant logics. Terror as a state effect shows us how state actors look to secure the uncertain and proliferating affects of suspicion by reorienting bodies to the existence of unitary state. As such, suspicion and terror operate on a spectrum of state affect and state effect that emerge from the contingent, intimate relations and politics of a
In the remainder of this chapter, I animate how state effects and state affects operate in the milieu of policing and securitization in the New York City-area after 9/11.

**III. Finding potential terrorists and determining suspicion**

“Let the terrorists among us be warned…We will use all our weapons within the law and under the Constitution to protect life and enhance security for America. In the war on terror, this Department of Justice will arrest and detain any suspected terrorist who has violated the law. Our single objective is to prevent terrorist attacks by taking suspected terrorists off the street.”


In June 2003, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released a special report on the treatment of detainees arrested in connection with the Department of Justice’s 9/11 terrorism investigation. The OIG report focuses on the issues affecting the detainees’ length of detention, the process taken to clear individuals of connections to the attacks to terrorism, removal procedures for detainees, and conditions experienced by detainees while confined. The OIG centers two facilities in the report, Metropolitan Detention Center and Passaic County Jail, both because they held the majority of September 11 detainees and because they were the focus of complaints about detainee mistreatment. In doing so, the OIG report brings to light the variety of state actors involved in the arrests and detention of September 11 detainees, outlining the interactions of officials at the Department of Justice, the FBI, the INS, the Bureau of Prisons with detainees and the general public.

As a document, the OIG special report is lightly redacted, excluding the names and demographic data of detainees, including in their testimonies or accounts of abuse encountered in detention. The report heavily favors the voices of state agents, giving us some insight into the (mis)communications across government agencies regarding the arrest, detention, and treatment...
of September 11 detainees. In this section, I analyze the encounters between state actors, immigrants, and other individuals that result in the classification and detention of certain bodies as September 11 detainees. Specifically, I outline how state actors utilize policing and detention to classify Muslim, South Asian, and Arab immigrants as September 11 detainees, while suspicion differentially affects bodies that “look Muslim,” a racial indiscernibility that constitutes the moving object of the war on terror state.

Understanding suspicion as state affect means outlining its role in (dis)orienting bodily, spatial, and affective relations between state actors, other individuals, and the environments they are in. Nguyen describes suspicion as an “uh-oh feeling,” an instinctual response that signals to an individual that something “doesn’t seem quite right” (2019: 30). Nguyen goes on to detail how more than an instinctual reaction, suspicion is shaped by the “racial formations, cultural histories, and social memories” that trigger the “uh-oh feeling” (2019: 30). This structural analysis of suspicion builds on Ahmed’s description of affective economies, understanding that this form of racialization accumulates on certain, marked bodies delimiting their ability to act or move in a field of affective relations (Ahmed 2004; Ahuja 2011). As such, suspicion works as a particular orientation of state affects that tends to racialization. Suspicion differentiates between the ordinary and the extraordinary, even if as Ahmed notes, suspicion is an empty signifier (Ahmed 2000). While suspicion and the differences it produces are not explicitly defined, its “very failure to provide us with techniques for telling the difference is itself a technique of knowledge” (Ahmed 2000: 29). Instead, a collective “common sense” is developed, as not only that which “is normalized and already known as ‘the given’,” but also in the “normalization of ways of ‘sensing’ the difference between common and uncommon,” (Ahmed 2000: 29). In other words, suspicion works to differentiate not only by skin color, ethnicity, or existing racial
signifiers known and naturalized through existing inequities and histories of naming, but also through other actions deemed uncommon in the wake of 9/11, including the weird actions taken by individuals, proximity to the site of the terrorist attacks, or the spatial aggregation of bodies. As I show in this section, while immigration status is one racial marker used by state actors to classify and categorize September 11 detainees, underlying state affects of suspicion unsettle this determination and enroll others in this category.

Following the September 11 attacks, the FBI coordinated with the INS and other state agencies to set up a “watch list” that would “identify potential hijackers and other individuals who might be planning additional terrorist acts” (Office of the Inspector General 2003). In the week after the attacks, the FBI received more than 96,000 tips or potential leads from the public. Given the massive public interest and concern in the wake of 9/11, Attorney General John Ashcroft issued a memorandum to attorneys that the Department of Justice (DOJ) would “use every available law enforcement tool to incapacitate these individuals and their organizations” with a particular emphasis on immigration law “given the identities of the September 11 terrorists” (Office of the Inspector General 2003). The emphasis on the immigration status of possible terrorists highlighted the importance of FBI and DOJ coordination with the INS to determine which individuals may be “of interest” to the investigation. Immigration status became one of the primary proxies used by the state to classify individuals “of interest” to the investigation and as potential “September 11 detainees.” However, this category, “of interest,” was neither clearly defined, nor handled uniformly across the nation. The lack of a uniform protocol and the expansive nature of the investigation meant that individuals were often arrested in connection to the investigation “incidentally,” by virtue of encountering state agents following “a lead” (Office of the Inspector General 2003). In practice, incidentally encountered individuals
were also arrested because state agents were unable to determine who might be associated with the attacks. This practice occurred despite verbal assessments by the INS and FBI that were meant to determine the level of interest that suspect individuals may hold in relation to the attacks. Moreover, the U.S. Attorney working in coordination with the New York sector of the investigation had different standards of which individuals were “really of investigative interest,” based on individuals’ telephone contacts or proximity to the attacks, resulting in a different prioritization of focus for issuing search warrants, subpoenas, and their legal materials (Office of the Inspector General 2003).

These various techniques for determining which individuals were “of interest” to the investigation resulted in the classification of hundreds of immigrants as September 11 detainees and potential threats to the public. State agents utilized anticipatory securitization, arrests, and detention to classify and prevent these potential threats from acting. Anderson describes how this mode of preemptive action “acts over threats that have not yet emerged as determinate threats” (2010b: 790). Instead, the preemptive classificatory schema “of interest” is used in a social field of indeterminacy, looking to close off potentialities through anticipatory securitization and state terror. State agents did not have a uniform protocol to determining interest. It is across the bodies and spaces of immigrants that we see the effects of these anticipatory violences play out, often resulting in their detention as a result of their lack of immigration status, as opposed to association with the terrorist attacks. However, the preemptive actions of state agents also gesture to an indeterminacy, both in who is of interest and how interest is determined.

Animating this indeterminacy, the OIG reports describes examples of how immigrants were arrested. The leads investigated by the FBI and INS exemplify this uncertainty, but more importantly, show how affects are attached to certain raced and classed bodies along the contours
of histories of racialization and naming (Ahmed 2004; Puar 2007). Suspicious affects are social and differential, accumulating on certain bodies based on perceptions of not only their skin tone or ethnic background, but also involuntary body responses and spatial aggregation with other similar bodies or proximity to sites deemed important. For example, a man was arrested on immigration charges and labeled a September 11 detainee for developing a roll of film with multiple pictures of the World Trade Center but no other Manhattan sites. In the process of his arrest, his roommates were also arrested for lacking legal immigration status in the United States and labeled September 11 detainees (Office of the Inspector General 2003). Another story outlined by the OIG describes how another individual was arrested on immigration charges after the FBI followed a lead in which a person complained to the FBI that a grocery store was operated by “too many Middle Eastern men” (Office of the Inspector General 2003). Underlying the anticipatory securitization and the racial determinations of detention and policing are uncertain state affects that gesture to the spatially contingent and differential and unfold onto further affective materialities. While immigration status plays an integral role in the categorization of individuals as “September 11 detainees,” spatial proximity, telephone contacts, familial relation, or the aggregation of bodies in a space unsettle the racial determinations of this anticipatory action, gesturing instead to how suspicion orients state affects to racialization.

The first detainee testimony on the cassette offers some context on both the indeterminate circumstances that underlie encounters with state agents, but also reference the unfolding affective materialities:

I got picked up right after September 11th. Three weeks right after September 11th. And I was arrested from my friend's house in the nighttime. I was just visiting him, because I was off that day. 2:00 in the night, seven males, they just walked in, they just broke the door, and they just walked in the house. And we got scared. We thought it was some robbers or something. Then they showed their badges, that they were from the FBI, and belong to the government. And they
said: "We are going to search the house". We asked them for a warrant, and they said, just be quiet and sit down, nothing's going to happen, everything's [Audio Breaks] And they started looking for something in the house. They made the house upside down. They took off the carpet from the floor, and made the whole house upside down. They don't know what they are looking for. And later on, they brought two more officers, and they asked for the immigration status, which I wasn't having.²

The arrest takes place in the middle of the night at a friend’s house. Similar to the stories outlined previously, the spatial aggregation of certain, marked bodies triggers suspicion as a particular orientation of state affects requiring a response from state actors. In other words, suspicion marks the detainees even prior to the determination that they lack immigration status. Moreover, in this detainee’s story, these state affects of suspicion undercut the legitimacy of state actors, blurring the lines between the war on terror state and everyday criminals or robbers.

While both state affects underlie this indeterminate and confusing encounter, in the explicit move by state actors to interrogate the individuals about their immigration status, we see the state effects of the war on terror state. The targeting of immigrants by state actors is a result of the expansion of the legal apparatuses to preemptively respond to “terror” after 9/11. Following 9/11, the U.S. government began to implement the full force of a series of policies that expanded governmental power to police and detain immigrants in the United States. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) was the primary piece of legislation that expanded the immigrant detention system in the United States (Reddy 2005).

Its focus with regard to 9/11 is two-fold. First, it enhances the penalties against undocumented immigrants with criminal convictions. In doing so, the IIRIRA expanded the term “aggravated felony” to include more common criminal convictions (encompassing convictions for which the

² Testimony #1 from “Cassette #5: Detainee Testimonies: 2002”
term of imprisonment had been completed in the past 15 years), and put these immigrants in expedited deportation proceedings. Second, it redesignates immigration law outside of the criminal justice system, permitting the Department of Justice to avoid the greater safeguards of criminal law, like “the requirement of probable cause for arrest, the right to be brought before a judge within forty-eight hours of arrest, and the right to court-appointed counsel” (Human Rights Watch 2002: 4).

By focusing their efforts on policing immigration status, state actors work to reorient the indeterminate affects of suspicion in this period to reify the existence of the war on terror state. In executing the full extent of the laws outlined above, state actors utilize state terror to identify Muslims and other undocumented immigrants that “look Muslim” as a target of political violence at home and abroad. However, as we will see, despite the war on terror state’s use of the law to arrest the individual and classify him as a September 11 detainee, the affective materialities of the encounter unfold onto other affective relations and orientations, including the destruction of objects in the house in search of evidence of terrorism and the detainee’s new relationalities at Passaic County Jail. The detainee continues:

But only thing I want to ask the answer, is that I have been here twelve years, never got arrested, never got involved in no crimes, but why did they pick me up and bring me to the jail, and then keep me there for two and a half months to see the judge, even I had no paper. And keep me with the regular inmates. And since September 11th, it’s happening everywhere, and with everybody, especially Muslims, Arabic Muslims, I mean. And that's the whole story.

The detainee references unfolding affective orientations with an entirely different set of bodies, actors, and environments: from his relations with “regular inmates” and the judge, to the physical environment of the jail, as we will see in more detail in the next section. In addition, the detainee describes both the proliferation of suspicious affects “everywhere” but also their particular,
uneven accumulation with “Muslims, Arabic Muslims.” While the categories of Muslim seem determined, the state affects of suspicion unsettle this certainty, enveloping others who are encountered by circumstance into this racial category. Individuals who “look Muslim” are the objects of state terror, but understanding suspicion as an orientation of state affects also gestures to the proliferation of bodies that “look Muslim,” or in other words, bodies deemed threatening to the state and requiring securitization through state effects of terror. Importantly, racialization operates at the nexus of state affects and state effects. While suspicion unevenly affects and accumulates on certain marked bodies based on the indeterminacies of the social field and their interactions with existing inequities and histories of naming, state effects of terror reorient these uncertain relations back to the war on terror state. In other words, individuals that “look Muslim” are identified as targets of political violence through detention, surveillance, and over policing in the reification and justification for the war on terror state.

**IV. Passaic County Jail and the conditions of detention**

The topic of detention, torture, and their relation to affect and state terror has been written about extensively in scholarship on the war on terror, particularly focusing on the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo (Ahuja 2004; Puar 2007). What might the experiences of detention at Passaic County Jail tell us about the micropolitics of suspicion and terror in the war on terror state? While the relations of Passaic seem more routine than Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo, they point to the particularities of September 11 detention in the New York City-area and animate the affective materialities and relations that unfold in the wake of state terror. I focus on Passaic County Jail (Passaic) for several reasons. Passaic was one of the two primary post-9/11 detention centers in the New York City area, holding 400 detainees from September 11, 2001 to May 30, 2002 (over 50% of all September 11 detainees). Passaic was also the focus of the OIG’s
investigation for allegations of abuse against detainees in the media and several lawsuits. While the OIG positions Passaic as a satisfactory example of immigrant detention contrary to the draconian procedures at Metropolitan Detention Center because of its over 15 years of experience housing INS detainees, the report also highlights cases of verbal and physical abuse by prison guards, the use of dogs on detainees, and importantly, violent conflicts between the general population and post-9/11 detainees (Office of the Inspector General 2003). The first detainee from the testimonies on the cassette describes this expansion of racial violence and subjectification of Muslim post-9/11 detainees by the general population in his testimony:

And in the jail, they kept me with the regular inmates. The people who did crimes, robberies, rapes, whatever. And they kept a lot of other people from my country over there. And a lot of other Muslims, that are Arabs or whatever there. And because they kept the immigration inmates and the regular criminal inmates together, I see a couple of people there who had a problem with the regular inmates. Because they were praying inside, and the other people, they don't like it because they were praying. And because of September 11th, there is too much discrimination, because they were Muslim and everything. We talked to the cell officers, and the police department over there, that please don’t keep us with them. But they still kept us with them. And I see this one guy's name who is Abdullah, he broke his arm over there. The regular inmate, the criminal guys, they broke his arm just because he was Arabic and Muslim. And after six months, when I came up from the jail, I didn't know where to go or what to do. Because I have no family over here. I lost my house, I lost my job. And even inside, I had no visit, I had nobody come behind me. Because my friends, they were scared too, to come over there. Because if anybody comes or gets involved in any kind of things since September 11th, first thing that they ask you about is if you are a terrorist and all that things.

State effects of racial violence, state terror, work to reorient bodies in relation to the war on terror state. Yet, as is clear in the testimony, state affects proliferate the spatial relations of Passaic, differentiating bodies and their relation to other social spaces. The detainee describes the affective relations that differentiate regular criminal, immigration, and cell officers, while also detailing the process of distinguishing Muslim bodies praying and the violent effects associated
with appearing Muslim. The detainee also describes how attachments to spaces outside of Passaic are destroyed. Connections to family, home, and employment are broken down as a result of the effects of detention and affects of suspicion. Suspicion also proliferates across the detention space, blurring the lines between regular criminal inmates and immigration inmates, with racializing edges accumulating on bodies that “look Muslim.” The process of identify bodies that “look Muslim” is based on racist state logics that distinguish populations based on existing histories of naming and racialization to manage them. This logic is also foundational to the expanding security apparatus and “countering violent extremism” programs of the war on terror, which targeted Muslim communities based on the unfounded premise that these communities were more likely to generate extremists predisposed to terrorism. In other words, the idea that some bodies “look Muslim” is not a reference to natural or biological understandings of race. Rather, it looks to point out the irrational encounters between state actors that identify certain bodies during the War on Terror for surveillance, policing, and detention. These encounters are then codified as a state logic to justify and perpetuate the targeting of Muslim communities during the operations of the War on Terror.

Suspicion not only affects bodies that “look Muslim,” but also those identified as regular criminal inmates, another determination made along existing histories of naming and racialization. Specifically, here the references to the general population of inmates are grounded in anti-Black sentiment. Detainees leverage this anti-Blackness to uphold claims to innocence for immigrants at the cost of normalizing the everyday criminalization of Black populations in the United States. Similar to determinations of bodies that “look Muslim,” anti-Black encounters between state agents and individuals, or between individuals, are also random and illogical, but codified as a set of state logics to justify and perpetuate anti-Black violence.
However, there’s a level of indiscernibility even in analyzing these detainee statements for state affects of suspicion. What is unknown is the extent of these encounters, the minor and intimate details that shape them, the environmental changes and atmospheres, and more. If ambiguity and uncertainty are central to our understanding of how suspicion proliferates, we must also hold space for the possible relations yet to come or still unknown in the detainee’s affective encounters in the jail. What is clear in this testimony are the racializing effects of state terror, how these logics are reified, codified, and perpetuated as part of the state security apparatus. As the detainee describes, along with the category of September 11 detainee comes a stigma that connects people to terrorist acts, whether they are related to them or not. As we described in the previous section, many of the detainees were arrested on immigration charges, but the effect of this is a racialization that orients bodies and individuals to the war on terror state. As Berlant notes, the war on terror state expands to enroll all of us to be its “disciplinary deputies” (2005: 67). Even inside Passaic, the “regular inmates” occupy this role, becoming state actors that enact racial violence on Muslim appearing bodies categorized as September 11 detainees. As Robinson (2004) describes, terror is reapportioned by the war on terror state to obscure the racial violence necessary for preemption and to reorient the proliferation of uncertainty to justify the necessity of the war on terror state.

To compensate for this uncertainty, state actors implemented a “hold until cleared” policy to hold “September 11 detainees without bond until the FBI cleared them of any connections to terrorism” (Office of the Inspector General 2003). While the origins of the policy are unclear and unwritten, the OIG report notes that both the FBI and the INS understood it as implicit in DOJ policy during this period. The IIRIRA is also an important justification to the Department of Justice’s “hold until cleared” policy. It gave immigration officials some legal basis to hold
special interest detainees until the FBI cleared them of any crimes, including after their deportation proceedings were completed. However, this policy was haphazardly implemented, applying the labels of “‘high interest,’ ‘of interest,’ or ‘of undetermined interest’” to immigrants who may have had federal immigration charges but no connection to terrorism (Office of the Inspector General 2003). On top of the vagueness of the directives to “hold until cleared,” there are a variety of state actors who invent ways to keep detainees in detention. A deputy assistant attorney general in the criminal division describes how state actors utilized preemptive logics to hold individuals on immigration charges until more was found out to prevent the catastrophic consequences of one individual “getting loose” (Office of the Inspector General 2003).

In this context, Passaic and other detention sites are important preemptive holding spaces where state effects of terror are visible, but also where state affects blur subjectivities and statist determinations. Another detainee testimony describes not only his extended stay in Passaic, but his entanglement with the violence and abuse of bureaucratic proceedings:

Then I went on bail on December 21st. Then [they] arrested me again. Then I went on bail on 25,000. Then they arrested me again, on the fourth January. They said before, that the immigration charge now is a federal charge. They keep me in federal jail for four months…For months I have been here in Passaic county. So, I got a deportation in May. But they are not sending me back after that… [Interviewer: Keep going] Still I am here. They are not sending me back. I don’t know what [they will] do with me. So they took my money when they arrested me, the immigration officer: $730. Then I asked him for my money—to the deputy officer, I know his name too. They said that if you ask for money, then your case will become complicated you cannot go back. They said like this. I wrote a letter to immigration for the money, they didn’t give me the money, nothing.

In describing his repeated capture and detention by state actors, the impacts of the Patriot Act are palpable in the detainee’s story. The USA PATRIOT Act was passed approximately six weeks after the attacks on September 11, expanding the power of law enforcement authorities through
surveillance and detention and implementing stricter controls on immigration. In expanding the surveillance and detention apparatus of the war on terror state, the Patriot Act solidifies the stigma of terrorism on certain bodies. In this sense, the Patriot Act is a “vicious intensification of the conditions of possibility of the status quo” (Puar 2007: 266 fn 81). However, paradoxically, the Patriot Act also expands to enroll and orient white bodies in relation to the war on terror state in ways that were formerly reserved for black and other non-American populations in the United States (Puar 2007: 142). This dual intensification and expansion of racial state terror orients bodies, immigrant and otherwise, to the existence and reification of the war on terror state.

Yet, as we see in the testimony, the state affects underlying this capture unfold and constitute other affective orientations between the detainee and the war on terror state. This includes the differential relations between the detainee and state agents like the immigration officer, the deputy officer (at the jail), and his arrestors. These affects also assemble differential relations across spaces of detention between federal jail and Passaic. While these contingent state affects delimit the detainee in his ability to affect other bodies and objects, this is challenged when he threatens knowledge of the deputy officer in charge of his case, stating “I know his name too.” In this confusing encounter with state agents, both subjectivities are blurred, unveiling the inadequacies of state terror as a state effects to exercise racial violence to propose a coherent state. Rather, this statement shows how state affects are mobilized in intimate, differential interactions towards an indiscernibility between bodies, objects, and environments (Woodward 2014).

In this paper I turn to the experiences of detainees alongside government documents to animate the messy, contingent relations that unfold in the exercising of state violence in the wake

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3 The OIG Report is itself a product of the legislation which directs the OIG to “receive and review claims of civil rights and civil liberties violations by DOJ employees” (Office of the Inspector General 2003).
of 9/11. Moreover, I consider the stakes of racialization happening at the nexus of state affects and state effects, where the differentiating, social contingencies of suspicion interplay with statist techniques of racial violence and terror. Importantly, thinking of suspicion as a particular racializing orientation of state affects allows us to understand how affects differently and unevenly impact some bodies over others. While this often happens along the contours of existing racial and social schemas, it also engages nervous ticks, spatial aggregations of bodies, and proximity to sites to differentiate masses.

At the same time, these racial violence through state terror is an essential component of war on terror state’s constitution and composition. Legislation like the IIRIRA and Patriot Act, and state agents’ enforcement of these laws through surveillance, policing, and detention, constitute some of the state effects that identify populations as September 11 detainees. This anticipatory securitization haphazardly enforces these laws as an attempt to secure the proliferating, problematic fields of suspicion, reorienting bodies to the war on terror state’s unity and existence, despite its incoherence.
Works Cited


Chapter 2: Abolition Geographies in the Platform Economy: Essential Work and Bike Registrations in New York City

I. Introduction

“While some New Yorkers utilize delivery workers for convenience, many others rely on them as the key to survival during the ongoing pandemic...The NYPD remains committed to doing all it can to protect these essential workers.”

—Police Commissioner Dermot Shea (2021)

I reached the masjid a few minutes before Borkot’s funeral service was about to begin. The service was happening during Friday prayers at a small Islamic Center near Chinatown on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. By the time I got there, the side street that the Islamic Center is located on was packed with e-bikes loaded with freezer bags. The freezer bags were almost exclusively red, with a Grubhub or Doordash logo emblazoned along the sides. The e-bikes, mostly Arrow 10s, were locked to every open inch of fence, vacant lamp post, or scaffolding. Inside the masjid, there was no spare room. People lined the hallways and entryway to listen to the imam and prayers.

Borkot Ullah, a Bangladeshi food delivery worker who rode an e-bike, was killed by a speeding car being chased by the NYPD in Manhattan. Borkot was making deliveries for Grubhub when the driver ran a red light and hit him. As the driver fled the scene, the unmarked police car, which had been in pursuit before the crash, pulled over to check on Borkot (Kuntzman and Shenk 2021). He was taken to Bellevue Hospital, where he died. Borkot was one of hundreds of Bangladeshi immigrant delivery cyclists who live and work on the Lower East Side, and one of thousands of immigrant delivery workers across the boroughs of Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. He was also one of at least seventeen food delivery cyclists
who died while working in New York City in 2020 and 2021. Almost every delivery cyclist who
died during those years was a man of color and immigrant.

I had been invited to attend the funeral service by organizers at Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM). Borkot was an active member of DRUM, a “multigenerational, membership-led organization of low-wage South Asian and Indo-Caribbean immigrant workers and youth in New York City” (DRUM n.d.). He had joined DRUM having fled Bangladesh after encountering political repression, and alongside DRUM, he had fought for the rights of undocumented immigrant workers—for better wages and safer working conditions, especially during the pandemic. He had been active in the Fund Excluded Workers campaign, which would go on to establish an unemployment fund to benefit undocumented workers across New York who did not have access to traditional unemployment benefits or the pandemic-induced benefits packages.

Other DRUM members recollected how Borkot would attend actions and rallies across Manhattan on his bike during his breaks from work. According to them, he was looking forward to a check from the Excluded Workers Fund, which would have offered him a sense of financial security in the United States and allowed him to send money to his family in Bangladesh.

About three hundred people attended the service and gathered in the alleyway outside the Islamic center following the funeral service. It was clear that his death had a big impact on the close-knit community. While people milled around, a local Bangladeshi media outlet interviewed bystanders about their opinion on Borkot’s death which had an increased profile because of the police involvement in the case. DRUM organizers and members who had attended the service and were interviewed made explicit efforts to emphasize that the focus was on Borkot and his life as a friend, community member, and worker. Moreover, DRUM and Borkot’s allies were adamant that it is against New York City law for the NYPD to engage in high speed chases like
the one that led to Borkot’s death because of how high-speed chases escalate the situation and endanger by-standers. In contrast, many others, including some leaders in the community, used the death as propaganda, deflecting blame away from the police and replacing it with reminders to workers to wear helmets and be responsible while working.

The contradictory viewpoints within the community on the role of the police were stark given the circumstances of Borkot’s death and police silence on their participation in it. Moreover, the contradictions within the community raise questions and lines of inquiry about the relationship between the NYPD and the Bangladeshi (and Asian American) community in New York City, as well as the unbearable encounters between the police and immigrant delivery workers. In this chapter, I consider the role of the police in the platform food delivery economy in New York City. This chapter is not about how companies in the platform economy discipline and surveil immigrant delivery workers. Rather, I argue that the increased presence of the NYPD in delivery worker spaces and lives not only exacerbates conditions of precarity experienced by workers in the platform economy but expands the possibility for violent encounters between immigrant delivery workers and the police. First, I outline the racialized and classed logics of “essential work” pandemic increase the vulnerability to exposure to premature death that gig workers face and experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, I interrogate NYPD efforts to register delivery worker bikes in the context of community policing and the domestic war on terror in South Asian and Muslim communities. Importantly, community policing expands immigrant delivery workers’ vulnerability to exposure to premature death. As such, I argue that bike registrations not only expand potentially violent policing infrastructure in immigrant communities, but articulate class distinctions between working class immigrant

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delivery workers and middle class, “model minority” interlocutors. I conclude by considering how delivery workers keep each other safe by side stepping police involvement in their lives.

II. Abolition geographies and the platform economy

This article looks to bring together abolitionist literature and praxis with recent studies on delivery workers in the platform economy. Platforms are digital infrastructures that allow multiple groups to interact and extract data from the interaction (Srnicek 2017: 30). As a result, “gig work” is also data work, and data in the platform economy is increasingly one of capital’s “new frontiers” for accumulation as it fights to counter declining profitability rates (Srnicek 2017; van Doorn and Badger 2020). Recent studies on platform capitalism have sought to reshape inquiry into the platform economy through a focus on workers’ perspectives on class composition as a way to make sense of contemporary workers struggles (Englert et al 2020; Woodcock 2021a). Essential to an understanding of class composition is a focus on the social composition of labor, “the specific material organisation of workers into a class society through the social relations of consumption and reproduction,” including an understanding of workers’ housing, the gendered division of labor, migration, racism, and more (Notes from Below 2018). While data is an integral part of the exploitation of platform workers, a focus on workers and class composition highlights the continuing importance of the antagonisms between capital and labor, especially if, as Woodcock writes, “understanding capital [in the platform economy] needs to also be about identifying how it can be overthrown” (2021b: 708).

A focus on the social composition of labor allows for a situated analysis of the material conditions structuring working-class lives. It has been used in relation to delivery work and platform labor across in a variety of contexts, albeit not always explicitly. These assessments
vary from general analyses of the diverse material conditions of delivery work in the U.K., including migration, housing, and education (Cant 2019), to race and racial wage codes in platform work (Dubal 2021), to the role of migration in the labor process (Lam and Triandafyllidou 2021; van Doorn et al. 2020; van Doorn and Vijay 2021). Recently, the role of COVID-19 on platform workers' lives has been analyzed, both as a factor that increases the precarity that workers face (Ravenelle et al. 2021) and in partially decommodifying platform labor through local regulation (Katta et al. 2021).

While understudied in the context of delivery work and platform labor, policing constitutes a major aspect of the social composition of labor for racialized working-class communities in the United States. Therefore, I look to understand the role of policing in the platform economy, particularly in the ways it impacts immigrant delivery workers. Policing in the United States is tied to long history of maintaining racism and slavery (Reichel 1988), controlling “unruly” laborers and violence against strikers (Kumanyika 2020), and the surveillance and disruption of communist, black liberation, and environmental movements (Churchill and Wall 1990). Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, U.S. police and security forces expanded the surveillance, profiling, and coercive policing of South Asian, Arab, and Muslim communities through “community policing” and “countering violent extremism” programs (Nguyen 2019). Through collaboration with community leaders, these programs have intensified the racialized surveillance, policing, and incarceration of working-class Muslim, South Asian, and Arab immigrants as communities predisposed to terrorism. Policing and incarceration are necessary tools for the state to manage these disorganized surplus populations (Gilmore 2007; Reddy 2005).
Increasingly, the impacts of racialized policing are being considered in the context of public health and the social determinants of health. Policing and incarceration work alongside capitalism to reproduce group-differentiated and systemic vulnerability to premature death (Gilmore 2007). Recognizing the violent impacts of police interactions, Critical Resistance and the Oakland Power Projects (OPP) launched a campaign to “disconnect health crises and healing from police response,” in order to minimize police contact with community members (Oakland Power Projects n.d.). Critical Resistance and OPP spurred others to think about how contact with the police increases vulnerability to racialized violence and exposure to premature death (Cooper and Fullilove 2016; American Public Health Association 2018). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Freshour and Williams (2020) discuss how the devalued and invisibilized essential labor of immigrants and Black workers in the South has heightened vulnerability to premature death at two levels: 1) it devalues their labor, putting workers at increased risk of COVID-19 exposure, 2) precarious essential workers were more likely to encounter police while working, charged with enforcing physical distancing and stay at home regulations (also see Frydenluynd and Dunn 2022). As such, increased racialized vulnerability to exposure to premature death “forms a fatal infrastructure for COVID-19’s spread, and constitutes a central dynamic of state and capitalist responses to the pandemic” (Freshour and Williams 2020). As such, policing in immigrant communities is integrally tied to the racialized relations of production, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. When considering the social composition of delivery work, policing shapes the material basis of immigrant delivery worker lives in the U.S. In the remainder of this article, I demonstrate how the logics of essential work and community policing increase immigrant delivery workers’ vulnerability to premature death.
III. Delivery cyclists in New York City: Navigating “essential” work in the pandemic

“If a law enforcement officer attempts to stop you from providing delivery services in one of the areas below, please show them this notice. Please encourage them to contact the Grubhub Legal Team regarding this notice at [email protected]. In response to COVID-19, several local governments have issued orders restricting the movement of individuals, with the exception of certain essential services. Food deliveries have been deemed essential services.”

—Grubhub COVID-19 Notice (2020)

A Grubhub COVID-19 legal notice was released in the early days of the pandemic in New York City, the epicenter of the first COVID-19 outbreak in the United States. It advised delivery workers on how to continue with their jobs in the transformed landscape of work during the pandemic. In New York City, this was particularly important, given that some of those most impacted neighborhoods were the working-class immigrant communities in Queens, Manhattan, and Brooklyn, where many delivery workers lived and commuted from. In these boroughs, as a result of the pandemic, already underpaid workers lost their jobs; a disinvested public health system that closed hospitals in low-income communities of color was overwhelmed by the first “spike” of COVID-19; and increasing rents intensified socioeconomic disparities (Thompson et al. 2020; Correal and Jacobs 2020; Springer 2020). The impact of the pandemic was intensified by the material realities of working-class immigrant life in the United States: living in shared apartments, multi-generational families, and mixed family housing; not receiving government support due to immigration status or language barriers; and having to continue working and commuting by public transportation to jobs considered “essential” by the government (Ojha 2020).

The Grubhub notice on “Grubhub driver essential service and Shelter in Place orders” came in the wake of U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency’s (CISA) advisory memorandum on the identification of essential
critical infrastructure workers during the COVID-19 response. The CISA memo served as an advisory list for local governments to determine what forms of work would be necessary to maintain public health and safety, as well as economic and national security. And as Grubhub’s notice states, “Food deliveries have been deemed essential services,” labeling the labor of immigrant delivery workers as essential to the national security and public safety of everyday people in New York City. Paradoxically, the statement also highlights the role of law enforcement in regulating this category, threatening immigrant delivery workers with dangerous encounters with the police. In this section, I will focus on how the DHS’s designation of food delivery workers as essential workers results in the uneven exposure of immigrant delivery workers to premature death during the COVID-19 pandemic. Working in these conditions led to record numbers of immigrant food delivery worker assaults and deaths. In particular, I explain how the paradoxical logic of “essential work” in the pandemic intensifies the precarious conditions of platform labor, especially for immigrants. Specifically, I demonstrate how platform capital exploits and intensifies the “group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (Gilmore 2007: 28) of immigrant delivery workers as essential workers during the pandemic.

The governmental logic of essential work is premised on millions of workers risking their health and safety to maintain the basic operations necessary for the maintenance of public health and economic security. In other words, much of this essential work is necessary for the reproduction and maintenance of a capitalist mode of production—workers to maintain and operate key supply chains, healthcare and security systems, telecommunication and information technologies, and food and agriculture networks. Essential work declarations have been used before in the United States to maintain “essential” production during war time and other crisis periods. The COVID-19 essential work declaration is different because it transformed the
workplace into a potentially lethal space caused by an indiscernible virus (Dickerson 2022).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the paradox of being an essential worker is that while workers both need these jobs to survive, the “essential work” required of them makes them more vulnerable to violence and premature death by the virus. While this is a characteristic of capitalism as a whole, the particular social composition of delivery workers in New York City intensifies their vulnerability to violence and premature death within the racial capitalist logics of essential work and policing.

Delivery workers in New York City are predominantly immigrant men, from Central America, South Asia, and West Africa. Many of these men live in the city without documentation. So when other predominantly immigrant workplaces—like restaurants, retail stores, construction sites—across the city shut down, delivery work was the only remaining option for many. The number of immigrants working for gig economy companies like Grubhub, Uber Eats, and DoorDash skyrocketed during the pandemic. For example, Uber Eats alone said it had added 36,000 couriers in New York City in the first few months of the pandemic (de Freytas-Tamura 2021). In a survey of 500 delivery workers conducted by the Workers Justice Project and the Worker’s Institute at Cornell, about half the delivery cyclists surveyed had started working at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown and the pandemic was the most cited reason for working on the food delivery apps (Figueroa et al. 2021). In addition, while U.S. citizens and permanent residents had access to federal and statewide Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, many app-delivery workers did not qualify or seek assistance from the program because of their documentation status (Waxman et al. 2022; Figueroa et al. 2021). As a result, app-based delivery work remained a solitary option for many working-class immigrants during the pandemic.
Moreover, the realities of essential work during the pandemic are inflected by features of the platform economy that limit worker protections through (de)regulation and maintenance of a “racial wage code” that exploits precarious immigrant labor, heightening their vulnerability to exposure to premature death. As opposed to direct employment, the primary model of employment in the gig economy classifies workers as independent contractors (Vallas and Schor; Dubal 2020). This labor arrangement underlies the entire gig economy, from ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft, to food delivery apps like Grubhub and Doordash, excluding workers from basic labor laws, benefits, and working conditions. This primary arrangement in employment classification has led to several conflicts between platform workers and platform capital around municipal and state-wide policy that would regulate the employment rights of platform workers. By evading regulation, platform companies have embedded themselves in urban life, but disembedded themselves from local rules and regulations that benefit workers (Wood et al. 2019; Graham 2020). In other words, while food delivery platforms operate in geographic locations, they strategically distance themselves from local rules and regulations in order to commodify labor (Wood et al. 2019). As a result of this disembeddedness and absence of labor regulation in the sector, platform workers are increasingly precarious in the labor market and work in dangerous conditions with limited access to basic protections and job safety (Wood et al. 2019; Vecchio 2022; Woodcock and Graham 2020).

The conditions of delivery work in New York City during the pandemic illustrate the effects of this relationship between essential work and (de)regulation in the platform economy. In New York City, many delivery workers at the beginning of the pandemic worked for less than the minimum wage, without unemployment insurance or sick leave, or basic workers’ rights like workers compensation in case of injuries on the job or collective bargaining (de Freytas-Tamura
Moreover, they lacked access to health safety equipment during the pandemic, like PPE and COVID-19 testing (Figueroa et al. 2021). While workers faced the deteriorating working conditions as “essential workers,” Grubhub and other app-based delivery companies consolidated revenue during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Grubhub CEO Matt Maloney and CFO Adam DeWitt stated in a letter, “The pandemic has been less of a temporary demand spike and more of a permanent catalyst, putting our business on a higher sustained trajectory” (Beckett 2020). The top four food delivery companies in the US—Doordash, Grubhub, Uber Eats, and Postmates—brought in roughly $5.5 billion in combined revenue from April to September 2020, more than double of the $2.5 billion in revenue they brought in during the same period in 2019 (Sumagaysay 2020). While the COVID-19 pandemic provided the catalyst for expanding the food delivery market, delivery workers saw little protection or benefit from the increased revenues. Instead, many faced an intensification of the previously precarious conditions they faced as workers in the platform economy.

While presented as a model of flexibility, freedom, and independence, the work arrangements in the platform economy obscure and exacerbate the particular vulnerabilities of immigrant labor in the platform economy, including exclusion from welfare assistance (like the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program), immigration enforcement, and discriminatory racial violence while working. Platform capital is particularly attuned to immigrant labor as a flexible labor source that allows for the extraction of maximum surplus labor value by keeping labor costs low and requiring minimum labor protections (Holtum et al. 2021; Veen et al. 2020 cited in van Doorn and Vijay 2021). In addition, through practices of selective formalization, the barrier of entry to the platform economy is relatively low for migrants, but also skews the employment relationship in favor the platform companies and users at the cost of workers who
bear the brunt of administrative and fiscal burdens in the labor relation (van Doorn et al. 2020). This low barrier of entry is exemplified by how platform companies use simplified onboarding processes and offer referral bonuses to workers, while often omitting formal requirements like background checks, drug tests, and work permits.

To illustrate these particular vulnerabilities, I offer a brief example from the pandemic that shows how immigration enforcement and policing intensify the paradox of essential work, increasing delivery workers’ vulnerability to exposure to premature death. Not only do immigrant workers have to consider working in dangerous conditions caused by the COVID-19 virus, working carries the risk of being violently policed. On June 1, 2020, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio extended the pandemic-induced city-wide state of emergency and instituted an citywide curfew “to protect the City and its residents from severe endangerment and harm to their health, safety and property” in the wake of large demonstrations protesting the police murder of George Floyd (Office of the Mayor 2020). The emergency executive order used the language of the pandemic and its potentially deadly spread to expand police presence across the city. While essential workers were exempted from the curfew, many limited their work during this period, not willing to risk their safety and well-being after witnessing videos of the police using brutal force on delivery workers, protesters, and bystanders (Dowd 2020). As one food delivery worker said, “We are afraid that they could grab us, arrest us and deport us,” with another adding, “It’s better to stay home and stay safe. No one wants to get beaten that way” (Dowd 2020). These statements gesture to the role of the police in facilitating who has access to the category of the “essential worker” and which essential workers deserve protections from the state.
Many delivery workers share the fear of immigration enforcement by the police. This is especially apparent in the context of delivery workers e-bike thefts. E-bikes that delivery workers use daily to complete their work cost anywhere between $1500 and $3000, a significant cost for platform delivery workers whose median net pay per hour (excluding tips) is about $7.94. E-bike thefts are also often accompanied by the threat or actualization of physical violence against workers. While incidents of e-bike thefts doubled between 2019 and 2020 (according to NYPD data, Sandoval 2020), surveys of delivery workers show that most do not report incidents to the police for fear of retaliation over immigration status and police indifference to supporting delivery workers in retrieving their e-bikes (Aponte and Velasquez 2020; Figueroa et al., 2021).

Despite an increase in violence and discrimination against delivery workers during the pandemic because of their status as immigrants, or relatedly, their race, ethnicity, or language spoken, the police efforts to support delivery workers were limited due to the perceived threat of police violence against immigrant delivery workers.

Essential work in the pandemic exacerbates the precarious conditions that immigrant delivery workers face, increasing their vulnerability to exposure to premature death and violence, both in the context of unsafe work and targeted policing. In particular, working-class immigrant food delivery workers are especially vulnerable, faced with exclusions from public welfare assistance, discriminatory racial violence, and the threat of immigration enforcement and deportation. If as Freshour and Williams write, “[essential] workers continue to put their very lives at risk not because of some illogical patriotism to “feed America” but rather because they must feed themselves and their families and have no “safety net” to do so otherwise” (2020), then immigrant food delivery workers clearly illustrate the paradoxical logics of essential work in the context of racialized policing and immigration enforcement. In addition to their precarious
employment relations, the examples of food delivery worker encounters with police demonstrates immigrant food delivery workers’ heightened vulnerability to premature death as essential workers during the pandemic. However, rising public attention to the working conditions of food delivery workers and the ambivalent police responses to delivery worker assaults and robberies has led to an increase in police efforts to keep delivery workers safe. In the next section, I will discuss how in the wake of Borkot’s death, the New York Police Department (NYPD) sought to engage delivery workers around issues of bike thefts and safety through bike registrations. Specifically, I will describe how in the context of Asian American and Muslim communities in New York City, bike registrations are a reappearance of community policing strategies utilized in the domestic war on terror.

IV. Bike registrations and policing Asian Americans

Almost a month after Borkot’s death and funeral prayers, I attended a vigil in his remembrance. The vigil, organized by delivery workers, Los Deliveristas Unidos (LDU), and DRUM, began with a bike registration event with the New York Police Department (NYPD). The bike registration event was held primarily in response to the increase in e-bike thefts during the pandemic—thefts that have left delivery workers reeling in the aftermath, lacking access to the tools necessary to complete their jobs and obtain an income (Marcos 2021; Dzieza 2021; Sandoval 2021). As explained in the previous section, police had done little in response to the rapid uptick in e-bike thefts and associated assaults of workers. According to a survey done by the Workers Justice Project and researchers at Cornell University, more than half of the 508 delivery workers surveyed reported having had their bicycles stolen, and of the 120 workers who reported it to the police, only 2 delivery workers were helped by the NYPD and got their bikes
back (Figueroa et al. 2021). In addition, many thefts go unreported because delivery workers do not trust the police to retrieve the stolen bikes and fear retaliation or violence from the police.

Part of the police incoherence regarding this issue is due to the fact that until the pandemic, throttle-powered e-bikes were illegal in New York City. Mayor de Blasio worked with the NYPD to strictly enforce their usage, setting up checkpoints across the city, fining e-bike riders and seizing their bikes (Lee 2018). In January 2020, Mayor de Blasio expanded the criminalization of e-bikes, despite recognizing that they were integral to the jobs of immigrant food delivery workers, calling it a “common-sense” public safety reform (Robbins 2020). It was not until the pandemic, and the support of technology companies looking to make e-scooters legal in the city, that e-bikes were recognized as an essential part of the city’s food delivery infrastructure. The turn to bike registrations was a tactic used by advocates of delivery workers to build relationships between the police and delivery workers. Advocates hoped that by documenting ownership of the e-bikes, police would be more willing to support delivery workers in retrieving their stolen vehicles. In this section, I interrogate the relationship between bike registration for delivery workers and community policing in Asian American (particularly South Asian, Bangladeshi, Muslim) communities in the context of expanding encounters between police and delivery workers as increasing vulnerability to exposure to racialized violence and premature death. In particular, I argue that this mode of delivery worker advocacy shifts the balance of power away from working-class delivery workers toward middle class interlocutors and the police.

The histories of both bike registrations and police relations with immigrant communities in New York City are fraught with tensions. Bike registration was developed as a police strategy to enforce racialized policing through investigatory or pretextual stops (Bloom 2018). Municipal
police have also been shown to differentially police immigrant workers, especially since 9/11, resulting in immigrant worker distrust of the police and dangerous interactions between immigrant workers and the police (Varsanyi 2008). In New York City, the influence of “broken windows” policing and the use of discretionary arrests have had an outsized material impact on immigrants and other racialized communities (Jashani et al. 2021). So why register bikes with the police when the likelihood that they would do something about bike theft was scant? Was bike registration worth putting already-precarious immigrant workers in increased contact with the police? In conversations with delivery workers and organizers before and at the bike registration event, the overwhelming answer was that the police presence was uncomfortable, especially given the police involvement in Borkot’s death. On the other hand, some delivery workers also found the police presence essential to their livelihood. When delivery workers are confronted by the police following their bike being stolen, the police response is often to refuse to help because the bike is not registered. In the worst cases, the police suspect delivery workers themselves to be the bike thieves. As a result, some delivery workers saw bike registration with the NYPD as a harm reduction tactic that would improve relations between the police and delivery workers. In other words, even if bike registration did not pay immediate dividends, the uncomfortable exchanges with police at the event were worth it if the police were able to support them in the case of an e-bike theft.

However, if bike registration is articulated as a way to build relationships between the police and delivery workers, it needs to also be placed in the context of shifts in policing following 9/11. Bike registration at delivery worker outreach events like Borkot’s vigil must be put in relation to community policing tactics used by the NYPD in working-class Asian American and Muslim communities in New York City. Community policing is premised on
building trust between targeted communities and the government (usually local law enforcement) to prevent violence from happening. In the context of post-9/11 policing, community policing has been used to build relationships between police and Muslim communities as a counterterrorism measure, to “combat violent extremism” (CVE) (Nguyen 2019). Specifically, NYPD and law enforcement across the United States targeted Arabs, South Asians, Muslims and others perceived to be part of the groups based on the idea that the 9/11 attacks were executed by Arabs from Muslim-majority countries and that Islamist extremists were more likely to come from these communities. According to Hassan v. City of New York, the NYPD developed a program to monitor Muslims across the Eastern Seaboard, infiltrating almost every aspect of Muslim life, from mosques to halal butcher shops to student groups. Moreover, the program established the Demographics Unit in the NYPD. The unit maintained a list of 27 “ancestries of interest” (including “American Black Muslim”) and carried out surveillance, infiltration, and monitoring operations using undercover police officers known as rakers (Apuzzo and Goldman 2011). The NYPD also used informants, selected from a pool of arrestees, prisoners, and recent immigrants, to act as inside observers in mosques (Gonzalez 2017). Informants and infiltrators employed a tactic known as “create and capture” through which they would “create’ conversations about jihad or terrorism with congregants, then ‘capture’ and report responses to the police” (Gonzalez 2017).

These police strategies and tactics had a devastating effect on Arab, South Asian, and Muslim communities across New York City. Brothers turned on each other. Worshippers at mosques could not trust one another. While community policing is built on trust between members of targeted communities and the police, it destroys long-standing relationships and ties among community members. After 9/11, Arab, South Asian, and Muslim communities were
remade in the figure of NYPD’s racial paranoia, communities that openly support policing and “countering violent extremism” programs in the name of public safety and inclusion in the United States. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, NYPD strategy involved a focus on infiltration, surveillance, and covert collaboration. Now, some parts of these communities are in open collaboration with the police. They are led by community spokespeople who remain in positions of power as leaders in religious institutions, as business owners, or as members of governmental institutions.

We can see this phenomenon play out at Borkot’s funeral prayers, when community leaders spoke in support of the police and deflected attention from the police involvement in Borkot’s death. We also see it clearly in Bangladeshi and South Asian American orientations to policing and public safety in recent years. First, the number of South Asian Americans affiliated with NYPD Fraternal Organizations like the Bangladeshi American Policeman’s Association (BAPA), Pakistani American Law Enforcement Society (P.A.L.S.), and Muslim Officers Society have grown drastically since their founding in 2015. All three organizations have a focus on recruiting community members into law enforcement, with a focus on youth, while also aiming to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community. For members of the Bangladeshi American community in particular, BAPA and the NYPD are linked to ideas of a better future and more opportunities, giving them the ability to live out the American Dream.

Even beyond involvement with the NYPD, people with influence in the Bangladeshi and Muslim American civilian community organize for greater collaboration with and express explicit support of the police. In the aftermath of Christchurch Massacre in New Zealand in 2019, Muslim-Americans in Brooklyn established the Muslim Community Patrol (MCP), to act as an “extra set of eyes and ears for the police” (Petri 2019). Despite the long history of the
criminalization of Muslims by the NYPD, the MCP follows in the tradition of other community patrols in marginalized communities like the Brooklyn Asian Safety Patrol in Sunset Park and the Shomrim in Hasidic neighborhoods in Brooklyn. Patrolling the neighborhood in navy blue uniforms and NYPD-styled patrol cars, the MCP had the support of Brooklyn borough president Eric Adams, who related the program's importance back to 9/11, saying, “More than buildings went down in 9/11. Trust between communities went down. We are building it back one brick at a time, and this patrol is one of those bricks” (Petri 2019). While the MCP was supported by borough president Adams (a former NYPD captain) and the NYPD in Brooklyn, their presence was anxiety-inducing for many Muslims in the community, precisely because of their close ties to the NYPD and the devastating impacts of post-9/11 community policing in Muslim communities across NYC. The case of the MCP points to the deep tensions around policing and notions of public safety in Bangladeshi and Muslim American communities. These tensions emerged again in 2021 when Eric Adams announced his candidacy for New York City Mayor. Bangladeshi political groups like Rise Up New York supported Adam’s mayoral bid precisely because of his former experience as a police captain, arguing that “[Bangladeshi communities] do not need to defund the police, we need more police to our communities” (Pazmino 2021).

These conflicting beliefs around community policing in Asian American communities articulate particular class dynamics and tensions that we see in the story of Borkot’s death. Specifically, calls for policing exacerbate the class differences in Asian immigrants to the United States that were implemented and enforced through decades of immigration law. Beginning with the 1946 Luce-Celler Act and furthered by the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, U.S. immigration law has prioritized professional class immigrants—doctors, engineers, businesspeople, and others who would improve the economy and culture of the United States
(Prashad 2002). These immigrants exemplified the stereotype of the model minority, “a racial group distinct from the white majority, but lauded as well assimilated, upwardly mobile, politically nonthreatening, and definitively not-black” (Wu 2013, 2). The model minority formation operates as a mode of “inclusion” into American society, extending certain protections and privileges to Asian Americans in exchange for their value as multicultural citizens. Implicit in this inclusion is their embrace of the doctrines of neoliberalism—bootstraps individualism, capitalist meritocracy, and assimilation. However, the representational politics of the model minority serve to reinforce and bolster the institutions that criminalize working-class Asian American and Muslim communities, reproducing binaries of “deserving, multicultural” model minorities and others who threaten the foundations of American democracy (Nguyen 2019). Melamed describes this process as a means of “creat[ing] new privileged subjects, racializing the beneficiaries of neo-liberalism as worthy multicultural citizens and racializing the losers as unworthy and excludable on the basis of monoculturalism, deviance, inexibility, criminality, and other historico-cultural deficiencies” (2011, xxi). The politics of community policing fit closely with the representational politics of the model minority formation. Community policing stresses law enforcement as a necessary aspect of a healthy democracy, highlighting the role of community participation in law enforcement as a way to prevent “violent extremism.” Community policing not only reinforces the binary of the deserving multicultural model minority who reports or polices the unworthy, suspect members of their community, but reproduces a class antagonism. That is to say, working-class Asian American immigrants are perceived to threaten the stability and precarious protections offered by the model minority formation and are thus suspect in their communities.
While model minority immigrants arrived with firm job offers and aspirations to become permanent residents in the United States, working-class South Asians threatened the “model” status of Asian Americans in the United States. Vijay Prashad documents this perspective among middle class South Asian Americans, quoting a professional class migrant describing working-class immigrant taxi drivers as “spoiling things for us” and “ruining our image” in the United States (82: 2002). Borkot and other recent working-class immigrants like him present a threat to the stability and protections offered by the model minority formation. Following Borkot’s death, there were many in the masjid who made reminders and admonitions to delivery workers to wear helmets and use safety equipment while working, as if the workers were not being responsible enough. While they portray and make themselves as law-abiding, responsible multicultural subjects, these “model minorities” reinforce the idea that the Bangladeshi gig delivery workers at the funeral are the opposite, troublesome and criminal in their irresponsibility while working, reifying the divide between model minority subjects and its others.

Through the implementation of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA), conceptual binaries of the productive, legal immigrant and the illegal, criminal alien immigrant were cemented. The passage of these laws instituted a form of racial governance that further criminalized undocumented, working-class (Asian American) immigrants, and enforced it through the expulsion and deportation of surplus immigrant labor. Not only did these 1996 immigration reforms create a divide between legal and “illegal” immigrants, but a divide along class lines. As Chandan Reddy describes, the 1996 immigration reforms also come alongside the Welfare Reform Act, working to “politically and economically disenfranchise the noncitizen and simultaneously to redirect capital’s surpluses back into the economy” (2005,
In essence, working-class immigrants are targeted by the policing and carceral systems in the name of securing everyday life for “American” citizens.

These model minority orientations to the police gesture to what Liu describes as an “Asian American body politic that treats race as a flexible position from which to demand access to whiteness and participation in the neoliberal economy, erasing any internal contradictions of class, ethnicity, and skin color privileges” (2018, 436). Upward mobility through collaboration and integration with policing infrastructures for some parts of the Asian American community comes at the cost of increased criminalization of working-class people, as well as newer and undocumented immigrants who are not yet legible to the schemas of the model minority formation or neoliberal capitalism. What we see in the Asian American turn towards policing is an attempt to protect the fragile gains and protections that the model minority formation offers to certain already-privileged members of the community. By disciplining and policing of working-class and undocumented community members and erasing histories of the ongoing domestic war on terror, professional class Asian Americans ensure the stability of the model minority formation and its material impacts on their lives and livelihood.

In this context, policing and the turn to bike registrations presents a dilemma for understanding public safety for immigrant delivery workers. Although bike registration presents some avenues for recourse for delivery workers to receive police support in responding to e-bike thefts, it expands police presence in a community where many are working-class and undocumented immigrants. This escalates the possibility of fatal or carceral encounters between delivery workers and the police, increasing their vulnerability to exposure to premature death. Moreover, it proposes the police as a catch-all solution to delivery worker problems, from road safety to e-bike thefts to delivery worker assaults. In response, highlighting bloated NYPD
budgets and the historically uneven enforcement of immigrants, Black people, and Latinx people by the NYPD, the organization Transportation Alternatives proposed widespread infrastructural investments to New York City streets that would expand and protect bike lanes, protected bus lanes and intersections, and automated enforcement of reckless driving through cameras and increased lighting, among a suite of other reforms (Transportation Alternatives 2020). In particular, they argue by reallocating the NYPD budget to infrastructural investments and reducing police interactions with bikers (immigrant food delivery workers included), the NYPD and the Department of Transportation (DOT) can increase road safety and reduce police violence and bias against immigrant, Black, and Latinx people (bikers, as well as others on the road). While these reforms do not address the totality of immigrant delivery worker needs, they look to expand the public safety of delivery workers without expanding police interactions with them. In other words, they look to operate within a abolitionist horizon, enacting what André Gorz describes as a “non-reformist reform,” an effort to erode and decrease the power of carceral and policing institutions without reinforcing them (Chua 2020; Gorz 1968; Critical Resistance n.d.).

Bike registration parallels tactics used by the NYPD in South Asian and Muslim immigrant communities during the domestic war on terror, shoring up the power of the police and increasing delivery workers’ vulnerability to exposure to premature death. In addition, as a mode of delivery worker advocacy, bike registration mirrors community policing strategies by shifting the emphasis away from worker organizing toward relationships between key interlocutors and the police. This presents both challenges and lessons for potential delivery worker-led organizing for better wages and safer working conditions. In the next section, I study how worker-led organizing can present alternatives to policing as the primary way to keep delivery workers safe in the platform economy. In turning to these delivery worker-led strategies,
I consider how immigrant food delivery workers also identify bottlenecks that challenge platform capital’s ability to exploit workers.

V. Prospects of worker-led organizing

“We are here for safety. If we build stronger relationships, then when someone is in trouble, they can reach out to someone else and we can protect each other.”
— Nazmul, DRUM delivery leader (2021)

In response to the deteriorating condition of work in the platform economy in New York City during the pandemic, delivery workers have taken up several tactics to agitate for better working conditions. In this section, I take up Graham’s (2020) argument that the platform companies sow the seeds of its own demise in the ways that workers find bottlenecks in the space-time of the platform economy to manipulate how the platform companies are tethered to regulations and resistances situated in spaces like New York City. Moreover, through contestations of the broader social forces that shape the precarious everyday lives of immigrant gig workers, they articulate forms of “inclusion” and solidarity that challenge the increased vulnerability to exposure to premature death brought on by the pandemic and expansion of policing infrastructure in delivery worker communities. These strategies of resistance are not without conflict or tensions, also presenting reactionary realignments with policing and carceral infrastructure. Regardless, through situated resistances, immigrant gig workers challenge the power of platform companies and shape the digital and material urban spaces in which they live.

There’s a long, dark stretch along the Willis Avenue Bridge that presents an ideal location for thieves and thugs to ambush delivery workers as they work. It’s not the only location in the city where delivery workers are targeted. A report in New York Magazine and the Verge describes the Willis Avenue Bridge and the rise in assaults during the summer of 2021:
The Willis Avenue Bridge, a 3,000-foot stretch of asphalt and beige-painted steel connecting Manhattan and the Bronx, is the perfect place for an ambush. The narrow bike path along its west side is poorly lit; darkened trash-strewn alcoves on either end are useful for lying in wait. All summer, food-delivery workers returning home after their shifts have been violently attacked there for their bikes: by gunmen pulling up on motorcycles, by knife-wielding thieves leaping from the recesses, by muggers blocking the path with Citi Bikes and brandishing broken bottles (Dzieza 2021).

In response to attacks, delivery workers have organized themselves to patrol dangerous locations across the city and keep each other apprised on thefts and assaults across the city. Through Facebook pages like “Delivery Boys en Acción NY” and WhatsApp groups, an amorphous conglomerate of “Delivery Boys” has emerged to chronicle and fight back against the bike thefts and assaults that have been plaguing delivery workers. Delivery workers share photos of their stolen bikes on the page, allowing the networks of delivery workers to keep eyes and ears out across the city in search of them. When these thefts are reported to the police, delivery workers are met with limited action and as a result, Delivery Boys band together to use apps to track stolen bikes and show up en masse to intimidate thieves and retrieve stolen bikes.

This model of emergent and immediate self-defense offers an ad-hoc, but effective solution for delivery workers. While police have historically ignored e-bike thefts, the actions of the Delivery Boys and other vigilantes has led to the police taking notice of these events, resulting in tenuous and extravagant displays of police violence against thieves. Police support of the delivery workers presents a tenuous compromise, protecting precarious workers from violent thefts while expanding policing and carceral infrastructure in the city. According to Hildalyn Colón Hernández, the Director of Policy and Strategic Partnerships at Workers Justice Project who was brought on to manage police relations in support of delivery workers, the realization that e-bike theft can be considered grand larceny was a motivating factor in convincing a police officer to investigate a stolen bike (Dzieza 2021). Another delivery worker wanted to see
institutional protections for delivery workers that would be similar to the law protecting Metropolitan Transportation Authority workers from assault, threatening offenders with up to seven years in prison (Marcos 2021). While these relationships, alongside bike registration, offer short term protections, they expand police infrastructure deeper into delivery worker communities, many of whom are undocumented and working-class. This implicates the expansion of border surveillance and policing in these communities, working as a disciplining and exploiting mechanism of undocumented immigrant workers (De Genova 2002).

Despite these tensions, Delivery Boys’s organizing offers us glimpses of an alternative infrastructure of immigrant delivery worker life that materializes in both digital and material space. Organized through WhatsApp and Facebook, delivery workers share expertise and support, challenging the strategic ignorance of platform companies around working conditions and the physical materialities of delivery worker life, including e-bikes, cooler bags, chargers, and more. They also utilize these relationships to support each other around e-bike thefts without the NYPD’s intervention. While the NYPD are beginning to take notice and some delivery workers agitate for increased police surveillance and support infrastructure for delivery workers, others are focused on the community and in cultivating the relationships that keep each other alive and able to work in the platform economy.

These emergent organizing infrastructures also resulted in massive delivery worker protests and substantive change (Dzieza 2021) and as a result of these protests, in September of 2021, the New York City Council passed a series of bills that aimed at improving the lives and working conditions of delivery workers in the city. Passed by large margins, the slate of bills granted delivery workers basic rights, including: access to restaurant bathrooms, more transparency around tips, worker-determined limits on the distance of deliveries, set minimum
payments per trip, and an end to practices that charged workers for insulated bags (required for the job) and to access their paychecks (Sterling 2021). Although small wins on paper, the bills were the culmination of over a year of organizing efforts led by Los Deliveristas Unidos (LDU) and other delivery workers to introduce new labor standards and rights for app-delivery workers. Of the wins, the city’s pledge to set a minimum payment per trip is particularly striking, given the variable rate of payment by the platform companies and low overall median hourly-wage for delivery workers in the city—$7.94, excluding tips (Figueroa et al. 2021).

The delivery worker bill of rights gestures to a shift toward municipal regulation of the platform economy, slowly moving costs away from delivery workers and onto the platform companies and restaurants. It was the result of delivery workers organizing massive bike protests in New York City over several years, bringing attention to the poor working conditions and lack of transparency over tips and wages by the platform companies. While the organizing efforts mainly began with Mexican and Guatemalan delivery workers, they have expanded to include Bangladeshi, other South Asian, and West African immigrants. The protests build on digital infrastructures, like the WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages described earlier, but also long standing familial and religious ties. Delivery workers use familial relationships and connections from their home country to their benefit while organizing in New York City, bringing together workers for home cooked meals and more (Aponte and Velasquez 2020). These familial relationships build on those that are essential to migration when undocumented and working-class. Second, with the rapidly growing numbers of Muslim (South Asian and West African) delivery workers, the mosque at Friday prayer has become an essential place for delivery worker organizing.
Following Borkot’s death and funeral prayers, delivery workers and organizers with DRUM have worked to politicize and involve more delivery workers in struggles to better working conditions. While the delivery worker bill of rights offers some basic protections, these organizing relationships form the basis for further action. A month after Borkot’s funeral prayers, delivery workers and DRUM organizers planned a vigil that operated not only as a site of collective remembrance, but also a place to engage workers on political education, build collective safety while working, and enroll them in networks of support. At Borkot’s vigil, alongside the police bike registration tent and the city-sponsored “Vision Zero” tent (which handed out free bike helmets to workers), DRUM organizers and workers affiliated with LDU floated around the space of the park where workers were gathered. Speaking in Spanish, Bangla, Hindi, and English, they insisted on the importance of collective organization as a response to the dangerous conditions for platform workers, reorienting the individualist language that proliferates in the platform economy with frameworks of solidarity and community safety. Workers connected with each other and organizers on their shared backgrounds and histories. They also shared their experiences working, both the good moments and the bad. They exchanged phone numbers and texts on WhatsApp to remain connected after the vigil. These scenes of conversation and collective support were in stark contrast to the line of delivery workers waiting to register their e-bikes with the NYPD in another part of the park.

When the vigil itself began, workers, organizers, and Borkot’s friends and community gathered in a circle to listen to speakers who both knew Borkot and the dangers of working as a food delivery worker in New York City. In addition to emphasizing the importance of safety gear, the resounding message across speakers was to build relationships between Latino and Bengali delivery workers. This vigil led to a series of collaborations between DRUM and LDU,
bringing Latinx and Bengali delivery workers together at other bike registration events that also provided free bike tune-ups and safety gear, as well as building a space for relationship building. These efforts also resulted in a “Delivery Worker Pledge,” organized by workers alongside DRUM and LDU, which became central to efforts to organize delivery cyclists. It states: “We deserve dignity, rights, and protection. We are part of poor, working-class and immigrant communities who are organizing to build power. We are pledging to: 1) Love and protect each other. 2) Actively value my health and well-being. 3) Remember my significance. 4) Build community with other poor, working-class and/or oppressed people” (DRUM Instagram Post, Dec. 16, 2021). Although bike registrations continue, the Delivery Worker Pledge emphasizes that the first line of defense for delivery workers is being organized. Community presents an alternative to police, providing mutual support in the wake of injuries, deaths, and other violence on the job. Working-class delivery worker organizing shows some of the ways in which delivery workers are building material infrastructures of support in both digital and actual ways.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a crisis for gig workers and organizers with a rapid rise in the number of deaths of immigrant gig workers. While situated delivery worker struggles are making inroads into municipal regulations of the platform industry, immigrant delivery cyclists live particularly precarious lives in New York City. With the expansion of policing infrastructure in delivery workers' lives, working-class immigrants increasingly live at the precipice of exploitation, deportation, and arrest. Especially for South Asian and Muslim immigrant delivery workers, the expansion in policing mirrors decades-old community policing practices that target and over-police these communities. It also uplifts class tensions in the Asian American community. The policing of working-class immigrants continues and reifies binaries of the good, productive, legal immigrant vs. the criminal, illegal immigrant. This binary deepens
the model minority formation, protecting middle class Asian Americans through the expansion of policing in working-class and undocumented immigrant, Black, Latinx communities (many of the same communities that make up the ranks of delivery workers).
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Conclusion

“America makes [it] so that we can only survive by leaving our countries and families to come here and then treats us like we are not human beings.”

“...at the end of the day, freedom is a place”

The so-called “war on terror” has had an indelible impact on the politics and lives of working class immigrants in the United States. Notably, it is not the first domestic war against immigrants or domestic Others; it comes in the wake of the war on drugs, Japanese internment, and the Indian wars, among others. The domestic impacts of the War on Terror are inextricable from the violence of the ensuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the expansion of the military industrial complex across the world. Q. Ali, a detainee at Passaic County Jail organizing with DRUM, highlights these entanglements as they emerge not only in the wake of 9/11 but as a result of U.S. imperialist interventions across the Global South. As I show in this thesis, while the war on terror intensified the targeting of working class immigrants though policing, detention, and deportation, these techniques build on existing racial capitalist logics that govern Asian immigration to the U.S. From the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to the Immigration and Nationality 1965, controlling labor through racially exclusive immigration laws is central to racial capitalist hierarchies in the U.S. Moreover, the implementation of the 1996 immigration reforms increased the criminalization of working class immigrants and expanded the suite of tools used by state actors to regulate immigrants as surplus labor.

As I describe above, racial differentiation is internal to the logics of capitalism (Robinson 1983). In the U.S., the management and regulation immigrant labor has been especially
important to the development of not only race, but also American identity. Even the contemporary neoliberal turn to multiculturalism articulates the incorporation of ideal, largely middle class, immigrant identities into American identity, as a way to intensify the exploitation and exclusion of working class, unruly, and divergent immigrants and racial minorities in the U.S. (Melamed 2011). I show in Chapter 2 how middle class interlocuters involved in delivery worker advocacy propose reforms that endanger working class immigrant lives, as well as other marginalized Black and Latino communities that are over-policed. These reformist logics are essential to “model minority” politics, and in response, DRUM’s working class politics offer an alternative. For example, DRUM members overwhelming rejected supporting the DREAM Act, which would have granted a path to citizenship for undocumented youth and DACA recipients in the U.S., while expanding border patrol and detention infrastructure that would make it more difficult for future migrants to receive citizenship. In other words, while the legislation offered short-term benefits to many undocumented DRUM members, it was unacceptable because of its long-term ramifications for other migrants and border-crossers. DRUM members instead advocated for an end to deportations and administrative relief for all, not just DACA recipients. The carceral locales of policing, deportation, and incarceration make up some of the everyday spaces of working class immigrants, in which they also build expansive visions for what life can be. In these radical acts of place-making and freedom dreams, working class immigrants continue to organize against the institutions of racial capitalist violence.

However, as I show in Chapter 1, there is another register in which relations of racialization take place, where race is not always logical. In the encounters between state agents immigrants, detainees, everyday people, and their environments in the direct aftermath of 9/11, we see the proliferating and sticky potential of racialization as it draws on configurations of
bodily space, weird encounters, and histories of naming. While there is a structural position that
certain, marked bodies play in the social field (Nguyen 2019), the potential misrecognition and
illegibility of bodies in moments of crisis or emergency means that countless others are also
enrolled racializing relations. In this context, affect theory can potentially be used to describe the
minor and proliferating of relations of race. Specifically, through affect, we can theorize racial
indiscernibility through statist relations of capture and control, as well as minor opacities and
lines of flight propose counter-relationalities to racial subjectivity. Importantly, these are not
always liberatory and sometimes land on other planes of subjectivization. For example, in
Chapter 2, many of the vigilante-type actions taken by delivery workers to retrieve their e-bikes
from thieves reify racist assumptions of who robbers are in the city. As a result, while delivery
workers escape violent encounters with the police, they propose alternative racializations that
threaten other bodies in the social field. Similarly, in Chapter 1, the first detainee suspects the
“regular inmates” and the reasons for their incarceration, drawing on stereotypes of
criminalization.

This is not to say that affective readings of race always lead to subjectivization, but rather
to reinforce the necessity of outlining the ambiguous and uncertain relations that make up race
and racialization. As Glissant writes, a “theory of difference is invaluable…But difference itself
can still contrive to reduce things…” (Glissant 2010: 189). Instead, how might we conceive of
affective accounts of race and racialization as an exercise in opacity, in understanding the
“texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components” (2010: 190)? Rather than
articulating a separate project from an analysis of racial capitalism, I think there’s potential for a
convergence of the two that investigates the minor, dynamic, fleeting relations of racial
capitalism. For example, in Chapter 1, I propose a spectrum of state affects of suspicion and state
effects of terror at the nexus of which racialization takes place, taking into account both the materially emergent relations of the site and the deterministic captures along the contours of racial capitalism.

In this context, the two chapters of this thesis propose a politics and proposition for thinking about race in the contemporary conjuncture. Especially for working class immigrants, the effects of the War on Terror are visible across urban landscapes and social life. In addition to the infrastructures of policing, detention, and immigrant enforcement that were expanded as result of the War on Terror, this thesis also incoherent, minor encounters that threaten the lives of immigrant workers and youth. Through this, working class immigrants not only find ways to resist, but make life livable and practice making freedom a place.

In the future, I intend to continue with my community-based research with DRUM in New York City. Specifically, I want to think about the social composition of labor in delivery work. Contributing to the growing literature on the platform economy, I want to investigate the role of disability in delivery work. Increasingly, GoFundMe fundraisers are used to support workers and their families after being injured on the job. At the intersection of a disinvested health infrastructure, immigration enforcement, and under-regulated working conditions in the platform economy, immigrant delivery workers use a patchwork of various institutions and practices to care for each other. Moreover, I look to understand disability in relation to how algorithms organize the social and bodily space of delivery workers. However, there are numerous ways in which working class immigrants and delivery workers are challenging the structures and institutions of racial capitalism, and this is just a start.
Works Cited


