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A South Florida Ethnography of Mobile Home Park Residents Organizing Against Neoliberal Crony Capitalist Displacement

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A South Florida Ethnography of Mobile Home Park Residents Organizing Against
Neoliberal Crony Capitalist Displacement

by

Juan Guillermo Ruiz

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Anthropology
College of Arts and Sciences
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The first anthropology teacher I had was an amazing student of anthropology, Carol Holmes, who should have a Ph.D. at this moment were it not for blatant racism present in some Anthropology departments. As a friend she would share the amazing anthropological ideas of Foucault and others. I did not realize how much this impacted me until I actually went abroad to Spain (to try to recapture my lost Spanish tongue with its grammar). In Madrid, I felt that culture shock, and a constant panopticon of downcast judgement of being that bastard reminder of the colonizing effort that Spaniards had undertaken in the Americas. Then, when the March 11 train attacks happened, I noticed how young Madrileños saw my tan skin as an affront to them, and

one of them even spit at me and told me “*Vaya al infierno*” (Go to hell). When, I came back, I had to understand these phenomena better. I had to comprehend how a place like Spain that was the aggressor during their colonial period and the enslaver of so many, could now teach their youth that they were owed something. So, I changed my major to Anthropology at Georgia State.

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Abstract

The cyclical inflations of real estate values right before the 2008 housing crisis in the United States enticed mobile home park landowners, especially in California and Florida, to sell their land in the search for spectacular profits displacing many low-income residents. This thesis uses an engaged anthropological ethnographic approach to explore the struggle in organizing against neoliberal crony capitalist displacement in the South Florida metropolitan area. The study focuses on Davie, a suburb of Fort Lauderdale, where at the time of fieldwork a third of residents lived in mobile homes. In 2007, the Davie town council attempted to soften the impact of past neoliberal policies that produced the affordable housing crisis at that time. However, the effort was just a temporary solution as the town council, along with crony capitalists, had already created long-term plans for the area. This was just another demonstration of the tremendous power of mobile home park landowners who wielded influence on Florida state lawmakers, local city councils, and bureaucrats that can be easily traced to the 1980s.

While mobile home park residents demonstrated the hallmarks of a divided working class under neoliberal ideologies and pressures, the author employed applied anthropological methods to attempt to bridge divides among mobile home park residents, promoting mutual education and political action. The author argues for the use of participatory action research methods to provide for more holistic community decisions. A number of applied recommendations arise from this research. They include better training in anthropology departments for students who wish to pursue community organizing opportunities, as well as structural changes to representative

democracy at the local, state and national level to contest crony capitalist implementations of neoliberalism. Through collaborations in an explicitly anti-racist and anti-classist manner, stakeholders can come to common ground to respect people's basic human rights to housing, and provide for a more just economy.

Chapter 1 : Introduction

Life is a struggle. People struggle with their environment. People struggle against society. We struggle with ourselves. People struggle with other humans.¹ We are involved in webs of these struggles simultaneously. Sometimes these struggles are harder than they should be for people. In this thesis, the struggle by manufactured home owners renting land in a mobile home park will demonstrate just how unfair the economy is structured for the working poor.

In South Florida, the struggle against the environment was a public theme for the rise of one influential family, the Forman family. In 1910 with water overlaying the “land half the year,” Hamilton McLure Forman and his wife Blanche Collins purchased land in the sawgrass swamps west of Fort Lauderdale and migrated from the “security and comfort of established society” of Southern Illinois (Forman 1979, 2). The Formans struggled against the mosquitos, dengue fever, malaria, and had no access to the coast except by boat (1979, 2-3). Over time, they “became the most successful growers of Irish potatoes in the area,” expanded into dairy farm, acquired more land holdings, and became enmeshed with local politics through their election recommendations (1979, 4-8). The Formans were very influential politically, supporting the local Democratic Party through the leaflets and brochures they distributed to their milk customers and through political donations (1979, 8).

¹ Dr. Arletha Livingston, formerly of Georgia State University in the Africana Studies department introduced me to this concept.

In the 1960s, the Formans converted 300 acres of their farmland into a different struggle, the struggle of collecting monthly rent by renting the land in a mobile home park. The Forman family were not the only entrepreneurs in South Florida to convert land into mobile home parks, and it happened in other parts of Florida and across the United States as well as demand for affordable housing was not met from 1940 onward (Wallis 1991, 87-95, 103-108, 125-128). Mobile home parks do not take such a huge capital outlay for infrastructure (1991, 120,173), and it did provide unsubsidized housing for many working families. At the same time, it provided landowners, like the Formans, with steady income flows.

One of the mobile home parks the Formans owned was called Silver Oaks Mobile Home Park, and after some drug issues and deaths that gave the community a bad name, the name was changed to Palma Nova (Agnew 2002; Greto 2002; Greto and Weinberg 2001). Palma Nova was home to more than 700 families from various backgrounds, the majority were Latinos, though there were also many white Americans. Demonstrating the influence of the family in the area, the school across the street from Palma Nova is named Nova Blanche Forman Elementary School, in honor of the matriarch of the family, Blanche Forman. In 2008, there were rumors that the park was closing, which would have only given residents six months to leave the community, with or without their mobile home. This thesis is the story of the struggle of a group of people in the Palma Nova community who were afraid of the closure of the park and my work with them as an anthropologist. We worked to try to organize the community, to counter that threat of closure, seeking verify the veracity of the rumors. This was our attempt to organize against neoliberal crony capitalist displacement of mobile home park residents.

The struggle focused here is between mobile home owners and landowners is one of capital, state law, and power. The capital at play here is land versus home. Land is considered

real estate, while a mobile home is considered chattel, the opposite of real estate. A mobile home is a thing that can be moved, it is not a building. In Florida, State Law 723, dictates the relationship between the land owner and those renting a space in a mobile home park (Florida Legislature 2020). The power to do what one pleases with their property is mainly within the hands of the landowner. Once they decide to close the mobile home park, residents have six months to leave. Unless the landowner is selling the property, where if the residents have gone through all the proper legal steps to form an HOA and reserve their right of first refusal to purchase the park when this situation. While this seems like an easy step, it is more difficult said than done as everything has to line up for residents to own the land their home sits on.

Neoliberal Crony Capitalism

To understand why I name the ones displacing mobile home park residents as neoliberal crony capitalist one must understand what is a neoliberal crony capitalist. First, I will split the term into its two components: neoliberalism and crony capitalism.

What is crony capitalism?

Michael Labeit's definition of corporatism has been used to define crony capitalism: "a social system where the government intervenes aggressively into the economy, typically with political instruments that benefit large corporations and enterprises to the detriment of smaller businesses and private citizens" (2009). Though Labeit would probably abhor changing the term corporatism into anything to do with capitalism because his definition of capitalism is a pure form that "is a social system based upon the recognition of individual rights, including private property rights where all goods, both intermediate goods and final goods, are owned privately." I

would disagree that there is a pure form of capitalism however, building off Sylvia Junko Yanagisako's view of capitalism as a "complex and uneven historical process that entails heterogeneous capitalist practices shaped by diverse meanings, sentiments, and representations" (2002, 7). Thus, I will not use corporatism and instead use crony capitalism.

What is neoliberalism?

Neoliberalism is the idea that the way to maximize a society's interest and economic output is to have a laissez faire economic system where the state's role is to lay down "strong property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2005). These legal structures will then provide everyone with the rules of the economy and it is people's individual right to earn as much money as they possibly can if they so desire, and in so doing their other intrinsic interests will be served, hypothetically. Neoliberalism is not just an ideal, a goal, an ideology.

Neoliberalism is the latest stage of capitalism and it entails a particular formation of the state, of policies, and of ideology which can be identified in some academic theorizing. In reality the neoliberal policies instituted as David Harvey describes, has helped restore the wealth of the top 1 percent of earners in the United States (2005, 16). Wealthy Americans and the corporations they represent have obtained another set of policies, a set of crony capitalist policies. Put the neoliberal policies for the everyone in a country together with the crony capitalist policies for mainly rich, and you have neoliberal crony capitalism. Mobile home park residents find themselves on the harsh end of the neoliberal policies, while the owners of mobile home parks have the wealth and power to influence politicians and employ policies at their behest.

There is a strong argument made by Michael Munger and Mario Villarreal-Diaz that democracy paves "The Road to Crony Capitalism," the title of their essay (2019). Crony

capitalism is a strong feature of the market economy in the United States. Whether it is large multinational corporations seeking tax-write offs or just rich individuals, however contrary to what Munger and Villarreal-Diaz imply, I would argue that from the beginning, this country and its colonial origins were engrained in crony capitalist schemes. Crony Neoliberalism is the merger of these two structures and their associated ideas. Where you have two set of rules for different actors, those who can organize political power and those who do not or cannot. This dichotomy has many possibilities in the middle, between those who have extensive access to power, as US President Donald J. Trump had starting with his surprise election in 2016, and those who have so little power because of their economic, social, and educational capital. Though the masses of people skew heavier to the group without power than to those with power.

While individual people have been losing the safety nets provided to them as neoliberal policies are instituted for them, multinational corporations use corporate welfare from the government through the money generated by US and state taxpayers (Harvey 2005). Neoliberal policies have been imposed on the poor, the working poor and the middle class and small businesses that have not taken advantage of the system. However, for the upper class and businesses that understand how politicians have created *mechanisms* of enrichment, there is plenty of welfare available to them in the form of government subsidies, protection of markets, the thwarting of innovation and other methods of crony capitalism (Munger and Villarreal-Diaz 2019).

For landowners who operate mobile home parks, to maximize profits they have a need for a state to ensure that their property rights trump the home owners' property rights. If not they could have families who will not move off their land if they are evicted or if the mobile home park closes. Thus, there is a conflict between the rights of a mobile home owner who rents the

land underneath their home and the landowner. This is where the neoliberal state comes in and acts as the final arbiter, as is done in Florida, through State Law 723. This allows for the landowner to displace the mobile home owner at specific times, sometimes even allowing the land owner to take over the mobile home. I saw this displacement up close and personal in South Florida, and again this is due to neoliberal crony capitalism.

Why was the displacement not just due to neoliberalism? Neoliberalism describes the ideal system, where everyone supposedly has the freedom to do what they want economically. The problem with neoliberalism is that the rich organize to influence the politically connected through their economic power. Neoliberalism does not describe the mechanism by which rich, politically connected people affect change. Crony neoliberalism describes the phenomenon more accurately.

Why was the displacement not just due to crony capitalism? Crony capitalism is how the rich, the powerfully connected and organized affect change through legislation. Mobile home park residents in South Florida were not organized. Because they were not organized they could not be powerfully connected, though we were able to connect to some politicians it demonstrated that it was possible to have some political connectivity. Finally, mobile home park residents were not rich, so they could not participate as crony capitalist because of the prevalent ideology was one based on neoliberalism. They were unable to collectively organize because of their focus on individuality.

Mobile home park residents have a hard time getting their voice collectively together, because of their daily struggles on the job, their family, and finding time for themselves. They are struggling with jobs that are underpaying them, struggling to find affordable day care for their children, let alone their struggle for health. *We the people*, has never included every single

person in this country, and through my fieldwork, mobile home park residents were not represented in Tallahassee, even though they vastly outnumber the land owners who were represented in the state capital. However, their collective economic power is just as strong as the individual economic power of landowners. The problem lies in coalescing that power into a cohesive voice, and I argue that the working class struggle to break free of neoliberal ideologies that make working together with other working class people more difficult. If they worked together, there could have been a more direct challenge to the crony capitalist, through crony capitalism. This is how the political system works here in America. This is how it was before even the country began (Kendi 2016; Buck 2001).

Collectively, mobile home park (MHP) residents provide substantial wealth for MHP landowners as their collective rents don't just trickle up, but flush straight up to land owners. However, the collective strength of mobile home park residents is diluted by their lack of collective action and pooling of resources into something they can manage collectively because there is no collective organization. In South Florida, MHP residents rarely had an active Home Owners Association (HOA), and it is even rarer for a coalition of different mobile home parks to meet together. For a brief moment, there was a Miami-Dade Mobile Home Council, but it did not last more than a few years.

The best coalition for mobile home owners in Florida has been The Federation of Manufactured Home Owners of Florida (FMO) founded in 1962. Paul H. Rubin would argue that groups like FMO represent crony capitalism: special interest legislation (Rubin 2015), however FMO's power is small in comparison to mobile home owners. FMO's best recent accomplishment was a 2001 legislation that created "a trust fund to compensate manufactured home owners displaced because of a change in land use" (FMO 2020). This trust fund provided

some relief for mobile home residents displaced, but it was often underfunded and it did not cover the cost of housing replacement (specified by FS § 723.06116, at most \$3,750). I did attempt to work with FMO but their presence in South Florida was limited.

It appeared that MHP landowners was a decently organized group, with a number of them using the same lawyers to represent them. I wish I was able to study that group intensely, however, penetrating that group was beyond the scope of what I was able to do. Though I was able to observe Mr. Austin Forman a couple of times at Democratic political events as he was conversing with candidates that he monetarily supported. However, another way to better understand the landowners and even mobile home owners better, one needs to understand the history of mobile homes in the United States.

Mobile Homes in America

The mobile home historian Allan D. Wallis described mobile homes as having their roots in the covered wagon but evolved in America through the Twentieth Century with the rise of automobiles and the lack of affordable housing (Wallis 1991, 31-39). “The first auto campgrounds, constructed in the early 1920s, were municipal facilities. Their development was encouraged by local businesses who saw autocampers as potential customers” (Wallis 1991, 39), an example of crony capitalism. This is welfare from the municipality, using local funds to bring in outside customers. “By the late 1930s, the term ‘park’ came into use to distinguish trailer facilities from other types of campgrounds” (Wallis 1991, 41). Around “the mid-1930s, trailers had” begun “to be used as fixed residences” (Wallis 1991, 64-65).

However, after WWII, there was a shift from recreational use of travel trailers to permanent lodging because of an unmet demand for housing (Wallis 1991, 87-104). The trailer

was expected to be a temporary solution to post-WWII housing problems, but homes were used far longer than expected (Wallis 1991, 96). Even after the postwar housing crisis had passed by 1954, trailer sales continued to grow as young families who could not afford site-built homes looked for a way to transition to suburbia with their growing families (1991, 132-133). The maximum width allowed by states also quickly grew with families as regulations changed from 8 feet wide trailers to 14 feet wide in 1969 (1991, 126, 132-133). In 1969 also came the advent of the double-wide model, where you could place two 14-foot wide homes to double the size of square footage allowing for more comfort (Wallis, 133). However, by the 1980s, with the increase in prices for land there was a decrease in the number of new mobile homes placed in parks (with more being placed on land owned by families), reflecting an increase of a closure of mobile home communities (Wallis 1991, 199). Wallis regards mobile homes as a “genuine innovation, meeting needs which conventional housing has left unsatisfied” as “the mobile home has become the predominant unsubsidized type of affordable housing in the United States” (1991, 20).

Most mobile homes do not move much after their first installation, for that reason, I feel more accurate calling the home as “manufactured homes.” Still, the word manufactured homes do not have the history and feeling of mobile homes. At times in this thesis I will alternate between the two, and before I used to have an urge to be strict to call the homes “manufactured homes.” However, I have come to peace with the term “mobile home” as the term is used by the community. The price of transportation is thought of as high and most people from my study did not consider moving their homes without a park closure (further study should be conducted on the market versus the perception).

There are a few ways that mobile homes have provided shelter to Americans. It is easy to place a mobile home on a piece of property, a lot easier than building a site-built home. This is one of the major forms of mobile home ownership across America, especially on land that a household owns. Another relationship is that a family could always rent a mobile home owned by someone else. In other instances, an individual renter or couple could easily rent a room in a mobile home owned by someone else. Yet, in this thesis, the focus is on mobile homes that people own and their vulnerability to be displaced from the land they are renting when the landowner decides to close, and the ability of those mobile home community residents to mitigate that risk.

However, it does not last quite as long depending on humidity and on the upkeep provided by the homeowner, a mobile home would luckily last 40 to 50 years. More often than not, a mobile home will house different households as families move in and out of homes and communities. The number of households in a mobile home would be a valuable number to ascertain, perhaps further research can be ascertained. Some households will move on to site-built homes, some owners will pass on, and children or even the park will have to decide what happens to the title. Other times mobile home residents are evicted, because they cannot pay their lot rents or even their mortgage. The focus of this thesis however is on the displacement of mobile home park owners, who own their mobile home and lease the land in a community from the landholder when that landowner decides to not run a mobile home community.

This is the background where laws like Florida's Chapter 723, better known as the Mobile Home Act, were codified. In Florida, the increase of land prices has been spectacular in metropolitan areas, especially in South Florida. At one time Tampa and central Florida were considered to be South Florida. However with the spread of railroads and air conditioning, the

real South Florida has taken off, including its imagination in the minds of people across the world through movies and tv shows like *Scarface*, *The Birdcage*, and of course... *Miami Vice*.

The Dark Side of South Florida

As depicted in media portrayals like *Miami Vice*, South Florida is famous for its international glitz, its nightlife, the area's expensive homes and its beaches, and the rich cultural diversity. It is a wonderful place to visit as a tourist whether one is on Spring Break or not, and for those who live there, there are many things to enjoy. However, just like any place, there are some dark sides to South Florida. One of the most oppressive features, apart from the grueling heat in the summer, is the cost of housing in South Florida.

Currently, almost half of all households in South Florida are burdened by the cost of housing (Fernald 2019b:W18), which is defined as when housing costs more than 30 percent of a family's income (Fernald 2020a, 4). Even more alarming, more than a third of South Florida renters pay more than 50 percent of their family's income on housing, the HUD definition of severely cost burdened (Fernald 2020b, W18). During the financial crisis of 2008, many homeowners fell behind their mortgages and were foreclosed. With such housing burdens, affordable housing solutions are critical to a working South Florida economy, however one of these solutions, living in a mobile home community, comes with many challenges and opportunities.

For the working poor, the South Florida metropolitan area lacks the numerous conveniences of a community that supports the needs of all its workers, let alone the unemployed. Aside from the obvious fringe benefits of the temperate weather and easy access to the beach, South Florida lacks two important needs for low paid workers: housing affordability

and quick, reliable public transportation. In 2007, before I started my research, for more than 72,100 households in South Florida by 2007 (about 4 percent), the much-stigmatized mobile home was the housing solution they have relied upon (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Mobile homes provided a respite from the high cost of land in South Florida.

In 1990, one out of every four mobile homes were situated in metropolitan areas, with 10 percent of all homes located in Florida (Hart, Rhodes, and Morgan 2002, 33). Simultaneously, Hart, Rhodes, and Morgan claim that Americans perceive mobile home parks as “hotbeds of sex and violence” that depress adjacent property values, and that popular media “are all too happy to pander to this” (2002, 2). Wallis also notes that mobile home residents “are often looked down upon,” with neighbors “fearing the effects on house values and social stability (1991, 21). Wallis argues that the reason for many Americans distaste of mobile homes can be traced to its differentness (1991, 21). Yet, I would argue that the imagination of difference has to do more with the negative social status and poor media representation as discussed by Hart, Rhodes, and Morgan (2002). Wallis also notes an argument dating back to the mid-1930’s that “mobile home owners do not pay for the public services they use,” which he credits to ignorance, prejudice, and especially class bias (1991, 21-22). Wallis also provides historical context to the discourse of mobile home residents as “white trash” or “trailer trash” (1991). Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray argue that the “white trash” stereotypes serve “as a useful way of blaming the poor for being poor” (1997, 1). I would also include the “trailer trash” term in this conversation. Blaming the poor, “helps solidify in the middle and upper classes a sense of cultural and intellectual superiority” (Newitz and Wray 1997, 1).

More recently, Katherine MacTavish has noted the numerous insecurities involved for MHP residents with suggestions for policy improvements (2006). Even though her target

population focuses on MHP parks in rural areas, there are many commonalities between rural, urban and suburban MHP residents. She first comments how MHP residents face financial insecurities, with “high interest mortgages, exploitative lot rents or eviction, capricious park management, the sale of park land for a ‘higher use,’ rent-to-own home sale arrangements, and high utility costs all foster household financial vulnerability” (MacTavish 2006, 3), all of which I witnessed in urban and suburban South Florida. MacTavish also notes that MHP residents face home structural insecurities through “poor construction, risks of air pollution and fire, and problems with maintaining sanitary living conditions in the face of overcrowding” (2006, 5), another condition I witnessed in South Florida. Finally, MacTavish explains how MHP residents face social insecurity as “the sense of transience defines a mobile park together with issues ... such as lack of trust, diminished sense of community, residential segregation, and stigmatization” exacerbate vulnerabilities (2006, 7). Though this might be the case across the sites that MacTavish has studied, what I witnessed in South Florida was a little more varied. These social issues were dependent on the different set of economic and social characteristics of the MHP, and that there are some MHPs where the sense of community is not diminished, especially in retirement communities. However further research is needed to better understand this.

MacTavish also recommends a number of policy improvements, and focuses on the opportunities of a cooperative park (2006). “The cooperative movement in New Hampshire shows us that non-profits, philanthropists, lenders, local communities, and states are willing to work toward developing changes to support this housing sector.” Cooperative parks are MHPs where residents collectively own the land together. MacTavish notes that this movement has spread to California, Oregon, Rhode Island, New York and even Florida (2006, 10). Though I am

not aware of the MHPs that have converted to cooperative parks in Florida. The policy suggestions that MacTavish promote address the three insecurities she discusses: financial, home structures, and social (2006, 10-12). Financially, she advocates for changing lending mechanisms so that they are not predatory and reform tax laws so that mobile homes are classified as homes and not vehicles. As far as ensuring the structural integrity of homes, MacTavish advocates for “innovations in building codes and practices and in ‘upgrading’ older homes” in an equitable manner. Yet, when it comes to how to address social insecurities, MacTavish notes that this is the most difficult of the three. Though she does advocate for “resident owned communities, changes in land-use policies, amended tax codes, and education programs” as places to begin to address these problems (MacTavish 2006, 12).

For those mobile home homeowners, who own their homes outright and clear of any high-interest mortgage, it does ease the financial burden. However, one must first purchase the home outright, and, even then, there are many financial burdens that the landowner can place upon that homeowner. I lived in four different mobile home parks in South Florida and Tampa over nine years to better understand mobile home living and the precarious situation such communities face in a volatile real estate market. However, after more than a year of participant observation research, working with the residents of different parks to help organize their communities, and witnessing a park closure, it is clear that the lack of affordable housing is a massive problem and makes the South Florida economy precarious for many.

The potential for mobile home park residents to effect change in state laws and in their communities is severely limited. Mobile home park residents who rent their lot are in a difficult and precarious position where the landowner can easily target them and make life difficult if they tried to use their latent power to help change Florida State Law 723. Only, and only if there was

a functioning Mobile Home Council across the state, where there were local mobile home council chapters, could residents try to take on the landed powers in Tallahassee, Florida's state capital. However, neoliberal ideologies make this difficult to achieve though not impossible.

During the housing bubble of the late 1990s until 2008, many mobile home parks closed, displacing residents and leaving many homeless. Additionally, with the dramatic economic recession and crisis of around 2008, many South Florida residents lost their jobs, making it hard to pay their lot rents. During my time in mobile home parks, I witnessed abuses such as eviction, threat of eviction, arbitrary fines, and even threats of arson against people who worked to organize their communities. And when the landowner decides to sell the land on which a mobile home park rests, even more turmoil begins for the mobile home owner. All mobile home park residents who do not own their lots, but own their mobile homes, face the threat of dislocation. In my research I interviewed people who had lost homes, others who were forced to move their homes, and I unfortunately saw the process happen up close. I saw firsthand how many residents of one mobile home park, Palma Nova in Davie, Broward County, Florida, were extremely concerned about the rumors of their park closing. That concern turned to anger, fear, and stress for many Palma Nova residents when they received official notices that their park was scheduled to close within six months of the notice and that they had to leave. This thesis documents the community organizing around the closure of Palma Nova, a mobile home community of 700-plus homes. I spent three months living in Palma Nova. I based my 2008 research on the problem of the dislocation threat in South Florida, mainly in the Davie area. However, mobile home park closures were not confined to Davie. Neither before my research nor after it. In subsequent years, Avocado, Aventura, and a host of other mobile home parks were closed in South Broward and in Miami-Dade County.

The Politics of Research

In my years of living in mobile home communities, I have worked with two non-profit organizations in dealing with problems faced by the residents of manufactured homes. I have tried to help organize three of the communities in which I have lived. In doing so, I have tried to apply my anthropological training. For me, applying my anthropology has meant to try to get people on different sides of issues to work together, but at the same time, to advocate for the least powerful in any encounter.

I started my journey as an intern at Legal Aid Service of Broward County, Florida, working under Janet Riley, the Housing Unit Attorney. I worked with her to understand how residents of the city in the county with the highest number of mobile home park residents, Davie, Florida, were dealing with the pressures of mobile home park closures. The Town of Davie had instituted a moratorium on closures, but it was ending during the time of my fieldwork, and prices for land had steeply risen during the previous decade meaning that, while it was very profitable for mobile home park landowners to have residents rent lot spaces for their manufactured homes, it was on many occasions even more profitable for landowners to sell properties to property speculators and developers and close mobile home parks.

I began my life in a mobile home by renting a room in a mobile home in Palma Nova, one largest and one of the more notorious mobile home parks in Davie. I worked with a group of residents concerned about the rumors they had heard of the park closing, providing them with information of the potential usefulness of forming a Homeowners Association (HOA). HOAs in Florida are quite different for mobile home park residents who rent the land in comparison to HOAs for residents who own their own land. Mobile home HOAs can begin as dictated by FS

§723.075 to pay the state fee for a corporation to start and renew every year which currently costs as little as \$87.50

Not long after the moratorium in Davie ended, coinciding with the end of my fieldwork period as well, the landowner of Palma Nova sent out notices that the park would close in six months. This set off a scramble for residents to try to salvage what they could, especially their actual mobile home if they could, find a new mobile home community, and find a way to pay for their mobile home to be moved to a different mobile home park.

My participant-observation advocacy research experience at Palma Nova, described in this thesis, informed my later research and activism. I later conducted research in Tampa, Florida on the preparedness and responses of mobile home park residents to hurricanes (Kusenbach 2017). The Tampa research allowed a comparative focus on questions of collective activity and land tenure insecurity. I went back to Davie in 2009 to live in another mobile home park, where I had purchased a home. Palma Nova was vacated by the time I arrived back in 2009. The global recession seemed to have temporarily stopped the threat of park closures because park landowners at that time did as potential buyers had more difficulties securing loans. However, there remained serious conflicts between mobile home park residents and the landowners. I worked with the non-governmental organization Jobs with Justice through their Vecinos Unidos (Neighbors United) campaign that helped residents work together in the face of the many problems with what must be called slumlords in Miami-Dade County. Many of the mobile home parks in Miami were in poor conditions. Plus, residents faced many vulnerabilities, whether it was access to medical care, immigration documentation issues, and the threat of community closure never went away, even during the recession.

I did some community organizing in my own community, though with a false start. In 2010, the residents, including myself, received a notice of an increase in lot rent and other amenities. People were not happy, so my wife and I put out flyers and we were able to secure the community center for a meeting. We discussed our options, but with the work falling mainly to my wife and myself, we were not able to put together a viable opposition. Then my wife and I were expecting a child and so we decided to try to move to a community with more amenities that focused on the safety of our child. We found another mobile home community nearby with sidewalks to walk my baby son in a stroller and eventually teach him to walk and run in a safer place.

My son's arrival took me away from working on problems in our mobile home park, but a number of years later, in 2016, I thought I was going to be finally able to help my mobile home community. When the lot rent was increased as well as the cost of a number of other facilities and amenities, residents in our community were not happy about it. Together with my numerous neighbors and my wife, we worked to address a number of concerns brought about by the new lease. The amount of the increase for a number of items, including lot rent and a pet fee, angered and worried a number of residents, including myself. We collected signatures and fulfilled state statutes concerning how to meet the landowner. We collected money for a lawyer to represent us. However, in the end we found out just how little power we had to effect change. We went to mediation with the park owner. However, there was very little we could do to stop the increases other than to agree to disagree on some of the increases for the facilities and amenities provided by the landowner, as this is how it is set up in FS 723. The experience shows, as does the ethnography below, that landholders hold considerable power over mobile home residents, not

only in monetary power, but also in legal power. At least in that mobile home park, the landowner offered three-year leases, which meant more stability and security for families.

Broward County

Just north of Miami-Dade County lies Broward County, and it too has faced the same cyclical booms and busts of real estate as its southern neighbor. The county seat of Broward, Ft. Lauderdale, started as a United States stockade in former Tequesta Indian territory in 1838 and then was abandoned in 1842. However, it was not until the arrival of entrepreneur Franklin Benjamin “Frank” Stranahan in 1893, and Henry Flagler’s Florida East Coast (FEC) railroad in 1896, did any serious organized development begin. Bill McGoun for the Broward County Historical Commission described the founding and early history of Broward County in this manner and his succinct account is worth quoting at length for our purposes here:

Besides making it possible for more settlers to reach Broward, the railroad also made it necessary. If Flagler were to reap any return on the state and private lands which he had been given in return for laying the rails, it was absolutely necessary that he find prospective buyers. His land companies sought immigrants both in the North and in the South.

They were not hard to find. Swedes from the Northeast formed the nucleus of Hallandale, and Danes from the Midwest founded Dania. Southern farmers, lured by better land and milder winters, joined the Danes and Swedes and founded Pompano and Deerfield, besides. Much of the fieldwork was done by blacks from either the South or the Bahamas... Broward County itself, which was formed from portions of Dade and Palm Beach counties in 1915 and named for former Florida governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward... championed Everglades drainage and got the dredges working on the south and north New River canals. While results in the Everglades were mixed, the drainage opened up much of today’s urban Broward County for development, first as agricultural land and, later, as residential.

The fruits of this work would come later. With the exception of a flurry in Fort Lauderdale’s Progresso area in connection with a 1911 land drawing, growth was slow and steady until the prosperity and optimism that followed World War I set off the first of Broward's two great booms.

In numbers, this boom pales in comparison to the greater one that followed World War II. While the county's population went from 5,135 to 14,242 between 1920 and 1925 for a gain of 9,107, the average gain per year between 1950 and 1970 was 26,808, as the population soared from [sic] 83,933 to 620,100.

But numbers are not everything. The 1920s boom set the prevailing pattern in two important ways. First, it marked the advent of the developer city in which a single plan would encompass an entire community rather than a single neighborhood.

Beyond that, it changed the nature of the county's economy. Before 1920 most settlers were farmers, but the newcomers were urban people, many of them retirees. Also, the 1920s witnessed the emergence of tourism as a major facet of the Broward economy. The grandest of the 1920s developers was Joseph W. Young who turned a low-lying tract between Hallandale and Dania into his dream city of Hollywood-by-the-Sea... To draw residents, he advertised throughout the eastern United States. He brought prospects in by bus, train and ship and treated them to lunch and tours of the city. He put on the "hard-sell," occasionally utilizing "sweat rooms" where the customer was bombarded by a high-pressure salesman.

But the boom already had crested; rough days were ahead. Once more, access to the outside world would be a major problem. With the spate of new settlement, there was a tremendous need for importation of both food and building material, most of which had to be brought over the single-track FEC. Many recognized the problem. Flagler's successors made plans to double-track the FEC and a second railroad, today's Seaboard Coast Line, was extended southward toward Miami. Young and others moved toward creation of Port Everglades. But, none of this could be done quickly enough. The backlog of goods at Jacksonville so critical that, on October 29, 1925, the FEC had to embargo everything except food or items for which special permits had been obtained. The effect on construction was catastrophic and this soon was followed by a drying up of credit. Northern banks long had felt that the boom, with its paper-thin operating margins and spiraling prices fed by speculative trading of both property and purchase options, was too giddy to last. By early 1926, they were becoming very cautious with their money. The most speculative developers were wiped out then and there. Others, including Young, might have been able to weather the downturn, but they could not weather great hurricane that roared out of the Caribbean and smashed squarely into south Broward on September 17 and 18, 1926. Much of Hollywood was flattened and/or flooded. There were 34 verified deaths. Observers insisted, however, that the real toll was much higher. Damage in Fort Lauderdale was less, but still considerable. Fifteen were dead. North Broward, which had both fewer people and lighter winds, had no deaths and only minor damage. In the long run, however, the worst damage was done by the black headlines in northern newspapers that scared away potential replacements for those who either had died or fled. For south Florida, the Depression began three years before it hit the rest of the nation. In 1927 Dania and Hallandale regained their independence, the latter to be its own city for the first time. Davie's charter lapsed, not to be renewed for 35 years, and Floranada, shorn of much of its territory, was reincorporated as Oakland Park. Yet, the collapse was not so total as commonly believed. While the 1930s was not the best of times in Broward, it was

not the worst, either. And growth had not stopped, it merely had paused. Population went from the 14,242 of 1925 to 20,094 in 1930 and to 39,794 in 1940...

As far as Broward's future was concerned, however, the most significant thing about ... [World War II] ... was the plethora of training bases that were established. Every airfield in the county, plus the future site of Broward Community College's central campus was a World War II training facility.

When peace came, thousands of service men recalled how nice it had been in Broward. With their families, they returned. Thousands of others joined them. The greatest boom was on... In the 30 years from 1940 to 1970, Fort Lauderdale's's [sic] population shot from 17,996 to 139,590. Hollywood went from 6,239 to 106,873; Pompano Beach from 4,427 to 38,587; and Hallandale from 1,827 to 23,849. Plantation, which was just getting started in 1950, had grown to 23,523 by 1970.

New cities came into being everywhere and old ones grew... As the county's population soared toward a million, a few of the developers became overextended or came under criticism because of the close ties between their firms and the cities which they had created. Also, a growing number of newcomers feared that too-rapid growth would bring to their new homes those problems which they had left behind in their old ones. As the 1970s dawned, they began demanding that their cities opt for slower growth and lower limits on the number of residences per acre. Gradually, governments began to respond.

Yet, when growth finally paused in 1974 it was not as a result of municipal actions. Instead, south Florida was just one more victim of a recession which was sweeping the nation. It was not the inability to build that cooled the boom. Rather, it was the inability to sell. At one point, there were an estimated 50,000 unsold condominium apartments in the area.

By 1976 the building industry began to revive. With it came a concern that the uncontrolled and, sometimes, unwise growth that characterized the past would not be repeated. A new county charter gave Broward's government broad powers to monitor and improve the quality of life and the environment. The passage of of [sic] the 1977 Land Use Plan was a major step toward limiting urban sprawl and insuring that the area's resources, natural, economic and social, would be put to their best use (McGoun 1978).

With these developments meant the arrival of workers, and these workers often resorted to living in mobile home parks. Similarly, mobile home parks expanded with the demand from retirees moving from the north of the United States and from Canada. Mobile home parks came to be a permanent and prominent feature in the Florida landscape, and especially so in Broward County, and even more so in Davie. In the boom years prior to 2008, when financial lending

institutions lent money out without verification of income, this led to a spectacular rise in home prices throughout the nation, and especially in South Florida. There were two major reasons why mobile home parks would close during this time. The most obvious reason was the desire to cash in on land that mobile home park residents occupied. With rising real estate values, it was very profitable for landowners to close the mobile home parks and either sell the land or redevelop it themselves into another type of income-generating venture, probably with higher profit margins. Hurricane Wilma in 2005 and its tropical cyclones damaged many mobile homes in numerous mobile home parks in South Florida. Some mobile home parks lost so many mobile homes that with the inflated real estate market, they cashed in on insurance payouts and closed instead of trying to regenerate the business. Others, like Kings Manor in Davie, almost closed. But when a new owner came in at Kings Manor who was already in the mobile home park business, combined with the closure of Palma Nova nearby, the owner was able to fill the park and generate more income. Rexmere Village in Davie also lost homes to Hurricane Wilma. But despite the initial loss of about 10 percent their 770+ homes they were also able to refill back to capacity when Palma Nova closed. The Great Recession of 2008, precipitated by the lack of regulations on housing mortgages which ballooned the prices of land and homes in many parts of the country and especially South Florida, seemed to have slowed down the rate of mobile home park closure.

Town of Davie Affordable Housing Crisis

By late 2006, the five members of the Davie Town Council had officially recognized that the city had an “affordable housing crisis” and passed a yearlong moratorium on park closures (Town of Davie 2006,18). The town had already lost over a thousand mobile homes in the

previous ten years due to owners closing their parks and units lost to hurricane damage (Carras and Spangler 2007). The moratorium, which prohibited any of its remaining 31 mobile home parks from closing, was eventually extended another six months. One-quarter of Davie's 90,000-plus residents lived in mobile homes, demonstrating the scope of the problem for the town (Carras and Spangler 2007). Palma Nova Mobile Home Park was one of those mobile home parks in Davie owned by one of the area's wealthiest landowners, Miles Austin Forman.

Palma Nova's population at the time of my fieldwork in 2008 didn't fit the typical American media representation of a mobile home community in terms of ethnicity. In this community, instead of an exclusively white non-Hispanic population, my study participants and I estimated that Palma Nova was 70 to 80 percent Latino, with a sizeable population of white non-Hispanics, (often called "Anglos" in South Florida), and a number of other ethnicities which included African Americans, Haitian immigrants and Haitian-Americans, Asian immigrants and Asian-Americans. There were also rumors that quite a number of park residents were undocumented immigrants. However, for reasons of sensitivity I did not complete a census and did not inquire about the immigration status of the residents.

About This Thesis

In this thesis I begin in Chapter 2 by locating the ethnographic research in the literature on neoliberalism, conceived of as the stage of capitalism contemporary with the fieldwork. After defining neoliberalism and crony capitalism, I locate the study in the theoretical tradition known as anthropological political economy. I show how this tradition conceives of human behavior as taking place within systems of unequal power relationships based on the uneven distribution of societal resources. I argue that the ethnographic data must be understood as evidence of larger

structural transformations even if the agency of my study participants indicates the space for counter-hegemonic maneuvering.

In Chapter 3, I make an argument for an activist and engaged anthropology and locate my own research methods within those emerging traditions in the discipline. I describe my own activism as an intern with Legal Aid Service of Broward County and show how an activist and engaged anthropology can intersect with and transform traditional ethnographic research methods upon which social and cultural anthropology is based.

Chapter 4 is the heart of the ethnography. In this chapter I show in great detail the organizing efforts engaged in by mobile home park homeowners to prevent their displacement in the wake of a threat, ultimately fulfilled, of park sale and closure. I document their engagement with each other, the obstacles both internal in the form of petty rivalries and ethnic conflict, and external in the face of overwhelming class power on the part of the landowner and the political and legal apparatus designed to intervene on the behalf of the landowner's class.

Finally, in Chapter 5, the thesis concludes with a claim that this thesis contributes to anthropological political economy as well as to the anthropology of neoliberalism and the kinds and stages of capitalism. It also concludes with a call for applied anthropology to employ such a theoretical model in order to further the political ends of the disempowered communities with whom applied anthropologists work and serve.

Chapter 2 : The Anthropology of Neoliberalism

The Force of Political Economy

This thesis is located in the tradition of anthropological political economy. By this it is meant an approach that an anthropological political economy presents itself as a more general theory of society and culture where an emphasis is put on inequalities and power relationships in various guises and locations (Robotham 2012; Roseberry 1988). Anthropologists taking a political economy perspective take a historical perspective to the conjunction of economics and politics (e.g., Mintz 1985; Wolf 1982). As one anthropologist author of an overview put it: “Anthropological political economy focuses on unequal power in social, cultural, and environmental relations, and attends to power in activity as well as subjectivity. The phrase often is a euphemism for Marx-influenced approaches or for politically left-leaning work, although this is not wholly accurate, for political economy offers penetrating insights and raises significant challenges for anthropology as a whole” (Heyman 2013, 88). These challenges include forcing anthropology to reckon with capitalism as an over-arching system that entails a relationship to the state where behavioral socio-cultural and representational responses are structured. While approaches from political economy in anthropology often originate in economic anthropology, and these approaches start from the perspective of production and then show how production is linked to and determines distribution, exchange, consumption, and the market (Robotham 2012, 41), they also provide the tools to analyze the relationships presupposed in the capital-labor contradiction such as those between capital, the state, and the law, as shown in this thesis.

Political economy is a materialist approach. This means that its frames of analysis prioritize the force of material social relationships. While not denying the importance and power of symbolic webs of significance that envelope human social relations, an approach from political economy foregrounds the material social relationships of power and denies a separation, as in many symbolic approaches in anthropology, “from the wellings-up of action, interaction, power, and praxis” (Roseberry 1982, 1027).

In this thesis, I locate the economic forces that ultimately account for the displacement of the mobile home park residents who are the subject of this ethnographic study in the political economy of the contemporary stage of capitalism known as neoliberalism, though I also focus on the mechanisms of crony capitalism. I construe neoliberalism as an articulation of the state, the market economy, and citizenship. I thereby align my approach in this thesis with the number of works in anthropology that attempt to apply anthropological perspectives to the local configurations of neoliberalism (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Edelman and Haugerud 2005; Greenhouse 2009; Hilgers 2010; Hyatt 2011; Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Wacquant 2012).

I have previously explained Marxist geographer David Harvey’s definition of neoliberalism, yet it is important to dig deeper into the political economic theory “that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills” (2005, 2). Harvey calls neoliberalism a system of “accumulation by dispossession” entailing the “privatization and commodification” of public goods and spaces, the “financialization” of just about anything that can be turned into a vehicle for economic speculation, and the “management and manipulation of crises” where the state becomes involved in the “upward” redistribution of wealth to the ruling classes (Harvey 2005, 159-64). This means

neoliberal structures, practices, *and* ideologies – where here ideologies are conceived of as “systematic political discursive representations emanating from material social relationships” (Yelvington n.d.). Essentially, neoliberal ideologies involve political positions vis-à-vis ideas, attitudes, and representations that revolve around the concept that the individual knows best regarding what choices to make, assuming that there are strong property rights, free markets, and free trade. These rest on and provide “cover” for actual practices where the state, with plausible deniability, intervenes on behalf of the classes and fractions of classes that own capital at various strategic points through a variety of means. These means especially include the rolling back of government regulations such as those related to the environment, financial services, and international trade, the breaking of the post-World War II capital-labor compromise by breaking labor unions, and, at the same time, the allowance or even encouragement of a kind of identity politics. These identity politics are extremely relevant in the mobile home park setting, as those tensions tend to reduce chances for working-class solidarity.

Promoters of the neoliberalization of the state, economy, and society argue there are quite a few benefits to be had by all under the regime of neoliberal markets (Harvey 2005, 20). The idea in theory can sound appealing to people who are led by a whole ideological apparatus to believe in each individual taking responsibility for their own actions and situation. However, in practice there are obstacles for markets and trade to flow freely and for individuals to be free, especially when there are obvious monopolies or cartels, either in the private sector or if those markets are controlled by the state in the name of the citizenry. Further, there is no such thing as truly free markets as there is always actors who are able to use force and coercion through their crony capitalist connections. Yelvington, Simms, and Murray argue that the state is “an inchoate ensemble of institutions and policies relatively autonomous from civil society but able to

monopolize public governance and the distribution of public goods on behalf of certain strata and collectivities” (2012, 60). However, “this does not mean that the [state] is always completely successful in its many and often internally contradictory projects” (2012, 60).

In this thesis, I will show how the existence of a neoliberal market without strong property rights for mobile homeowners creates a truly unfair market for those homeowners, while landowners enjoy crony capitalist privileged rights that are caught up in their political and economic power because of the type of property that they own in comparison to the mobile home homeowners. There are some protections for mobile home owners, perhaps because of the crony capitalism on the side of the mobile home owners, through FMO, that are constantly under threat by the crony capitalist on the other side, the land owners of mobile home parks. Though, mobile home park residents are generally disunited and divided in a similar manner as are many American neighborhoods. In the poorer mobile home parks, I did see a great sense of unity out of necessity, though the fear of losing one’s home can silence many residents.

The mobile home park landowner often profits handsomely from the rent provided by the mobile home homeowner. I have seen net operating income in Miami as high as 64 percent according to The Counselors of Real Estate Consulting Corps report prepared for a local non-profit, South Florida Jobs with Justice (2011, 6). Even if the mobile home owner has a relatively affordable home, the homeowner can face difficulties in organizing with fellow mobile home homeowners to resist abuses by the park owner.

The most profound threat to all mobile home park residents who own their homes and rent their lots is the threat of displacement. In my research, I interviewed people who had lost homes, others who were forced to move their homes to other mobile home lots, and I saw the process of entire parks being sold and closed. I saw firsthand how the Palma Nova residents first

heard rumors of their park closing and then how their concern turned to anger, fear, and stress for many when they received official notices that their park was scheduled to close within six months of the notice. At Palma Nova, I saw the uncertainty of people faced with having to move their mobile home, which cost \$20,000 to \$40,000 second-hand, or even around \$80,000 if they financed a new mobile home. For those who owned their mobile home outright, they were more able than those with mortgages to start the task of finding a new community for their home and family as quickly as they understood the situation. For those who did not have title to their mobile home they had to obtain approval from their lender. There were those who had problems working out the details of the move with their mortgage holders. For some residents, their mobile homes represented an investment of their life savings.

In this thesis, I analyze human activity and social relations as an interplay between economics, politics, and culture. I agree with Antonio Gramsci that between “the premises (economic structure) and the consequence (political constitution) the relations are anything but simple and direct” and that that “history is not a mathematical calculation” (quoted in Cospito 2016, 44). Ethnography is a way to understand the relations between the “premises” and the “consequence,” but these relations are anything but foregone conclusions. Therefore, historically-situated ethnography is essential to understand the underlying structures and causal mechanisms at work generating the surface manifestations that ethnography can capture. It is to the kind of ethnography presented here that we turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Conclusion

Anthropological political economy is an approach that allows us to see how power relations not only mark the social status of human individuals and human groups of various kinds

but how the relations structure interactions at various levels. I have argued for this theoretical perspective as a way of answering my research questions that, straightforwardly stated, entail asking why mobile home homeowners are being evicted as the land encompassing their mobile home parks is being sold for further development or financial speculation, what kinds of social structure arrangements limit their opportunities for resistance and recourse, and, indeed, what sort of larger economic and political forces are at work in this process. Political economy allows us to historicize and define contemporary capitalism as neoliberalism which is itself a particular – and some would say peculiar – relationship between the state, the economy, and the citizenry. Crony relationships are driving politicians to craft for neoliberal policies, for the benefit of those with access to power. Yet, to take a political economy approach does not obviate firsthand historical and ethnographic research. To ignore micro-level behavior would be to ignore the local workings of power inequalities as well as the possibilities of human agency. It is to the methods of undertaking this ethnography that we now turn.

Chapter 3 : Research Methods for an Activist Anthropology

An Activist Doing Anthropology

At the start of my internship with Legal Aid Service of Broward County and my ethnographic research in May 2008, I moved from Tampa to Davie. I was able to find a room in Palma Nova. I chose to live there because there was an existing City of Davie moratorium on the closure of mobile home parks that was about to expire. When I arrived in Davie, many residents were uneasy about the prospects for their communities. I found a room in a mobile home in Palma Nova through a contact that I had made on a previous trip. My contact had a friend who was renting a room at his mobile home for \$600 a month. The price of renting the room was quite high when one considers that the lot rent was about \$500 per month. However, I was only staying for three months and I needed to begin my internship and field research as quickly as possible. I had no in-depth knowledge about Palma Nova when I was offered the chance to live there. I took a quick visit to make sure that I could have a somewhat comfortable place to live. It was a nice mobile home that the owner, Jim (the names of my study participants who were at the time mobile home park residents are pseudonyms), procured when he lost his last mobile home to a park closure.

Jim's mobile home was a 2005 model, single-wide with three bedrooms and one bathroom. My room was not that large, about six feet by 14 feet. However, I had a bed, closet, television, and a desk where I could work on my computer. My first impression of Palma Nova was that it was neither the worst nor the best mobile home community that I had ever laid foot in.

I had visited about 20 mobile home parks in Tampa and Davie during 2008 before visiting Palma Nova. That included exclusive retirement mobile home communities and unkempt, rundown parks run by slumlords. Overall, my first impressions of Palma Nova were that I could live safely there and that I could “blend in” and be rather inconspicuous in order to facilitate my research because of the size of the park and the large numbers of Latinos living there.

As it turned out, I had ended up at the most infamous mobile home park in Davie. My small network of contacts among mobile home park residents who were familiar with different communities in the area were shocked and intrigued at my destination of residence. One resident of another mobile home park in western Davie warned me against living at Palma Nova. She told me that her church would go there once a year to help the residents at the park, but that overall it wasn't a safe place to live. A high-ranking administrator in one of the Town of Davie's departments who dealt with mobile home park issues was surprised, excited, and concerned all at the same time when I told her that I had moved into Palma Nova, telling me that I was taking on “quite a challenge.” She proceeded to tell me how Palma Nova had changed its name from Silver Oaks earlier in the decade and instituted a number of security measures to distance itself from its general notoriety and from the death of young girl who overdosed on drugs that she obtained there (Berrios 2002). However, this administrator felt that the name change was just cosmetic and that the situation there with regard to the availability of illegal drugs and the overall safety of the park had not changed. Even my internship supervisor and her paralegal were surprised and concerned when I told them that I had moved into Palma Nova that second week in May.

Activist Applied Anthropology

Orlando Fals-Borda, the great Colombian sociologist and ethnographer, suggested in a famous article in the journal *Dialectical Anthropology* that we go about “investigating reality in order to change it” (Fals Borda 1979). An early developer, adherent, and promotor of Participatory Action Research, and in line with contemporary calls for “interventive observation in field work” (Bodemann 1978), Fals Borda advocated for rigorous research standards while acknowledging the politics of research and advocated that the purposes of research findings be directed on behalf of a society’s disempowered groups (on Fals Borda, see Robles Lomeli and Rappaport 2018; Yelvington 2008). At the time of the planning and conducting of this ethnographic research, many anthropologists had started to question the idea of value-free research for research’s sake, and started to develop “activist anthropology” and “engaged anthropology” with book titles such as *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (Hale 2008), *Toward Engaged Anthropology* (Beck and Maida 2013), *Taking Sides: Ethics, Politics and Fieldwork in Anthropology* (Armbruster and Lærke 2008), *Feminist Activist Ethnography: Counterpoints to Neoliberalism in North America* (Craven and Davis 2013), *Engaging Anthropology: The Case for a Public Presence* (Eriksen 2006), *Anthropology Put to Work* (Field and Fox 2007), and *Engaged Observer: Anthropology, Advocacy, and Activism* (Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006). This was paralleled in other disciplines (e.g., Hoffman 2019). In many ways, however, the positions being taken up by these social and cultural anthropologists were what applied anthropologists were already used to taking up (e.g., Van Willigen 2002; Van Willigen, Rylko-Bauer, and McElroy 2019). Indeed, the University of South Florida (USF) claims the first M.A. program in Applied Anthropology anywhere in the world in 1974 and the first Ph.D. program in Applied Anthropology anywhere in the world in

1984, graduating over 500 students by 2020 and placing them in the private sector, the public sector, non-governmental organizations, and the academy (Romero-Daza and Himmelgreen 2020).

I locate this study in the traditions of activist/engaged anthropology and applied anthropology – thus, an activist applied anthropology. By this I mean an applied anthropology that from the start understands the politics of doing research and that denies research is somehow politically neutral. It is an applied anthropology that self-consciously uses political engagement to further the science of anthropology while at the same time using the corpus of anthropological data and theoretical production to put political engagement into effect. Great care is taken in an activist applied anthropology to make sure that the relationships between the anthropologist and her study participants is one of engagement and mutual interest and mutual education.

This being said, this study is also located in anthropology's traditional source of strength and distinction as an academic discipline: participant-observation ethnography. For my research in Davie, I used participant observation, defined as “a process of learning through exposure to or to involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting” (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999, 91). As anthropologists, it is our main method of building relationships that are central to the research. It allowed me to see how people related to one another, inside the communities and outside of it as well. I hung out with residents and their families. Strategized with them to see how we could better organize the community to really understand the truth of what was going on. This participation is what anthropologists Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland focus on they speak of ethnographers practicing “the method of living in the community... ‘hanging out,’ and conversing while consciously observing and ultimately recording what was observed” (2000, 261). I kept detailed notes of what was going on, as I

nearly totally immersed myself in Palma Nova and what was going on in the town of Davie, only retreating to the room I was renting. Now, I did experience some rejection by the community, especially when the closure notices were sent out and I was not there as I received messages accusing me of working for the landowner.

However, during my time in Palma Nova, I was fairly well accepted and I noticed how comfortable I became in walking the community. At first, I was very uncomfortable walking the streets that had no sidewalks, not venturing far from my home. However, with time, I became comfortable walking the whole of the park, passing out flyers, talking with neighbors about the situation. Encountering beautifully kept homes, and homes that had aggressive dogs guarding them by chain. I cannot say I was a “complete participant” as Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland discuss since I did not own a mobile home during my initial research (2000, 263). However, after I moved out and completed my research time in Tampa, I came back to Davie and I became a complete participant by living in a mobile home I purchased. Some would call this “going native,” though it made economic sense for me and subsequently for my family (2000, 262).

In my research I also looked to perform some semi-structured interviews,² through which the participants had either been displaced before, going through a displacement, or were concerned about displacement. I wanted to get some detailed data about people living in Palma Nova and in surrounding mobile home communities in Fort Lauderdale and Miami who had met these criteria. Participants had to agree to the interview and could at any moment cancel consent. I wanted to put together a video to educate people on the issues of park displacement, so I asked if I could video record the interviews. I performed nine interviews with four women, four men

² I do wish I would have asked participants, what they remember about the time they purchased a mobile home in a mobile home park? Did they really understand the relationship they were entering? Do mobile home owners in a mobile home park, really understand the relationship they are entering?

and one couple, but only four individuals agreed to the video recording. Every participant consented to the audio recording. I chose to interview key informants in Palma Nova and I also chose to do some stratified sampling. Stratified sampling “involves identifying significant segments or groups within a population and then sampling them separately from each segment” (Schensul, et al. 1999, 253). In the end, the video recordings were not useful in creating something for public consumption, mainly because I was an unskilled videographer. However, the interviews were invaluable and most importantly informed me that many of the participants did own other mobile homes previously and some were displaced from previous communities.

The research was approved by USF’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). In conducting this research, I employed the required safeguards to ensure the minimization of risk for my study participants. I complied with all IRB guidelines for the conduct of ethical research. The names given to my study participants in the ethnography below are pseudonyms. However, I use the real names of public figures and of the mobile home park because this information is freely available in other forms.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that to move anthropology in general forward practitioners must acknowledge their connection to, their struggle with and indeed dependence on the societies in which they work. They should recognize that they are often in the position to provide information through in-depth study of social problems that will aid in the alleviation of those problems experienced by marginalized sectors in a society. Anthropologists must realize that their acts of research represent political interventions into political situations. This stance is not incompatible with the tradition of applied anthropology out of which this thesis arises. It is also

not incompatible with the anthropological tradition of participant-observation ethnography, the main research method upon which this thesis is based. Participant-observation requires close engagement with study participants, with the ethnographer often living in communities with and undergoing many of the same experiences. In my case, I was a resident of the mobile home park, an intern with an organization devoted to securing more rights for mobile home park residents, and a researcher. I did not see these ultimately political positions as necessarily incompatible with the demands of producing quality and verifiable research. I hope that this thesis contributes at least in some small way to the furtherance of an activist applied anthropology.

Chapter 4 : Mobile Home Park Residents Organizing Against Neoliberal Crony

Displacement

Palma Nova: Location and History

Built on land that was part of the Forman family dairy farm (Forman 1979), the Palma Nova mobile home park bordered a few other residential areas and schools near the Davie business district. It was near a number of utilities, transportation corridors, and shopping centers. Adjacent to Palma Nova were three different types of residential developments. One was a mobile home park, similar to Palma Nova, named Everglades Park, home to residents 55 years of age or older and their families. Another development was an apartment complex bordering the northern portion of Palma Nova owned by Austin Forman at one time. However, it was difficult to ascertain the relationship of Forman to the current owner. This was a sprawling complex with over 35 large 3-story apartment buildings which contained floor plans that ranged from \$1,125 for a one-bedroom apartment, to \$1,890 for a four-bedroom, three-bath apartment . It was a well kempt community. Finally, the last residential area that bordered Palma Nova to the south was an area of working-class residents. There was a mix of apartments and site-built homes which were more affordable than other parts of Davie.

There were two major highways that were less than a mile away from Palma Nova, I-595 and the Florida Turnpike. It was reported that the Forman family forced the Turnpike to be built much more westerly than it was originally planned, adjacent to the family property in west central Broward County. Palma Nova was a little more than a mile and a half away from a waste

processing site which hosts a waste to energy incinerator and a landfill. Broward Mall was less than three miles away. Broward Mall was a small-to-medium-sized mall with four anchor stores and more than 80 other stores. Palma Nova was about four miles away from the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport. There were quite a few other strip shopping malls not that far from Palma Nova. The Central Campus of Broward Community College was directly across the street and a number of university satellite campuses, anchored by the main campus of Nova Southeastern University, were all within a mile of Palma Nova.

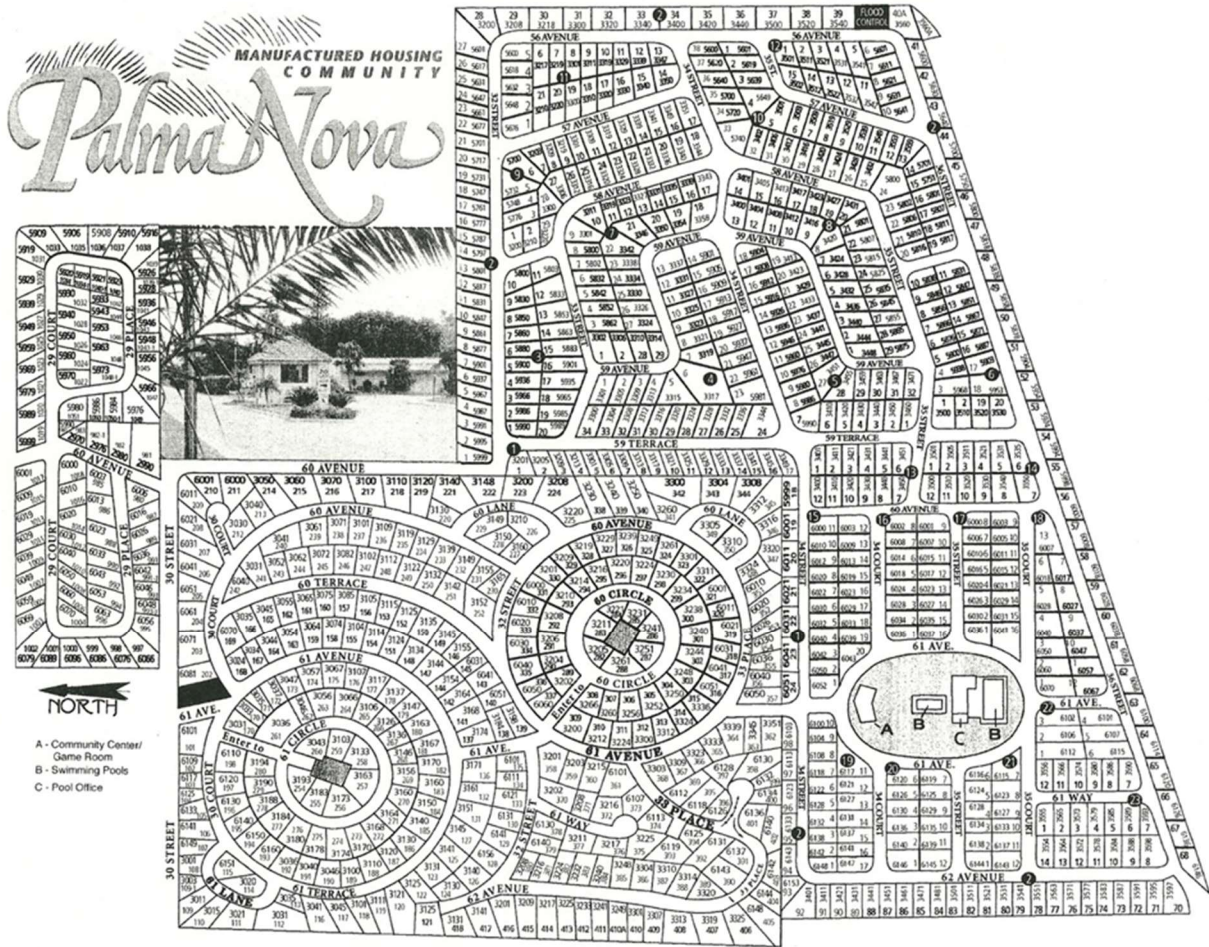


Figure 4.1: Palma Nova Street Plan

There are at least two common styles of mobile home park design. One design is a grid model, where the homes are lined up on parallel and perpendicular streets with varying degrees of density. The second design is a model of concentric streets can have the effect of increasing the density of the mobile home park. This second type characterized Palma Nova (see Figure 4.1). Within these two general models are varying degrees of density and infrastructure. The density of Palma Nova was about 8.28 lots per acre considering 944 lot spaces in 114 acres. However, there were a number of empty lots, perhaps as many as 200.

While living in Palma Nova, it was hard not to notice how poorly the infrastructure was maintained. My roommate Jim told me not to drink the water and not to spend too much time in the shower. He told me that twice recently Palma Nova residents had received notices not to drink the water from Fern Crest Utilities, Inc. I tried to avoid the water as much as possible drinking only bottled water, and my concerns about the water were only heightened by the concerns of other residents. Every resident that I worked with expressed concerns with the water quality as they also referenced other water notices that they had received. The water was actually provided by a company in which Palma Nova owner Austin Forman had an interest. In a *Broward-Palm Beach New Times* article titled “Residents of a Davie Trailer Park Think Their Contaminated Water Made Them Sick” (Guthrie 2008), the author said that Fern Crest’s water had been cited for exceeding trihalomethanes (THMs) levels going back to 1996. The article’s author was provided with copies of three different “important” notices that Fern Crest sent to Palma Nova residents, similar to a notice that Angela, a Palma Nova resident with whom I worked closely, also provided me. These notices were all titled “IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR DRINKING WATER,” and talked about the “drinking water standard” that was violated. Angela told me she believed that she received four or five of these notices since moving

into Palma Nova in 2004, but she only kept one which was dated August 15, 2008, just 11 days before official notices that Palma Nova would close were sent. The *New Times* copies were dated, June 29, 2006, warning of the water exceeding haloacetic acids and total THMs levels; May 14, 2007, warning of the water exceeding the same contaminants again; and on March 21, 2008, this time exceeding total THMs. The notice Angela showed me stated that “Tests Showed Coliform Bacteria” but that customers “do not need to boil your water or take any other corrective actions.” To this worrisome situation was added poor lighting in the park, and the lack of proper security as the number of robberies, residents agreed, were on the rise.

Reacting to Rumors: Organizing Against Possible Displacement

Part of my research plan was to attend as many of the Davie Town Council meetings as I could during my three-month internship. There was not much of note with regard to mobile home issues that first meeting I attended, on Wednesday, May 7, 2008. At the second town council meeting of the month, which occurred on May 21, the moratorium was scheduled to end and it ended without much of a commotion. However, to my surprise, a newspaper journalist for the *Miami Herald* told me that I had just missed my Palma Nova neighbors meeting outside of the Town Hall. She told me that there was a group of Palma Nova residents who were concerned about the security. She told me how they discussed that the lights on the streets were out and that there were a number of robberies recently. She said that it was a big group. I was disappointed that I had missed meeting the group, however the reporter had an even better piece of news: the group was meeting the next day at 7 p.m. at the Palma Nova basketball court.

I remember that next day of meeting the residents very vividly as it was my thirty-first birthday. I was looking forward to what I hoped would be the start of really working with a

community group inside the mobile home park where I was living. I had told my roommate Jim about the meeting, and he said he had not heard about it. I arrived at the clubhouse with Jim at about 7 p.m. as the South Florida evening sun still shone quite brightly on a hot muggy day. The door was locked to the clubhouse and only a couple of people were present. Then a few more people walked up, including Angela. She informed us that she was not given the key to the clubhouse by management, however, that was the least of her worries. Angela quickly started talking about the park being listed for sale and that a piece of paper that she had in her possession was the proof. The paper was then passed around to the attendees, as more people showed up with the passing time. Whenever someone would see the paper, they would acknowledge it with a sense of despair that it was proof that the park was sold. This included Jim. When I looked at the paper and saw the \$14.5 million price tag for the land, something did not look right about it but I could not tell just what right away. I felt mixed emotions of pity and denial.

I asked if there was a Homeowners Association (HOA) already in existence as earlier that month I had attended a workshop that clearly explained how HOAs can attempt to purchase the land, given the right conditions. The workshop was presented by a for-profit organization named FMO Conversion Services, Inc. held at Legal Aid Service of Broward County. At this meeting they explained the mechanisms of what is commonly known as the “Right of First Refusal” afforded by Florida law. As set forth under Florida law 723.071, Section (b): “the mobile home owners, by and through the association defined in s. 723.075, shall have the right to purchase the park” (The Florida Legislature 2009). However, it was impressive when both Angela and another woman named Cruz both acknowledged their understanding of the law’s Right of First Refusal. They felt that there was no way that the residents could afford \$14.5 million.

As more and more people started showing up two groups started to form, one that was speaking exclusively in Spanish and the other in English. There were also some tensions between not only between the two groups, but also between people in each group as people were figuring out what was going on and verbalizing what they thought of the situation. Angela decided to try to merge the two groups back into one as she recruited a young man that everyone just met to translate her Spanish into English as her English was a little difficult for many mono-English speakers to understand. The informal translator was not a resident of the park. Angela focused on the idea of getting media attention to support the residents. However, Jim argued that television stations in his experience did not really help out people through their reporting. He said that he was in a similar situation at another mobile home park three years previously but that television coverage only showed poor people living in the park and that it had no impact on their situation. As new people arrived at the meeting, word of the perceived sale of the park with the supporting paper was passed on.

Angela then advocated for people to form communication leaders for areas of Palma Nova to help spread a flyer the next week so that everyone in the community could know the truth. Of the approximately 25 people who attended, five people volunteered during the session to participate as block leaders, and there were another four people, including myself, who gave Angela their names for future contact. The meeting ended soon after the call for volunteers and people scattered. At this moment, I felt secure that Angela's interests were in the park residents and that she held little to no allegiance to the park management or the owner. I briefly shared with Angela who I was and what I was doing at Palma Nova. I told her that besides an intern with an organization designed to help mobile home homeowners I was also a graduate student in Anthropology at the USF that I was researching how mobile home park residents fight park

closures. I told her that I was there to help in whatever way possible. I did not volunteer as a communication leader as I still really had not much of an idea of the community, but that I hoped that there could be a role for me. We then exchanged phone numbers and e-mail addresses. As I was leaving, she asked me if I believed that Jesus Christ was my savior. I responded that I was supposed to be raised Catholic, as most Colombians are, but that my parents had bad experiences with Catholicism and they raised me without any clear direction in regard to my spirituality. I had no idea that my research would not only lead me on a path of discovery about the issues surrounding mobile home park displacement, land issues in South Florida and its politics, and questions of environmental justice, but that I would also find my spirituality transformed in the midst of what became a very challenging situation where people faced displacement.

Through e-mail and phone calls, it was decided that there would be a planning meeting at Angela's house the next Sunday. Cruz brought about 500 copies of a flyer she had created with her daughter on the computer, advertising a community meeting where everyone could learn the "truth" regarding the park closure. There were about seven people who came to the meeting and each of the attendees, including myself, were asked to pass out the flyers to our neighbors. The flyer discussed the measly amounts that the state offered in relocation funds. The meeting was very informal as one of Angela's children was playing with the kids of another volunteer couple from Chile. Not too long after I got there, I asked to look again at the paper that led us to believe that the park was closing. During the time since the last meeting, I thought about that paper with the \$14.5 million figure on it, and I had a very big hunch that it was just a web copy of the taxable value of the land. I had found the same value on the tax appraiser website, which covered the 114-acre site. When Angela showed me the paper again, I was clearly able to comprehend what I was looking at without the emotion of that last meeting. The paper was actually a property

assessment and it was not the “truth” of the park closing. I pointed this out to the neighbors there, and I took this time to also introduce myself as more than just a neighbor. I told them that I was a graduate student in Anthropology at USF and I was doing an unpaid internship with Legal Aid to research the displacement of mobile home park residents and ways to organize against that displacement. I felt quite comfortable with sharing the information with the small group, without fear that they would be interested in telling the park management. We all noticed that the timing for my arrival was very serendipitous, with all the issues that I was interested in studying at play. Angela even later admitted to me that she did some online investigation to verify who I was, mainly that I was a graduate student at USF. That night I also volunteered to work with my neighbors to pass out the flyers, since the park was so large, there were not so many volunteers, and this participant observation would be a good way to learn about the community. I was the only one from my area of Palma Nova, so it was easy to claim my territory as Angela divided the copy of the map that she had and then neatly outlined each person’s area on other copies of the Palma Nova map.

We had a very robust conversation at that meeting, talking about local politics, economics, community development, and personal experiences of the community. Most residents expressed their anger toward the Town of Davie council members, and some criticized the mayor as well. Some of us, including myself, did try to defend Mayor Tom Truex and council member Susan Starkey as seemingly more genuinely concerned about the plight of mobile home park residents than the other council members. Residents also expressed that they thought that this was another example of how the poor are squeezed by the rich, and since many were Latinos living in one of the most economically powerful countries of the world, that this was “business as usual.” The group demonstrated that they were very well self-educated on the

matters of mobile home ownership, and the political debates in the Town of Davie. They had portions printed of Florida State Statute 723, also known as the Mobile Home Act of Florida. They had newspaper clippings of the Town of Davie extending the moratorium in February, 2008, at which point I shared with them that I was introduced to the issue at that meeting. Angela also shared that she suffered immense damage to her last mobile home due to Hurricane Wilma, but that she was thankfully able to receive federal and local help to purchase a mobile home that was not damaged by the hurricane. Angela also discussed how she found out about all the rumors that the park was closing. She was robbed three times in the past year and after the poor police response she decided that she needed to enlist the help of her neighbors to fight back against the crime. However, as she went around the community seeking support for more police patrols, better lighting and better fencing, quite a number of people told her that they heard that the park was closing soon.

All of the residents at the meeting were quite fluent in Spanish, which was difficult for me as I did have trouble understanding what was going on as my Spanish at the time was limited. However, Cruz and Angela were able to sometimes translate into English for me. Cruz, who was born in Cuba, was a more fluent English speaker than Angela. Angela had come to the United States ten years prior from Argentina. We eventually started to communicate very well though we often had to use both English and Spanish to communicate – and even then, there were portions of the conversations which I did not understand. Speaking on the phone with Angela was even more difficult at first because of the difficulty I had understanding her, however as time went on, I understood her more and more.

Before people started to leave from Angela's house that Sunday night, we all talked about what we would say to those who came to the meeting next Wednesday. Since we had no solid

evidence that the park was closing, other than rumors, it was important to reassure people that not until Palma Nova sent out the official notices and therefore that people had to assume that the community was not closing just yet. However, we did talk about the importance of having an HOA, and I shared the information that I had from the FMO Conversion Services workshop, and that Legal Aid of Broward County could perhaps help them form an HOA. Angela revealed that there had indeed been an HOA at Palma Nova but that it had stopped functioning when key officers moved away.

When it was time for the next organizing meeting at Palma Nova, the management office denied Angela the use of the community center. However, maybe it was a blessing in disguise because for the meeting a huge crowd started to gather. Between 200 to 300 people showed up. Angela addressed the crowd and said that there were rumors about the park closing and that people should work together such as through an HOA. At the meeting, three different people tried to translate Angela's Spanish, and she herself even attempted to communicate in English. However, there was a great level of misunderstanding, discomfort, and even anger from English-speaking non-Hispanic whites. It was very difficult to understand the translators' English, and these non-Hispanic white residents were clearly uncomfortable with Spanish-speakers such as Angela and Cruz. I also heard complaints while Angela was speaking from a pocket of Anglo-Americans who had lived at the park for 15, 20, and in some cases 30 years, and they said that had heard the same rumors of closure many times during their time living at the park. They felt that an HOA would be useless and expensive. Adding to all the tension and confusion of the translators was the constant planes flying overhead. Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport lies about 3 miles east of Palma Nova and every four or five minutes a plane would fly

low over the park and for about 15 seconds drown out everything that the current speaker would say.

Cruz was also able to get another person at the meeting to speak. The speaker was Judy Paul, a former Davie council member who was now running for mayor. Paul told the crowd that the Town of Davie had already decided the future for Palma Nova, insinuating that political forces were aligned with the park landowner. She said that it was time for a new mayor, and that she would be someone who would fight for them. She also told the crowd that it was important to go to Davie Town Hall on the next Tuesday and Wednesday. She told the crowd that the next Tuesday the local state senator and two state representatives who have constituents in Davie were to come and hold a public town hall meeting. Paul also explained how the next Wednesday, at the first Davie Town Council meeting of the month, attendees would be able to ask Davie leaders what they were going to do to help.

After the meeting, there were a number of us who were talking together, a number who felt that they could not participate with an HOA as they felt they were already being “targeted” by the park’s management. Then, despite the earlier tensions, a number of Anglos joined the group with its clearly visible Latino leadership because they were concerned about their homes and they said they felt that working together would be beneficial. We decided that our next task should be to make sure that residents were aware of the opportunities to express their concerns to elected officials. It seemed that by now I was now being accepted as part of the team. The next Monday we decided to spread more flyers around Palma Nova and tell people that were not at the large meeting what would be going on in Davie Town Hall during the next couple of days. I came upon a young white Anglo man and his young daughter while passing the flyers. He was working on his car and his daughter was playing in the front yard when I gave him a flyer. We

started talking and he told me that he had just purchased his mobile home the month before, and that the office told him nothing about the park closing. I told him that we didn't know the truth, just that there were rumors and that we had to work together to create a better community.

Representatives visit Davie

The week after Judy Paul had told the Palma Nova meeting of the politicians visiting Davie Town Hall, there was a large crowd for the session with State Senator Steve Geller and State Representatives Martin Kiar and Evan Jenne. All three state legislators were Democrats who represented some or all of Davie and they came to talk about the 2008 legislative session that run from March through early May. After the Pledge of Allegiance, Senator Geller welcomed the crowd and proceeded to inform the crowd on a number of issues that mattered to him, also mentioning that he finished serving as a senator since he had reached his term limits by serving nine terms. One issue that he discussed, what he described as a “loophole for doc stamp taxes,” related to community development. He explained that the state was losing a tremendous amount of taxes as landowners were able to evade documentary stamp taxes, through a loophole, by placing the land under a holding corporation. However important the other issues were, it soon came to the attention of Senator Geller (through a note passed to him) that most of the 100-plus people in attendance were there from Palma Nova Mobile Home Park and that we were concerned about state regulations on park closings. After telling us he supported mobile home residents' desires to change State Law 723, he offered a promise to the crowd. He promised that if we were able to get enough people to fill the Bergeron Rodeo arena located just behind the Town Hall with a capacity of 7,500, he guaranteed that he could get Florida Governor Charlie Crist down to Davie to address the crowd on this issue. Soon after telling that to the crowd he

received a phone call and asked to be excused, joking in the process that the phone call might even be the governor. While Senator Geller was away, I decided to take a restroom break and upon going outside I saw Senator Geller with a local television crew. I remember thinking at the time that I guess it's important for politicians to take advantage of all the media attention they can garner. It made me further wonder about the motivation behind filling the rodeo arena. He came back in after his moment with the press and took his seat again at the elevated commissioner's table. State Representatives Evan Jenne and Martin Kiar were very supportive of efforts to change State Law 723 so that it would become more favorable to mobile home park residents. Jenne had explained that being a first term representative, a junior representative, he had little legislative capital to push through a mobile home bill. However, Jenne noted that he had been involved with Davie's Mobile Home Task Force to address the issues here locally. Jenne also described that he was planning on bringing a bill to the house session next year if he was reelected. He also said that Republicans control the Florida House and Senate and that they were more aligned with the landowners than with the residents of mobile home parks.

When it came to the part of the town hall where people could come up and ask questions, I went up and made a statement and asked them a couple of questions. First, I explained that I understood that the property rights of the landowners were important, that they should also remember to discuss the mobile home park issues as being between more than just one owner. This is very important to recognize, I said, as most mobile home park residents are more than just residents, they are also homeowners. Residents that owned their home had a huge investment in their homes. For some it is the one piece of property that has most of their equity tied up and that could potentially represent more than a \$100,000 investment although more typically it would represent \$5,000-\$20,000. I argued that mobile home homeowners who were forced to

move their mobile homes due to park closures needed support for the costs which ranged at the time of the fieldwork between \$8,000 and \$15,000. And I asked, not rhetorically, how they were going to meet the affordable housing crisis that was gripping South Florida.

Town Hall Meeting with Many, Many, Many Palma Nova Residents

The very next day, Palma Nova residents again filled the town hall chambers where Davie's Town Council responded to the rumors of the park closing. As with every first Town Council meeting of the month, there was an open public meeting portion where residents were allowed to bring up issues that were not on the official agenda and speak for no more than three minutes. After a few other issues had been discussed, Angela went to the podium and spoke of her problems with crime at Palma Nova. The mayor at the time, Tom Truex, directed her to an officer in the back to discuss what the police department could do. She later told me that she knew other people would ask about the rumors and that she had other concerns and that she did not want to be seen as "the crazy lady" who kept on talking about the park closing. She also told me that the police told her that without an HOA, Davie police were very limited in taking a proactive role at Palma Nova.

Another Palma Nova resident, Wanda, came up next with Frank Serra, an activist for mobile home park residents. Serra lived in another mobile home park but was there to help with translating the Spanish of any resident who needed it since the Town of Davie did not employ a translator for public meetings. Wanda asked the town council two questions concerning the situation at Palma Nova. The first question was whether Palma Nova was going to be sold and the second question was whether the rumors that the park was going to close were true. Mayor Truex then directed the question to the councilmember who represents Palma Nova and the rest

of District 1, Bryan Caletka. Caletka had represented the district since 2006. In response to these rumors, Caletka said:

I hear these rumors every two weeks. I'm always getting different people call in and every single time. The first thing that I do is I call the owner of the park. And every time he says the same exact thing to me: 'I told you this two weeks ago. I have absolutely no plans at redeveloping this park for many, many, many years.' And I say 'How long is many years?' He says 'I'm looking at 25 years down the road.' So... that's a long time.

When Caletka finished a number of people in the crowd clapped and as Wanda turned to walk back to her seat. However, the mayor called to her and gave his opinion on the matter.

Mayor Truex spoke of his surprise at hearing that the owner said that the park would stay open for 25 years, since the owner had never told him anything about 25 years. He did say that there were no imminent plans of the owner to sell the property. At this point, though, he admitted that in the long-term plans of the town a mobile home park was not envisioned for that area. Here he was alluding to an ongoing process of rezoning that would shift land use policy so as to increase land values and thus, eventually, cause an increase in tax revenues. He also said he shared the concern of the mobile home residents that there were signs that the park was getting ready to close. Mayor Truex added that he didn't think that it would close in a couple of months even though, he acknowledged, he wasn't part of the ownership group there. Still, he did express an explicit concern for the residents of Palma Nova to be concerned about the idea of the park closing. This caused concern among the residents in attendance because it seemed to them as if he had some insider information. Plus, there was a building economic crisis building with subprime loans resetting to higher interest rates and a drop in real-estate prices. This was the storm before the hurricane of the 2008 Great Recession. Surely, now was not the time to close mobile home parks to sell the land, right?

Wanda then went on to tell the mayor and all in attendance about all of the signs that she had seen that led her to believe that there might be some truth to the rumors, especially that a lot of homes had been moved out recently and that not that as many homes had been moved in as in the past. Truex acknowledged Wanda's concerns but he also noted that even when he first opened his accounting office in Davie in 1985 there were rumors that Silver Oaks (the name of the park before the name change to Palma Nova) was closing within a week. Truex put this down to the "nature of the community."

Finally, Caletka added that the owner had property not too far from Palma Nova, and that his intuition pointed him to think that he would "redevelop or develop" that piece of property first before doing anything at Palma Nova. It was interesting to see how invested Caletka was in seeing the rumors die down instead of taking the approach that Mayor Truex had of considering the possibility that there were truths behind the rumors and acknowledging the concern of the residents. Caletka was running for a different political office at the time as well. He was running for Broward County Commissioner District 7. Many people, not only from Palma Nova, wondered about his ties to Forman. This had all the hallmarks of crony capitalism between Forman and Caletka.

A week later the regional *Sun-Sentinel* newspaper published an article about Caletka's comments which incorrectly reported that he expected Palma Nova to close in 20 years instead of the 25 years which I heard him say. I reviewed this by looking back at a video from the town council that I purchased from Davie Town Hall. The inaccuracy in reporting would be repeated again in the Davie Town Hall later that month. However, the claim would seem even more deceitful than preposterous when the park closure notices were finally sent.

Palma Nova Home Owners Association (HOA)?

A few days after the Davie Town Council meeting, Angela decided to call for a small meeting of Palma Nova residents in the park on June 11, 2008. This meeting brought to fore the difficulties of creating community unity quickly. After the unpleasant large outdoor Palma Nova meeting, Angela wanted to keep the next meeting at Palma Nova small and limited to those who expressed an interest to keep in touch by writing their contact information on sheets that Angela asked people to sign. There were 12 of us were present for the meeting that day. The meeting started with an air of uncertainty over what we should do without any clear resolution to the rumor that the park was closing. One resident wanted the group to focus exclusively on a letter-writing campaign to get the governor's attention while a number of others were interested in establishing an HOA. However, the meeting changed substantially when Vicki, a resident that Angela had not invited, arrived.

After taking her seat and introducing herself, Vicki took out an audio recorder from her purse and turned it on. Alarmed, Angela asked her if she could not record us to which Vicki protested. I supported Angela's desire that if someone didn't want to be recorded then they should not be recorded. We were wary of people coming into the meeting and reporting back to Forman or the park manager. Vicki was upset by this and soon started to dominate the meeting by focusing on the water issue at Palma Nova. It was an issue that resonated with many Palma Nova residents, and concerned the people at the meeting. However, Angela and others wanted to focus on starting the HOA. It became a battle of wills between Angela and Vicki which culminated in Vicki claiming that she heard a rumor that the old HOA had run off with \$20,000. Vicki made sure that everyone realized that Angela was the former secretary of the HOA and she wanted to know where this money had gone. Vicki stormed out after throwing the accusation at

Angela. Angela denied the accusations, but there was substantial damage to the idea of starting the HOA at Palma Nova and to Angela's authority and reputation. After Vicki left, we did try to see who was supportive of helping to re-establish the HOA but the accusations had greatly diminished what little support was expressed earlier. It turned HOA supporters at the meeting into people who did not want to be involved. At least not until there was evidence showing that the last HOA board did not swindle the community of so much money. A few people left not too long afterward, spurred by Vicki's accusations to be wary of Angela.

Not too long later, at what turned out to be the end of the meeting, one resident, an Anglo man called Ralph, said he did not think that it was possible that we could have a HOA since there were so many "illegal immigrants" living in Palma Nova. I had heard that a number of residents living in Palma Nova were undocumented immigrants. Ralph, a tall white man, told us that he had talked to a lawyer friend of his who told him that "illegal immigrants" could not help to sign up for an HOA. This was potentially important because Florida state law stated that for the establishment of an HOA it was necessary that 67 percent of the residents agreed. What was Ralph was trying to suggest, besides repeating what might be seen as racist representations, was that undocumented immigrants could not be counted as part of a vote to form an HOA. A number of us protested the validity of his statement. I argued that the state only requires that the 67 percent who wished to form an HOA represent the rightful owner of the mobile home and that the law says nothing about the immigration status of the mobile home homeowner. Ralph disagreed and said that his friend was a lawyer and that we should believe him. I told everyone that I had a couple of lawyer friends myself at Legal Aid of Broward County and that I would be checking with them whether this was true or not. A few days later, I was able to answer Ralph's question. According to the paralegal in the Legal Aid Service of Broward County, the State of

Florida did not require information about the citizenship or immigration status of homeowners who would potentially form part of an HOA.

Meanwhile, after the meeting, Angela said that she did not believe that Caridad, the former HOA president, would or even could run away with such a large amount of money. She expressed her belief in Caridad's morals and values and she doubted that the association could even generate the amount – \$20,000 – that Vicki claimed in the first place. Angela said that the manager of Palma Nova a month previously had also told her that Caridad ran away with a significant amount of money from the HOA. Thus, the rumor was not new to her. But Angela said she did not believe either the manager of Palma Nova nor Vicki. Angela told me that the old HOA was able to get a number of donations of clothing, mainly from stores such as the local K-Mart, and leftover toys from a donation drive that Pastor Andy, a local activist minister, had helped organize through his organization Firewall. In addition, she said, the association never asked residents for association fees. However, Angela was present as secretary for a few meetings between the HOA and Forman, where they discussed the improvement of lighting at night, the abundance of stray cats and dogs, and concerns that sex offenders might be living in Palma Nova. Poor lighting was a prime security concern for the HOA. However, Angela said that Forman told them that improved lighting would be too expensive and that he was not going to bear the costs of installation and of electricity. When it came to the subject of too many dogs and cats wandering the streets of Palma Nova, Angela said that Forman told them that local animal control agencies would not come when they were called. One other distressing issue for Caridad was that she had found that through public records that there were a number of registered sexual offenders living in Palma Nova. Angela said that Caridad pushed Forman and the management of Palma Nova to remove all of them from the premises.

However, Angela did not know of the results of Caridad's campaign as Angela was just getting settled into Palma Nova at the time and had very little idea of what an HOA did. Angela said she thought of herself as just helping out her neighbors since they needed a secretary and Caridad came knocking on her door one day and Angela volunteered. Angela said that at times Caridad had a forceful temper but Angela felt that it came from a place of wanting to do as much positive for the part residents as she could. According to Angela, Caridad used to be part of an old HOA at Palma Nova a few years before Caridad restarted the HOA. Angela said that an elderly lady at Palma Nova once told her that the community did not support Caridad's efforts. It seemed as if there had been at one time a group of people who tried to make changes through the use of an HOA but that they, too, had run into same problems that the residents with whom I was involved were having.

The rumors and accusations started us off on a search for any bookkeeping records or bank accounts held by the old HOA. We went to a number of banks in the area in the hope that we could find a bank account that was held by the Palma Nova HOA. But privacy policies by the banks made this task quite impossible. Angela wanted to have some sort of proof to show to those skeptical neighbors but she could not find anything. We went from house to house where the former HOA members had lived trying to track down people. Angela, through neighbors, finally found where Caridad had lived but it turned out that she had moved away from the community. We went to the house where Angela knew the treasurer had lived but we could only find his brother and we were never able to track him down to talk to him.

During this time, Angela was very busy as she was working a full time job in a laundromat, supporting four children as a single mom and cooking and cleaning for them. Angela didn't even have a car so she took the bus one hour each way to and from work where

she would spend all day ironing and acting as the assistant manager at the store. Plus, she was a very active member of her church going three times a week and taking two theology classes every Monday night. A number of other people who were focused on working with us to establish the HOA were on retired or on disability payments and did not hold paying jobs even if they led very active lives. These were the distractions and divisions that occupied the residents of Palma Nova, in this neoliberal economy.

More Politicians come visit Palma Nova

One day I received a phone call from someone inquiring about the mobile home park issue and the situation at Palma Nova. The caller was Robert E. Kellner and he was running for Evan Jenne's District 100 seat in the Florida House of Representatives. Along with Jenne and Kellner, a woman named Freda Sherman Stevens was also running for the seat. Since all three were Democrats and no Republican was running in the election, the August 26, 2008 Democratic Primary would decide who would be headed to Tallahassee. Kellner said that he wanted to know more about the situation as he was interested in affordable housing issues and so we talked for a little bit by phone. I told him that I had been working with a group at Palma Nova and before the end of the conversation he invited me to bring along the group with whom I was working to meet him the following Saturday.

I told Angela and a few other neighbors about my conversation and we all knew that we wanted to see State Law 723 change to better protect mobile home residents. I think none of us really knew the political landscape in terms of getting 723 changed. I did not know to what degree Evan Jenne did or could have prompted changes in 723 before, but everyone was interested in hearing what Kellner had to say. A couple of people in the group that had formed

were not very supportive of Jenne as they felt that he could have done more to change 723 in his first term as a representative. They also felt that they couldn't trust Jenne as they linked him with his father's political fall from grace. Evan Jenne's father, Ken Jenne, had pleaded guilty to federal charges of mail fraud and tax evasion the previous November "for taking \$151,625 in improper payments and services from Sheriff's Office contractors" during his term as sheriff of Broward County (McMahon 2007; Nolin and Olmeda 2008). Not only was Ken Jenne the former sheriff of Broward but he had also served as an assistant Florida state attorney, Broward County commissioner in 1974, and state senator from 1978-1988 and 1990-1998, and he was deeply enmeshed in the Florida Democratic Party (Florida Senate 1998:14-15; *Sun-Sentinel* 2000; McMahon 2008). Thus, by falling from such a high position of power, Ken Jenne's improprieties raised concerns about his son for some Palma Nova neighbors. Therefore, when Kellner invited us to come and discuss the issues and to meet him it was not only an opportunity to discuss issues with a candidate, it was also an opportunity to evaluate a challenger to Evan Jenne.

A group composed of about four different Palma Nova households and I went to meet Kellner and his very small campaign staff where we mainly discussed issues affecting mobile home residents and Palma Nova. We talked about the situation in Palma Nova, not just concerning the rumors of the closing but also the crime in the park. The Palma Nova residents expressed their concern about the management's insincerity and failure to deal with issues brought to their attention and their general lack of respect toward residents. There was also a discussion on the problems with State Law 723, especially the paltry figures provided by the state to mobile home homeowners if they are displaced. Kellner and his staff also talked about a couple issues that were close to their hearts: housing for children aging out of foster care and "ending the needless killing of tens of thousands of healthy dogs and cats in Florida's public

animal shelters.” We discussed creating a statewide HOA Coalition which could mean a mass movement for making change in the state legislature. Eventually we agreed with Kellner that it would be great for him to come and speak to Palma Nova residents. There he could share what he wanted to do for mobile home park residents and to share his platform. We agreed on a date of Tuesday July 1, 2008 for the meeting, which was just a few days away.

Over the next few days at the park we prepared for Kellner to come and talk. As it turns out, the meeting proved to be very informational – however, not so much for residents as it was for the candidate. We worked with Kellner to create a bilingual flyer. As I was distributing copies of the flyer I was able to talk to some of the residents. Many asked if I knew if the park was closing. I told them that these were at this point only rumors. Angela was able to secure the clubhouse for the meeting. At the meeting, Kellner presented himself to around 40 Palma Nova residents. There was some confusion as his remarks were translated into Spanish. Many people expressed their concern that the park would close. They listened to Kellner express his desire to change State Law 723. But more than anything they wanted to know about the park closing. The meeting was a little contentious. But Kellner came away understanding how passionately afraid and upset they were because of the possibility that the park would close.

The next night after the Kellner meeting a number of us were back at Davie Town Hall to see if we would get any different answers from the Town Council regarding the closing of Palma Nova. One Palma Nova resident who was not part of our core planning group asked the town council directly if Palma Nova was closing. The resident told them about our meeting where a large number of people attended, but that the potential closing of the park still remained a prominent question. The resident, a Hispanic man named Carlos, asked if the park owner and the town government would provide any assistance to the residents if the park closed and if the town

was prepared to house the displaced residents. Mayor Truex said that no development application had been filed for Palma Nova. Based on conversations council members had with the owner, Truex said there were no immediate plans to redevelop the location. But he noted that the town had approved plans for a Regional Activity Center and this did not include a mobile home park in that area. One council member advised Carlos and other residents to negotiate a longer lease agreement with the park owner. Mayor Truex also asked Council Member Caletka if it was 20 years that Palma Nova was going to stay open and Caletka confirmed that it was indeed 20 years. The figure of 20 years was what was reported in the newspapers but Caletka had clearly stated 25 years at the previous meeting. This made the report provided by Caletka of his conversation with Forman suspect. What was it 20 or 25 years? Could any of this be trusted?

Almost immediately after Kellner's meeting at Palma Nova, we scheduled his opponent Evan Jenne to visit the park and address the residents as well. At Kellner's meeting, one of Jenne's campaign staffers had attended. I had talked to another staffer a few days before the meeting because Frank Serra was an adamant Jenne supporter had informed them of Kellner's planned visit to Palma Nova. We informed Kellner that one of Jenne's staffers would be there. He did not take it very well. However, we didn't feel that we had anything to hide from either campaign. We wanted to push the candidates to fight as hard as they could for changes to the mobile home laws that would help Palma Nova residents and others in similar situations. Once Jenne's visit was scheduled, I worked with a couple of the Palma Nova residents to design the flyer. Once we received 900 copies of the flyers from Jenne's campaign, I joined others to distribute them throughout the park.

When Jenne addressed the park residents the mayor also came to Palma Nova. Jenne presented a 10-point plan to try to ease the fears of mobile homeowners of losing their homes.

The crowd, as with Kellner's meeting, was around 40 residents. Jenne quickly introduced himself and acknowledged that he was running for reelection. He started in on presenting his 10-point plan to the gathering but people were still mostly interested in the immediate question of whether Palma Nova would close soon. After he presented his plan, there was a question and answer session. There was quite a bit of anger displayed by the residents and many questions were directed at the mayor. The mayor was able to keep people calm and answered the questions in a manner that seemed honest and forthright. Mayor Truex told people that he didn't think that Palma Nova would close soon as it was a bad time economically for real estate, and that it didn't make sense economically for Palma Nova to close at this time. But in the next breath he implored people to indeed prepare for the park to close perhaps not immediately but perhaps in three to five years. Again, Mayor Truex rebutted Councilmember Caletka's claim that Palma Nova will be around for 20 or 25 years. However, a few of the residents felt that the mayor was hiding something. His reassurances did not comfort most in attendance.

After bringing Kellner and Jenne to the community there seemed to be a fresh impetus for restarting the HOA, but there were still large hurdles. While it seemed that there was momentum for an HOA in Palma Nova, we were also toying with an idea that Jenne's camp had suggested to us: forming a Palma Nova Civic Organization. They told us that we could start a civic association which would just be a way to start organizing ourselves and to start to address issues before the HOA could be formed. Soon after there were about 15 people who met at Cruz's house and there were some fresh faces added to our small group now distinguished as the group among the park residents who were in favor of reviving the HOA. We had also wanted to invite Freda Sherman Stevens who was also running in the Democratic primary for the Florida Representative District 100 seat, and we wanted to invite the candidates for Senator Geller's old

seat, Florida Senate District 31. However, at that point we were quite overwhelmed by the amount of work that it took to put together the two meetings for Kellner and Jenne that we did not want to lose sight of the main goal of restarting the HOA. Also, Kellner and Jenne had approached us through our networks to come to speak at Palma Nova. As far as Florida Senate candidates, Kellner provided us with phone numbers for the campaigns, but Cruz was only able to speak to one candidate, Eleanor Sobel. Cruz asked if I could send some information to Sobel on the mobile home issues, however I never received a response from the candidate or her campaign.

Neoliberal Crony Displacement

There were some rumors that closing notices to Palma Nova residents were to be sent in late August 2008. I had completed my internship and fieldwork and was back in Tampa by this time and could only keep in touch from afar. On Monday, August 25, 2008, Palma Nova residents received the letter that many feared: Palma Nova was closing in six months. There was, it was reported to me, widespread anger and anxiety throughout the park. This was right before the full impact of the Great Recession of 2008 were to be known. However, one could speculate that Forman was well off to withstand the closure of Palma Nova, and that a downturn in the economy did not hurt him too much.

At the next town council meeting on September 3, 2008, Vicki spearheaded the organization of a march of Palma Nova residents from the park to the Davie Town Council meeting where everyone knew the closing of Palma Nova would be the focus. I came back to Davie for more fieldwork. I was not involved in any planning of the march, but it was great to see Vicki bring together the residents for such an effective and poignant show of unity to

demonstrate against the displacement. The march received coverage in the newspapers and local TV news and brought hundreds of people to the meeting. There were so many residents there that many people had to stand outside and listen to the meeting on loudspeakers. The march made logistical sense as Palma Nova was less than twenty minutes away by foot from town hall. This set up a townhall meeting where the Town Council was confronted by the grim outlook that faced Palma Nova residents.

At the start of the meeting, Mayor Truex tried to assure the audience by letting them know that everyone would be able to share their feelings as they were extending the open public meeting to an indefinite number of speakers. The mayor then asked the town attorney, John Rayson, to “tell everyone where the town stands with the Palma Nova issue, give us a little history of the [Mobile Home] Ordinance, and what the town is doing right now as far as implementing that.” Rayson stated that:

Everyone should know that the Town of Davie Town Council has been a leader in identifying the problems associated with the closures of mobile home lots and in fact had a working group that came up with recommendations, and this had been during a moratorium that had previously been passed by the Town Council of Davie to protect mobile home tenants. That moratorium expired several months ago. Prior to its expiration the town council passed a mobile home relocation assistance ordinance....

Landowners have rights. The Florida legislature knows that there are conflicting rights between mobile home tenants and mobile home homeowners and they’ve attempted to balance those rights... [State Law] 723 that says basically the state has the sole authority to legislate in this area. What I’m suggesting to you is that I think that everyone on Town Council not only empathizes and sympathizes with the plight of the substantial number of good Davie residents in mobile homes but also realizes that, as a primary matter, the fight is not between the Town Council and its residents but it perhaps should be the subject of more legislative action in Tallahassee where better laws to protect...mobile home tenancy can be enacted....

The Town of Davie passed its Mobile Home Relocation Assistance Ordinance, and that ordinance is in full force and effect. We believe it to be legal. And it has a host of requirements that a mobile home park owner must comply with prior to receiving a Certificate of Completion from the Town of Davie and those include that they have to provide copies of all lease or rental agreement forms that the mobile home park owner

currently has in place to the Town. They have to come up with a relocation assistance plan they have to provide all of the tenants an inventory of relocation resources or, in other words, places where Davie residents can relocate to... They have to state the actions that the owner will take to refer tenants to alternative public and private subsidized – that means by governmental stipend of public and private resources. The mobile home park owner has to provide information how to assist tenants to best move their mobile homes from the mobile home park and any other action the owner will take to minimize the hardship... [he then stated all the highlights of the ordinance]...

We will be the first one to state that more protection can only come from the state legislature, and in terms of that I would encourage you to contact the legislative delegation, your state senator, your state representatives, and tell them that we have a community in Davie of 920 mobile homes that faces closure and that the laws that we get are not sufficient enough to provide full protection. The Town of Davie is doing what it can. We hear *you* [Rayson's emphasis]. We understand the problem, we've responded to it with a moratorium, with a working group with recommendations, and with an ordinance itself, but beyond that we need your help to convince our legislative leaders to give us greater protection.

Rayson portrayed the Town of Davie as taking the initiative in protecting mobile home residents, while blaming the state legislature for failing to protect the millions of Floridians who live in mobile home parks. In addition, he highlighted the need for mobile home homeowners to take the fight to Tallahassee and not in Davie. Further, he avoided any discussion of any role that the Town of Davie might have played in assisting those affected by the park closure.

The residents then came up to the podium one by one to share their concerns and feelings about the park closure and to ask a number of questions related to the park. The main concerns expressed by the residents were where their family would end up and how this would affect them economically. They were afraid that they would not be able to move their mobile homes. They asked what the town would do to mitigate the situation, and expressed their hopelessness at the prospect of an intervention by the Florida State Legislature. Overall, residents generally understood that Palma Nova was a business owned by Forman and that its primary goal was to generate profits for him. However, they felt that Forman wanted "to step over the little people and crush them as they go along," as one resident put it.

The first resident that came up told about how she was already able to relocate to another mobile home park, but she left her mobile home located in Palma Nova behind with her grown children. She expressed concern that they were facing yet another displacement as they were displaced from another mobile home park a few years back. She also talked about how residents didn't have the time to go to the state legislator and fight for their rights. This, for her, was even more difficult as her grandchildren and other residents' children were going to take their Florida College Aptitude Test (FCAT, a high-stakes standardized test for public school students that has a huge determination in whether a child earns promotion to the next grade) at about the time by which everyone would have to move. At the end of her time, she asked for money from the Town to help the residents. The mayor responded in a defensive manner, stating that the Town had worked for a year on a solution and they came up with what they could but that the Town could not force landowners to pay residents more money than what State Law 723 requires. After the woman started to speak again, the mayor interrupted her to say that she was "not fighting against Town Hall," saying that instead she was "working with town hall." To which the woman ended by curtly stating that she hoped so.

A young woman talked about how because she still has a mortgage and cannot move her home as it is too old and that she would not be eligible for relocation funds. She continued by responding to the council's suggestion of taking the fight to the state legislation: "What happened when the state representative was [in Davie], and [then-Republican Florida Governor] Charlie Crist was supposed to come down here?" Crist never did come down to Davie to talk about the mobile home problem. She said: "You guys keep saying that we need to go to our legislator..." The mayor then responded about Evan Jenne's visit to Palma Nova, saying how there were far fewer people at the Jenne meeting compared to the many more people that were at

the Town Council meeting at that very moment. The mayor also responded to a question about the lack of legislative movement on State Law 723 by stating that “We do not live in a country where we confiscate people’s land.” However, the woman pointed out that the Town gives money for parks and streets, and she ended by asking “What about having homes for your community?” The mayor again responded defensively on that point.

One young woman talked about how she was imagined that she was going to be homeless with her kids asked: “Where is Mr. Forman, why is he not present? ... This is the person who is kicking us out of our house, he can’t even stand before us like you people [members of the Town Council] are and at least tell us, ‘Listen this is why I’m making you guys leave, this is my future planning,’ have the decency and respect and consideration for us who cannot make it.” She then asked the Council if they could

Honestly, deeply, sincerely say that you guys really understand where we are coming from? You have a home, you will always have a home, we have nowhere. And many of us who are old, and elderly and disabled, and cannot move. Who’s going to move them out of their house? Who’s going to pack their things? Who’s going to say ‘You know what? Let me grab you by your hand and you can come stay at my house. Here’s a plate of food. Let me wash your clothes, let me put you in my bed. Have a good night. Let me tuck your kids in to sleep and you know what? God bless?’ And you know what? This is reality, this is sad. This is the Town of Davie. We put our kids and our future into this town, and what are we supposed to do? My children are in Davie Elementary, wonderful school. Great school. And I have to take it because of a simple guy who has no consideration for his people so our children mean nothing. I thought our children were our future. I thought our rights were to stand up and be a parent and show our kids you have to fight. But how are we supposed to fight when we don’t have any help? This is wrong, this is abuse. You know you don’t do that. You don’t do that to any of us. No one deserves that. At least give us a year, or six months don’t pay your rent.

For some, the tragedy of the park closing seemed to follow on the heels of other tragedies. One woman explained how she was displaced from another mobile home park that closed. She also had an issue with her mortgage, she said that she has put \$10,000 into the mortgage and now it looks like she will not be able to move it or recoup any of her investment. However, the story of

another woman was just heartbreaking: The woman had just moved into her mobile home with her daughter-in-law and grandson six months prior. Her husband was instantly killed when hit by a semi-truck two months prior. They paid \$23,000 for their mobile home, cash that she feels she cannot move. Also, her son in the military had just been deployed to Iraq. It was just awful to hear this women's situation. A young white male said exasperatedly: "There has to be a limit of what you can do with your own property."

In general, the response from residents to the council's suggestion to going to the state legislature seemed hopeless for residents. Some people expressed fatigue from multiple mobile home displacements. One man explained how he was displaced by a hurricane before, and now "politics" were displacing him. One woman said that they would hold the mayor accountable in elections for this. One woman said to the mayor that "Out of your mouth" he had told residents that the park would not close for two to five years, and she stated that "I trust you" but then she spoke through tears about how stressed she was by the situation. The mayor responded by saying that he had thought the park would not close for another two five years, admitted, though, that it was just a guess, and apologized for being wrong. Council Member Susan Starkey interjected that she did talk to the owner, and he told her that he would not close the park for "a while." The mayor then noted that he also spoke to a representative of Forman who told him that the closing of the park was not imminent.

Lisa, a resident, got up to speak. She was upset with Caletka and Rayson, and asked why the Town Council told them that the park would not close for 20 years. Caletka responded by saying that he found out about the parking closing from an e-mail from the Town Administrator as the Administrator was the first person in the Town government to know about the park closing. He said that he called the owner's representative "and they said that 'Things change.'

And I said ‘But that this was two months ago you said this to me.’ And they said ‘Things change quick.’ You know? So I can only give you the information that I was told at the time.” One Spanish-speaking woman told of how her last mobile home burned down that previous July and that she came to Palma Nova with the little that she and her husband had. They purchased a home in the park when the newspapers had said that the park would not close for another 20 years. Another woman expressed concern for the kids of Palma Nova and how they would perform during the FCAT exams. She said: “It is not just that President Bush wastes billions on a war that doesn’t bring us any benefit.”

One resident, Fred, said he understood that the Town of Davie had a 50-year plan and in that plan there are no mobile home parks. The mayor confirmed this. The resident also said he felt that the town encouraged Forman to close the park by providing him more options when the town changed the zoning laws. The mayor denied that the change of zoning allowed Palma Nova to close. He said that Forman could have closed Palma Nova even without the new zoning regulations. He said that it was Forman’s “option to close his business or to keep it running.” Judy Paul, the former council member who was now running for mayor, stood up to state her support for the extension of time for residents, arguing that children should be able to finish out the school year.

There were various requests and suggestions from residents and other interested parties. One man asked the Town Council if the Town had land where residents could move their mobile homes and then purchase the land cooperatively. The mayor did not answer the question. Another woman repeated the question but neither the mayor nor the Town Council responded. One person suggested that Forman provide mental health counselors in such a crisis situation. There was a request for an extension of the move out date, and some were upset at the idea of

paying lot rent for those extended months. Mayor Truex later responded by promising that he would bring up the idea of an extension when the Town met with Mr. Forman. When one person told the Council that she was considering not paying her rent and asked how long it would take for Forman to evict her, the Town Attorney responded: "Not long." Another woman, who noted that she was lucky because she found a place to relocate her home, asked the Town Council to help people when they move with a place to stay and for financial help for the expensive fees of public storage as it often took more than two months to move back into a mobile home after it had been moved.

Because of the reality that moving back into a moved mobile home took a long time, there was a request to expedite the permits that the Town of Davie had to approve for moving mobile homes. The mayor asked the Town Manager immediately if he could begin to expedite the paperwork the next day to which the Town Manager said he would.

There were Palma Nova residents who had purchased their home within two or three weeks before the notices went out that the park would close and who had been told by park management that the park would not be closing. After hearing a Palma Nova resident tell the Council that she had purchased a mobile home only two months prior and that now the park was closing, Starkey said that there should be an investigation of an intended fraud. To this, the crowd went wild.

Immediately after the public hearing section where people could make their thoughts known on the Palma Nova issue, the mayor called for a special session where Town Council could discuss the issues at length since there was already a full agenda for the town council meeting and it taken almost three hours to listen to Palma Nova residents. The mayor said he had a "whole list of issues that [he] felt they needed to follow up on immediately." Council Member

Brian Caletka said that he was “looking for answers just like the residents here.” Caletka also admitted that they needed to have someone who spoke the Spanish language.

Mayor Truex and two council members said they wanted to meet with Forman or his representatives. Council Member Starkey was not interested in meeting with Forman, as she felt that the town council should come up with its own strategy first on how to deal with the situation and Forman. She called the displacement an “abomination... a terrible thing... [she] always thought it would be a phased replacement development over time... This came as a real big shock and a disappointment as well.” Starkey noted that the rezoning of Palma Nova was not just an isolated rezoning, it was part of a large master plan to rezone 2,200 acres for the Regional Activity Center. At that point they finished discussion of Palma Nova and moved on to the rest of the agenda, tabling items that could wait as it was very late in the night.

The day after Palma Nova residents received their six month notices, Broward County held primary elections which essentially decided the two posts that would represent Palma Nova residents in Tallahassee, the state capital. In the Florida State Senator 31st district race, Eleanor Sobel beat the other two Democrats Kenneth Gottlieb and Timothy Ryan. Sobel received 7,113 votes which were 612 and 836 votes more than Gottlieb and Ryan respectively meaning that she won the seat by just over 3 percent of the total votes. The Florida House of Representative race for district 100 was won handily by Evan Jenne, who won reelection over fellow Democrats Robert Kellner and Freda Sherman Stevens. Jenne received 21 percent more votes than the next highest candidate, Kellner, who had 1,740 less votes than Jenne, while Stevens trailed Jenne by 2,480 votes. Palma Nova voters probably did not have a great impact on the races. There were a number of residents who said they voted in the elections, though I could not even estimate how many people voted from Palma Nova. However, there was still hope that impact made on the

politicians was greater for the mobile home cause in general, though in the Republican crony-controlled legislative branch, not much was changed to benefit mobile home owners in FS 723.

When I finished my research in Tampa, I moved back down to Davie to the mobile home that I had purchased. That was in March of 2009, when Palma Nova was supposed to have been vacated. However, there were still a number of families living in Palma Nova who were living in what looked like a deserted ghost town from outside. A couple of people that I had interviewed talked about living in such a lonely isolated place with empty mobile homes around and plenty of empty lots.

Chapter Conclusion

By June 2009, all Palma Nova residents had been displaced with the final set of residents having settled with Austin Forman for a higher amount of displacement monies. About 140 households had moved into Equus Pines Mobile Home Park and the other 550-plus households dispersed into numerous other communities. Some of them were able to move their mobile homes, others moved into apartment communities, a few were able to purchase a site-built home. When people finally had a chance to settle down into their new surroundings, many people were pleased, however that feeling did not last too long at Equus Pines. Also a few folks in different communities were upset at the way their mobile homes were installed in their new communities, citing electrical and mechanical failures. However, what many of us learned were the power of the forces that moved Palma Nova residents, and that the few ways to fight those forces requires unity, organization, and new strategies.

However, large landowners will not concede privileges without a fight, and residents complained of more than just their housing insecurities. In my internship and ethnographic

fieldwork, I saw a great desire by average residents to have a larger input into government for a wider set of problems. I believe that this struggle necessitates more than just applied anthropologists and collaborations between people of different skill sets and social networks. This struggle needs to build the internal capacities of communities to organize and handle problems collectively instead of trying to deal with things mainly through individual action. There is a greater need than just critiquing existing institutions, but those institutions need reshaping by the communities to become accountable and communities need to hold them accountable. In this manner, we can confront and contest global neoliberal ideologies and practices that shape and discipline the subjectivities of not only poor and average town residents, but also of local crony politicians and elites.

In the context of neoliberal capitalism with its strong emphasis on property rights and the rights of the property owners, it might be thought that the best way to mitigate the economic, political and linguistic neoliberal forces that displace mobile home park residents is to own the land beneath the mobile home. By owning the land beneath them, the mobile home homeowners would not be subject to the whims of one person or a small ownership group. There are a couple of different ways that owning the land can be accomplished. One option is for each mobile home park resident to own the land directly beneath their feet, individually. The second option is for mobile home residents to purchase the community together in a communal fashion.

In Davie, there was one example of a mobile home park where people owned their lots individually, Park City Estates. It was a nice community, with older mobile homes, and well kempt. It is a 55-and-older community, where the homeowner must be 55 years of age or older. Each home and the land directly beneath it are owned by the same person or persons. By contrast, a resident-owned community, or ROC, is a community that is owned communally by

residents. Not everyone has to have an ownership share, as some people can rent, but the majority of the residents do own a share of the community. In a ROC, the common grounds such as the community center, pool, other recreational facilities, and perhaps even roads (depending on whether they are maintained by municipalities or are private), are managed by the community. The ROC should have an outside company perform the duties of management to avoid conflicts of interest, and instead of a lot fee, there is an association fee that is usually charged monthly to maintain the common grounds and pay the management company. This sort of arrangement was the ideal for many of my study participants in Palma Nova.

But this is to speak in hypothetical terms. In the context of the ultimately unsuccessful organizing efforts on the part of Palma Nova residents, there were real-world consequences. There were people's dreams of building a better life for themselves and their families crushed when they learned they would be displaced and also might lose their mobile homes. Families were stressed by the unknown. These were people worried about losing their investment as their mobile home values depreciated. These were low-income families often living from pay check to pay check. They were worried about losing their job in an uncertain economy. And many mobile home homeowners work as electricians, construction workers, teachers, nurses and many other essential jobs to the neoliberal South Florida economy.

Chapter 5 : Conclusion

The Anthropology of Neoliberalism and Crony Capitalism

The ethnography reported here at one level seems to be simply a rather straightforward and protracted description of an ultimately unsuccessful attempt by mobile home park residents to prevent their displacement. But I argue that we can in no way understand what happened without recourse to a theoretical perspective that explains the behavior with reference the determinative political economic forces at work (only) apparently “off stage” from the ethnographic description. This thesis is a contribution to anthropological political economy and the anthropology of neoliberalism and crony capitalism. In my opinion, it pushes these traditions within the discipline forward by demonstrating how human behavior depicted in the ethnography is unintelligible without an understanding of differential access to economic and political resources on the part of the actors in this drama, as well as the contemporary stage of capitalism and the market-state relationship that reaches beyond the characters seen here.

The mobile home park residents, although homeowners, represented working class factions of various ethnicities and genders within a dynamic but defined system of identity politics. Even once they reached a loose consensus and coming to consciousness of their interests in trying to prevent their displacement from Palma Nova, and in doing so they certainly did not question certain political “givens” such as the private property system nor the need for wage labor, their organizing efforts were blocked from achieving success. The economic power of the landowner combined with the state and legal apparatus that favored capitalist interests meant that

the mobile home park residents had very restricted room to maneuver. Legal structures such as State Law 723 did provide a modicum of protection. But the struggle of these residents to organize and take advantage of whatever protections might exist showed the horizons of class power. The state, in its various levels of governmental structure, was shown to manage the affairs of the capitalist class even if not in uniformly coherent and orchestrated ways.

The Stakes for Applied Anthropology

There were a few days when I was sick in the middle of my fieldwork and had to stay in bed with a bad cold, but I was also struck with a deep wondering of what I was doing at Palma Nova. Was I helping or hurting the situation? Was I becoming too involved in the situation? Should I have just taken the normal route that anthropologists take and just try to understand the situation from the sidelines and to not apply anthropology on a daily basis? I did feel guilty of wondering if I had taken applied anthropology too far. It didn't take me long to get over those feelings and to come to a sense of peace with my role of applying anthropology. First of all, I would not have learned as much during my experience if I just kept to passive participant-observation and did not take an active position in Palma Nova. I let the group lead, but when I felt that there were issues that needed to be discussed, I discussed them with the group. With individuals, I felt I could talk more freely about these issues.

Second, I would not have been able to say that I did everything I could to work with the individuals that I did work with. It is not fair for an anthropologist to only want others to share with them their way of life if the anthropologist does not engage the people with what concerns them. The anthropologist has the obligation to inform her study participants of the kinds of comparative knowledge they possess and how they see the world because this influences how

they interpret the actions of the people they are researching, studying, or with whom they are collaborating. It is better to have those conversations aloud with the people you are with than by yourself. This is how this thesis contributes to applied anthropology: It attaches a theoretical perspective from political economy to anthropology with an explicitly applied purpose. My conversations with and, indeed my strategies for working with my study participants, were guided by my own theoretical analysis emerging out of this genre. I offer this thesis in the hopes that it provides some sort of model for applied anthropologists to follow suit.

Finally, I think that there were some positive impacts through my work. I can only guess that there were some positive impacts because ethnographic situations are not like laboratories, where you can test something over and over again, changing some variables and keeping some things constants. I do think that people that worked with me were quicker to find a resolution to their displacement as they had struggled to understand their options better. I had one final meeting with the group before I left Palma Nova. It was at this meeting where I gave my recommendations for the residents in attendance of what they could do. I told them that it didn't seem as though there was much support for an HOA. I advised them to start a civic association as Evan Jenne's aide had suggested. I told them to keep good track of all the information they received and to have a system of communicating with one another. I had become focused on figuring out the best system of a calling tree, but I realized that trying to structure social relationships is very difficult and that each organization needs to figure out what works for them. I told them that they had all the people available to make such an organization viable. There were 15 people in attendance, and these were people that worked hard during our experiences, and there were even a few people that weren't. One person had an aversion to an HOA, but was attentive about the civic association. It was a very positive meeting. I told them that I could help

them from afar, but that there was a bit of work to do. I did feel that they should have the eventual goal of the HOA be the target, but that people needed to see hard positive work from the group to gain their trust.

After my fieldwork, a number of technological communication tools emerged to make this communication easier and there were opportunities to create better tools for communication. Facebook was not as mature back in 2008 as came to be. Subsequently, it could be utilized to facilitate such communication where users can band together and designate moderators and administrators. Other platforms such as WhatsApp would have been a useful tool for those with the application to quickly disseminate information to any number of users. Text messaging, as well, might have been leveraged to send quick updates and for those who were volunteering. At the same time, these means of communication can easily be compromised by opposing interests.

A week before I had to leave Fort Lauderdale to go back to Tampa, I realized a strong peace within myself about the experience that I had gone through, and that I had engaged in a community that lived their lives to the fullest, where they worked hard for their families and helped each other out in so many meaningful ways. Looking back at my own personal life, it was one where community was always limited. I came to this country when I was three, and growing up in Atlanta's suburbs, I had found myself isolated in many ways. I was a Latino child ashamed to speak my parents' tongue. My parents did what they could to create that sense of belonging, however they could not replicate all the aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents that we left behind in Colombia. I could see many families in Palma Nova trying to replicate those familial connections, and many were able to keep some continuity when more than 100 families were able to have their mobile homes transported including many of the Neighbors of Palma Nova. I think there would be some excellent opportunities to study childhood and teenage life in a dense

community like Palma Nova, especially in light of the bonds that many residents had with their neighbors. Plus the action of organizing their neighborhood seemed to increase the sense of community. Similar to how I saw Alyce Gowdy-Wright work with mobile home park residents in Miami, non-mobile home park communities could benefit from exercises in working together to figure out what issues affect their neighborhood. The techniques came from the Chicago School of organizing.

Many Americans are economic migrants, following that job, that education that will land them that job, finding a place where the rent is cheaper, that home that has more room for their growing family. Many times it means leaving the communities we grew up in, whether we just dreamed of getting away or if the economic opportunity was just too great to turn down. Humans used to be very nomadic, but they would travel with their community together. As we have become more settled and many of us have bought into this notion of our essential community comprised of just our romantic partner and perhaps the children we raise, we have isolated ourselves out of the rhythms of our past. For some these rhythms were misogynistic, ageist, homophobic, ethnocentric, limiting, and or constricting in other ways. Our relationship to the land we rest upon is essential in defining these systems of hierarchy and exclusion. Does the number of people on this earth necessitate this crony capitalistic form that we see today, or is there a way to provide more freedom, with accurate information of the limitations and the accurate price of a community so that people can peacefully choose whether that local is one that is beneficial for their short term or long term? I do hope we can struggle to make this a reality in some communities, because what I saw mobile home park residents go through was discouraging, just because they could not afford to participate in the highly capitalistic system where there is not enough affordable housing being built.

With the Great Recession of 2008 hitting full force at the same time as the displacement of Palma Nova residents, there were additional hardships that residents had to overcome. I know some saw reduced incomes due to reduced workloads, though I did not have a follow-up study to really understand or find out the effects of the recession on them. I lost touch with a number of participants from Palma Nova, though others became neighbors. I remember harder times for friends who owned site-built homes and lost them. On the other hand, one former Palma Nova family ended up buying a foreclosed home and left the mobile home park community.

One recommendation I do have that can help many more communities out there is that more anthropology departments, especially those that want to be explicit in how they are applying anthropology, is to offer more classes or even a certificate program for community organizing in their graduate programs, and maybe even in their undergraduate programs. This would help broaden the number of students who are versed in examples of community organizing, the problems that can be encountered and how communities have secured gains for common people. However, for these sort of certificates to really have some impact is that this skillset must pass to people who do not attend a university whether it is for graduate or undergraduate degrees and can collectively do something for their communities. There is no need to wait for the anthropologist in shining armor to show up. The tools and techniques to organize communities must be available to those who want it, so they can affect the change in their community together with their neighbors.

I do not think that I came into this situation with the best tools, ideas, and strategies that are available. I must admit that literature search was not deep enough to prepare me for much organizing in Palma Nova. My coursework had introduced methodologies such as PAR, but I was not well versed enough in that to carry it out. I came to wish I had a whole class devoted to

PAR, and participated in a project, to gain firsthand knowledge of how to apply a PAR project so I was prepared to perform more effectively once I started fieldwork in Davie. Greenbaum, Jacobs, and Zinn for example provide a number of amazing PAR projects (2020). This should be material that students should consume, analyze and act upon. However, I did what I could, and I engaged my anthropology with the participants in Palma Nova. I learned a lot, and hopefully the participants learned something from me. We failed to stop the closing of Palma Nova, but in retrospect it would have taken convincing the land owner, Austin Forman, to change his mind. Even if there was an HOA up and going, and we had the right of first refusal as afforded by FS 723, Forman closed the park which would have made that option mute. Forman then went forward with a plan of constructing apartments, sold smaller portions of the parcel to other groups to build commercial buildings including warehouses, and even sold 25 acres to the town of Davie. The 25 acres appeared to be an over-inflated crony capitalist price of \$12.5 million, as Davie later sold the land in 2016 for \$5 million (Kiar 2020).

This is all about land tenure and who has the right to the land and the benefits of that land. There is an affordable housing crisis in the United States, in Florida and especially in South Florida. How are we going to decrease the burden on the struggle of these families when the rich landowners get to exclusively do what they want? Should they have that power? There are some basic protections for mobile home owners, but the landowners have so many more rights. Is that just? Are mobile homes just chattel, instead of homes for these families. How can we address this when working class people's incomes have not risen, in relation to inflation, since the 1970's and the 1 percent have seen their share of the wealth increase substantially?

In their homes, mobile home residents do what they can to survive as a family. A mobile home is a product where people are able to shield themselves from the elements, not very

different from a site built home. It can be a source of great pride. As Kusenbach shows in her article ““Look at my house!” Home and Mobile Home Ownership among Latino/a Immigrants in Florida,” numerous Latino residents feel as though they had accomplished the American Dream through mobile home ownership even when they do not own the land (2017).

Unfortunately, they have a harder struggle to organize compared to how the Formans organized with other dairy producers in the state because of the crony capitalist with a grip on power in the Florida Legislature to keep FS 723 intact. Each mobile home park could either organize a Home Owners Association or some sort of Civic Association that can represent their interest and then there needs to be a way to collectively bring these associations together at the state level. There could be county level councils of associations, which could help address county level problems. However, all of this takes time to organize and it is in the landowner’s interest to infiltrate and discourage the formation of such associations, as they would then have to address an organized mass versus independent disorganized residents. Plus, the crony capitalist group of mobile home park land owners should be studied as they probably have deep ties to real estate and a broad collection of business leaders in the state further entrenching their political capital, making it difficult to change laws that benefit them.

The Challenge

Housing costs are quite high in America, as a shortage of housing has not been addressed since the 1940’s. Home ownership is down, and the affordability of those homes are decreasing. More people are renting, and rents across the board are extremely high. Wages have not kept up with inflation, especially inflation in regards to housing. Even when wages increase in a locality, those wages are consumed by rising rents, because it is all about supply versus demand. The

supply is low, while the demand is high, so landlords can charge a premium, and have historically risen rates until they find a maximum extraction point that the local economy can support.

Lack of affordable housing affects all working class and poor folks, and it will exacerbate racial and ethnic tensions. However, it is through collaboration in an explicitly anti-racist and anti-classist manner, that stakeholders can come to common ground to respect people's basic human rights to housing, and provide for a more just economy. It is up to all of us to struggle together to figure out what is important and to democratically change our locality which will result in larger positive change on behalf of the marginalized all the while exposing the crony capitalists and the neoliberal policies that they institute.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval



June 5, 2008

Juan Ruiz
Dept. of Anthropology
SOC 107

RE: **Expedited Approval** for Initial Review

IRB#: 106973

Title: *Mobile Home Park Displacement and Community Organizing in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties*

Study Approval Period: 5/30/2008 to 5/29/2009

Dear Mr. Ruiz:

On May 30, 2008, Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above protocol **for the period indicated above**. It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review based on the federal expedited category number :

- six (6): Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- seven (7): Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Also approved were the English and Spanish informed consent forms.

Please provide a copy of your current human subjects protection education certificate, and the Investigator's Responsibility certificate.

Please note, if applicable, the **enclosed informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on page one of the form**. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form. Make copies from the enclosed original.

Please reference the above IRB protocol number in all correspondence regarding this protocol with the IRB or the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance. In addition, we have enclosed an Institutional Review Board (IRB) Quick Reference Guide providing guidelines and resources to assist you in meeting your responsibilities in the conduction of human participant research. Please read this guide carefully. It is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB.

OFFICE OF RESEARCH • DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY & COMPLIANCE
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDS, FWA No. 00001669
University of South Florida • 12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • Fax (813) 974-5618

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-9343.

Sincerely,



Paul G. Stiles, J.D., Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Enclosures: (If applicable) IRB-Approved, Stamped Informed Consent/Assent Documents(s)
IRB Quick Reference Guide

Cc: Anna Davis, USF IRB Professional Staff
Dr. Jacqueline Messing

SB-IRB-Approved-EXPEDITED-0601

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Mobile Home Park Displacement and Community Organizing in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in an ethnographic study researching the experiences of people displaced by mobile home park closures or of people who fear they are vulnerable to displacement, or people organizing to prevent displacement of park tenants. The research focuses in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties. The following information is being presented to help you decide whether or not you want to take part in a minimal risk research study. Please read this carefully. If you do not understand anything, please ask the project director or representative of the study.

General Information about the Project: This project is part of Juan Ruiz's internship with Legal Aid Services of Broward County, supervised by Janet Riley. He is a graduate student seeking his master's degree in Applied Anthropology at the University of South Florida and will write a thesis based on this study. This research seeks to collaborate with mobile home park residents who wish to share their experiences and organize community responses to park closures. Juan Ruiz will work together with project participants to determine how the project will publicize the experiences of participants, including what information to send to state representatives and other political representatives. Juan Ruiz is also interested in collaborating with mobile home park residents and their community organizations, in whatever way possible.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is twofold. First, it will share the experiences of people who have been displaced from mobile home parks and of residents who fear displacement. Second, Juan Ruiz seeks to document and collaborate with community organizers who are working to help people prevent displacement.

Potential Risks: There is no potential risks to the participants/subjects. Best practices of the American Anthropological Association will be followed throughout the project.

Potential Benefits: The potential benefits to participants in the project is the opportunity to share their concerns with state representatives and to strengthen community organizations. Participants will receive a copy of any audio, video, or images taken of them, copies of any media sent to state representatives, and copies of any published materials.

Contact Information: Juan Ruiz may be contacted at (813) 367-7296 or by e-mail: jgruiz@mail.usf.edu

Janet Riley may be contacted at (954) 736-2419 or by email: jriley@legalaid.org

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence.

IRB Approval	
FWA 00001669	
IRB Number:	<u>106973</u>
From	<u>5/30/08</u>
Thru	<u>5/29/09</u>

Protection of Confidentiality: If desired, participant will be referred to by a pseudonym to protect their identity and privacy. (Check one):

_____ You may use my name

Participant's Name (Print)

_____ You may *not* use my name

Please use the following Pseudonym: _____

Desired Pseudonym (Print)

I have been fully informed of the above-described procedure with its possible benefits and risks and I consent to **(choose one)**

_____ Participate in the project by having my interview(s) recorded in video and audio, and to have photographs taken of me.

_____ Participate in the project by having my interview(s) recorded by audio recorder only.

Signature of Participant or Representative

Printed name of signor

Date

Investigator Statement:

I certify that participants have been provided with an informed consent form that has been approved by the University of South Florida's Institutional Review Board and that explains the nature, demands, risks, and benefits involved in participating in this study. I have carefully explained to the subject the nature of the above research study. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the subject signing this consent form understands the nature, demands, risks, and benefits involved in participating in this study.

Signature of Investigator
or Authorized Research
Investigator

Printed Name of Investigator

Date

Mobile Home Park Displacement and Displacement
Prevention in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties Study
Contact: Juan Ruiz (813) 367-7296



Desplazamiento de Gente en Parques de Casas Móviles y Organización de Comunidades en Broward y Miami-Dade Condados Consentimiento Informado

Le invito a participar en una investigación etnográfica sobre las experiencias de gente desplazado de un cerramiento de un parque de casas móviles, o con gente que tiene miedo que su parque va a cerrar, o con gente que están trabajando para prevenir desplazamiento. Este estudio está enfocado en los Condados de Broward y Miami-Dade. La siguiente información se presenta para ayudarle a tomar la decisión si quiere o no quiere participar en un estudio de investigación clasificado como "riesgo mínimo." Favor de leer esto cuidadosamente. Si Ud. no entiende algo, favor de pedirle a la persona encargada del estudio.

Información General del Investigación: Este proyecto es parte del puesto de Juan Ruiz's interno con Legal Aid Services of Broward County, supervisado por Janet Riley. Juan es un estudiante posgrado que busca su máster en Antropología Aplicado en la Universidad del Sur de la Florida y va a escribir una tesis sobre este estudio. Esta investigación quiere colaborar con residentes de parques de casas móviles que quieren compartir sus experiencias y organizar respuestas de la comunidad contra cerramientos de parques. Juan Ruiz va a trabajar junto con los participantes del proyecto para decidir cómo van a publicar las experiencias de los participantes, incluyendo que información van a mandar a los representantes del estado de Florida y otros representantes políticos. También, Juan Ruiz es interesado en colaboración con residentes de los parques de casas móviles y con organizaciones de la comunidad, en cualquier forma posible.

Objetivo de la Investigación: Hay dos objetivos de esta investigación. Primero, se va a compartir las experiencias de gente quién han sido desplazado por cerramientos de parques de casas móviles y de gente que tiene miedo que sus parques van a cerrar. Segundo, Juan Ruiz quiere documentar y colaborar con organizadores de la comunidad que están ayudando gente para prevenir desplazamiento.

Riesgo Potencial: No hay ningún riesgo conocido de formar parte de este investigación. Voy a usar las mejores prácticas de la Asociación Antropológica Norteamericana durante este proyecto.

Beneficios Potencial: Los beneficios potenciales para participantes en este proyecto es la oportunidad para compartir sus quejas con representantes del estado que ojala vayan a ver o escuchar los partes que tu quieres y fortalecer organizaciones del la comunidad. Participantes van a recibir una copia de todo el audio, video, y imágenes grabado de ellos, copias de información mandado a los representantes del estado, y copias de artículos publicados.

Preguntas y Contactos: Puede contactar Juan Ruiz a
(813) 367-7296 o por e-mail:
jgruiz@mail.usf.edu

Puede contactar Janet Riley a
(954) 736-2419 o por email:
jriley@legalaid.org

Tu participación es totalmente voluntaria, y si quiere, puede retirar su consentimiento y terminar su participación a cualquier momento sin consecuencia de acuerdo con las reglas de mi universidad, la Universidad del Sur de la Florida.

IRB Approval	
FWA 00001669	
IRB Number:	<u>1010973</u>
From	<u>5/30/08</u>
Thru	<u>5/29/09</u>

Protección de Confiabilidad: Si quiere, puede proteger su identidad y privacidad con su participación con un pseudónimo en cambio por su nombre. (Elegir uno):

_____ Puede usar mi nombre

Nombre de Participante Escrito

_____ No puede usar mi nombre

Favor de usar el siguiente Pseudónimo: _____
Pseudónimo que Quieres (Escrito)

He sido informado totalmente con los procesos arriba con todos los beneficios y riesgos y quiero consentir a (**elegir uno**)

_____ Participar en el proyecto con mi entrevista(s) grabado en video y audio, y con fotos tomado de mi.

_____ Participar en el proyecto con mi entrevista(s) grabado audio solamente.

Firma de Participante

Nombre Escrito de Firmador

Fecha

Explicación del Investigador:

He cuidadosamente explicado al sujeto la naturaleza del estudio de investigación. Conforme a esto certifico que al mejor de mi conocimiento el sujeto firmando este formulario de consentimiento entiende la naturaleza, demandas, riesgos, y beneficios del participar en este estudio. Certifico que esta consentimiento informada es aprobado con el University of South Florida's Institutional Review Board.

Firma de Investigadora

Nombre Escrito del Investigador(a)

Fecha

Desplazamiento de gente en Parques de Casas Móviles
y Organización de Comunidades en Broward y Miami-Dade Condado
Juan Ruiz (813) 367-7296

