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Time Exists Because I Exist

Jocelyn Bolanos
Humboldt State University

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Time Exists Because I Exist

Jocelyn Bolanos

When I reminisce, I begin to stitch the past while still in the present, remembering my neighborhood while growing up, and reflecting on how it actually meant something to me. Strange how if we don't write it out, many of us will forget about spaces and I feel drawn, even more than before to keep documenting.

Back in 2010, I began my journey into the public system for the first time in my life-- high school; and I remember walking in the open and feeling like an alien. The students there either knew each other, they lived in the same neighborhood, or went to the same junior high. I only had my brother, which made it lighter than the heavy pressure to socialize and veer from interaction to friendship. It was in this high school when I first met some of my homies, Jovani Monge, Cesar Ramirez, and my brother. We had commonalities, like smoking weed, playing Yu-Gi-Oh, day drinking, popping ecstasy, listening to music, getting spiritual by admiring and mindfully talking about Earth, and talking about conspiracies. In Santa Ana, there's a park called "Edna" that had a bike trail attached and travels east all the way to the beach and north to the Angels Stadium. There is a golf course that is adjacent to it, it has a lot of trees, a small stream that connects to the river bed, and green grass. The border of the river bed and the golf course became connected by the trees. It formed a natural wall to stop trespassers, but one can still easily climb it or walk around. The trees created a patch of shade that was refreshing for our bodies in 90-degree weather. The slanted golf course was the place to lay on, for some quality time with the homies.

This place was meaningful for us, it was our place that we'd go after high school, it was a regularity. The golf course manager did not want us there. They wanted to get rid of us, and maybe that was a good thing too, because we would have never thought of going home. Eventually they cut down the trees and stopped watering the plants

because of the California drought. So it changed. The environment changed, crime went up, and it became unsafe for us. We never carried weapons nor did we ever try to get in trouble. This not only had an impact on us, but also on the community. So, we stopped kicking it there. We ended up kicking it behind a dumpster by my townhome, near a jacuzzi that was covered up because a 5-year-old kid drowned. This new open space became our spot to grab a camping chair or flipped bucket so we could do our own thing. Where no one can tell us anything for being a group of stoner nerds looking for a space to be us. It forced us to seek and transform a place for ourselves to be safe from our neighborhood, which throughout the years, became more violent and policed.

After all this, I find myself coming back to “The Pulse Shooting: Grieving Safe Space and the Work We Have To Do” by Denice Frohman. She talks about having to “reclaim space, even the ones we built for ourselves” (2016). I really connected with that. Us, being people of color, knew that we should not be around that area anymore. We were so conflicted, we’d ask each other where we wanted to kick it, and the word “Edna” came with a negative stigma. Frohman said, “I want to feel safe everywhere I go” (2016). She’s right. When she is asking for liberation from violence, I recognize she is talking of queer people of color, and I’m queer, brown, and I hang out with people of color, so it’s all connected.

Our little community resisted, by still gathering together and being ourselves. We’d have barbecues in our space, or our neighbors would get together randomly. What I’m sharing is that we were all part of a collective experience.

Frohman, Denice. “The Pulse Shooting: Grieving Safe Space and the Work We Have To Do.” *HuffPost*, 14 June 2016, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-pulse-shooting-grieving-safe-space-and-the-work_b_575f53d4e4b072d1185b0a8d.