Queering Urban Autonomy in Greater Los Angeles: Latinx Poli-creative Survival Strategies

This dissertation is an ethnographic study which examines how working class queer and femme Latinx artists from immigrant communities -whom I refer to as poli-creatives- use their creative labor to navigate their sociopolitical economic conditions across greater Los Angeles (LA). I contextualize LA as a transnational site with historical and ongoing structures of imperialism and settler-colonialism, racial capitalism, environmental racism, gentrification, and state violence that these poli-creatives and their communities must navigate. Based on participant observation and life history and informal interviews in 2019 and 2020, I intervene in urban studies, gender and sexuality, and social movements scholarship by arguing for a rethinking of queer resistance. While urban studies scholarship has employed the language of citizenship and focused on LGBT neighborhood-based models of queer resilience, I divert our attention to thinking about liberatory urban autonomies that are rooted in reciprocal care and survival. To do so, I introduce the concept of mycorrhizal assemblages that serves as a theoretical and analytical tool. Drawing on subterranean webs of mycelial fungal strands, mycorrhizal assemblages conceptualize how poli-creatives build a multifaceted ecosystem of informal creative economies and subaltern and decolonial knowledges rooted in a praxis of communal care: sharing resources, skills, political goals, and affective trauma to help each other and their local working-class Black and brown immigrant communities build sustainability and self-determination. Rather than depend on visibility and representation in public space, gayborhoods, or the neoliberal settler-colonial state and formal institutions for survival, I show how these assemblages invest in ancestral practices and healing, experiences of migration, intimate and accessible spaces, and bodily autonomy. I argue that these multiple, nonlinear, and regenerative ways of living and knowing lay down new soil for collective survival and build liberatory imaginations for queer worlds and a future otherwise.