

**“We’re still here”: An Abolition Ecology Blockade of Double Dispossession of
Gullah/Geechee Land**

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*This is an original manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Annals of the
American Association of Geographers on January 13, 2022, available at:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/24694452.2021.1989282>.*

Abstract

Narratives of resilience to sea-level rise too often perpetuate social violence. An abolitionist climate justice praxis necessitates seeing beyond physical inundation to sea-level rise as the sole issue. We argue that sea-level rise is environmental racism, if not always in its racialized outcomes of disproportionate harms, then always in its racialized production of differential value. More than mitigating flood risk when developing Black land futures strategies, to mitigate coastal land loss in the face of rising seas necessitates dismantling “racial regimes of ownership” that are imbued in property relations. Recognizing such, we argue that land futures strategies in the face of rising seas must account for multiple capitalist modes of accumulation, but specifically the primitive accumulation process connected to heirs’ property. Here, we argue that racial coastal formations are still underway in how sea-level rise and gentrification are leading to a *double dispossession* of land and displacing Gullah/Geechee people on Sapelo Island. While such displacement precipitates loss through harm and violence, in this paper we share strategies from abolition ecology praxis to “blockade” these double dispossession processes, and to a degree, even the narrative of loss. To situate the double dispossession narrative within a broader praxis that imagines alternative futures, we till the soil, trace the archives, and tread the marsh and drainage ditches with each other, and in solidarity with other residents to work toward achieving agricultural revival, property retention, and flood risk mitigation.

Key words

abolition ecology, racial capitalism, land dispossession, heirs’ property, sea-level rise

32 **Introduction**

33 *That's something my mother always said... Put something on that land. Use that land for*
34 *something. Don't let it just sit there. So when people come, then you're already established. So,*
35 *yeah, by doing these crops, we're already utilizing the land. So it makes it harder for people to*
36 *come in and just try to take over because we're still here and still trying to protect our land.*

37 - M. B. (Georgia Grown TV 2021)

38 In 2019, during our third harvest season, we were riding down a dirt road headed to our largest
39 plot of sugarcane when co-author M.B. (agricultural director) asked co-author D.H. (a
40 geographer) about making some maps to identify higher elevation sites for future agricultural
41 plots, but also for acreage of all the state-owned lots in the community and around the island.
42 M.B. said the agricultural program needed to occupy as much of that land as possible to increase
43 Geecheeⁱ presence in the community so that when prospective property buyers arrived on the
44 island, they would be discouraged from buying land within a predominantly Black space. The
45 idea about building Black presence through occupation of state lands in the community to
46 discourage outsider investment predates our conversation, extending back more than a decade to
47 M.B.'s mother, Cornelia Walker Bailey (see Heynen 2021). Here, we work to bring C.W.
48 Bailey's ideas to life, and into dialogue with the notion of the "blockade," through a praxis of
49 abolition ecology that works to transform current thinking within state institutions.

50 In configuring abolition ecology, we follow Gilmore's (Petitjean 2018) thinking that, "abolition
51 is figuring out how to work with people to make something rather than figuring out how to erase
52 something....abolition is a theory of change, it's a theory of social life. It's about making things."
53 Inspired by Gilmore and other scholars within Black Geographies (e.g., McKittrick 2013) and
54 beyond, we aspire to articulate a strategy "to make something" by envisioning alternative land

futures on Sapelo Island through solidarity between Geechee residents and academics. Specifically, abolition ecology pulls together participatory discourses from the Black Radical Tradition and political ecology to strive for more liberatory land-based ethics that challenge the oppressive logics of racial capitalism. Steeped in abolitionist principles of agitation and action, this approach works to produce nature that bolsters the cultural importance of Black life as opposed to vanquishing it. Our efforts have had their share of challenges, occurring upon a dynamic landscape wherein Black residents are resisting two processes of land dispossession: flooding and gentrification.

Local tidal trends are clearly upward, reaching nearly a foot over the past century and accelerating over the past two decades. Sapelo has flooded four of the past six years and, in 2017, Hurricane Irma disrupted early agricultural revival efforts to create jobs and generate revenue in partnership with the Gullah/Geechee-run Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society (SICARS). The waters flooded crops on land held in cooperative agreement between the State of Georgia and community members under the legal entity called the Sapelo Island Heritage Authority (SIHA).ⁱⁱ Use of this land was negotiated as a way to resurrect Gullah/Geechee foodways onto the landscape amidst ongoing property loss in one of the last remaining Gullah/Geechee Sea Island communities, Hog Hammock (Bailey 2001). Fortunately, this initial crop survived and in so doing offered insights into the connections between land, property auctions, the island ditch network, sea-level rise, flooding, and the ways geography and abolitionist politics can work together to mitigate ongoing dispossession.

Typical academic and policy-minded narratives of overcoming flood risk include improving coastal community resilience, which often implies the ability to maintain or return to a stable state after a flood. However, some geographers have swapped the notion of resilience for climate

78 justice, arguing that resilience gives primacy to capitalist social relations and reinforces systemic
79 inequities (see Derickson 2016). In turn, resilience discourse too often forecloses on alternative
80 futures by implicitly invoking a dependence on and return to the logics of racial capitalism
81 (Ranganathan and Bratman 2019), whereby capitalist modes of accumulation are not only
82 contingent upon racial difference for capitalism’s continued growth (Robinson 2000), but the
83 structural foundation that undergirds its persistent racial violence (A. Bledsoe and Wright 2018).
84 As such, narratives of building resilience to increased flood risk under rising seas often
85 perpetuate social violence.

86 Sea-level rise itself – an externality of the Industrial Revolution made possible through racial
87 capitalism’s state-supported exploits of life, liberty, labor, and land – is state-sanctioned
88 violence, but so too are “colorblind” modes of adaptation to rising seas. There is a steady
89 brutality that resilience to sea-level rise narratives inflict on populations who are frequently
90 excluded from decision-making processes (see Barra 2021; Fair 2020). In addition to the harms,
91 these same populations have been excluded from the benefits *accumulated* from spewing
92 greenhouse gases into our collective atmosphere via petro-racial capitalism (Luke and Heynen
93 2020). Adaptation that works within capitalist modes of accumulation leads to such actions as
94 promoting market-based mechanisms in response to yet-to-have arrived disasters (Paprocki
95 2019) or, worse, redistributing the means of risk mitigation to the “adaptation privileged”
96 (Marino 2018). There are other geographically rooted ways of thinking through these issues.
97 There are abolitionist principles that center historical racisms and specifically how
98 “intersectional drivers of trauma” can be incorporated into climate adaptation responses
99 (Ranganathan and Bratman 2019). And, there are efforts to dismantle racist institutions and build

coalitional land-based politics with place-making potential that follow Gilmore’s idea of “freedom as a place” (2017, 227).

An abolitionist climate justice praxis necessitates seeing beyond physical inundation to sea-level rise as the sole issue (see Ranganathan and Bratman 2019). More than merely mitigating flood risk when developing land futures strategies, to mitigate coastal land loss in the face of rising seas necessitates dismantling what Bhandar (2018) calls the “racial regimes of ownership” that are imbued in property relations. We distinguish between property and land in recognizing the origins of settler colonial logics in property (Harris 1993; Palmer 2020), acknowledging “land as life” and “storied” and that, as the prominent Gullah/Geechee writer and activist Cornelia Walker Bailey has said, “Culture is no good without land” (NPR 2008; Goeman 2015).

Recognizing such, we argue that land futures strategies in the face of rising seas must account for multiple capitalist modes of accumulation, but specifically the primitive accumulation process connected to heirs’ property, or property held as a tenancy in common, and specifically the legal pathways for its loss that increase gentrification pressure. With each heir holding undivided interest in the property, the title is often considered “clouded,” which limits the ability to use the property as capital, for example, through being denied bank loans against the property’s value as well as voluntary buyouts and disaster relief aid after a storm event. Such ownership typically leads to an array of family members jostling for use and even over who pays the property taxes, which often results in property retention issues and sometimes losses through delinquent property tax auctions (Deaton 2005).

In this article, we build on the notion of “racial coastal formation” by arguing that such formations are still underway in how climate-driven sea-level rise and coastal gentrification are leading to a *double dispossession* of land and by extension displacing Gullah/Geechee people;

and that two distinct processes of dispossession, often thought of as separate, are interrelated and interconnected through the logics of racial capitalism (see Hardy, Milligan, and Heynen 2017). In the following section, we develop the idea of double dispossession through the historical-geographical context of Sapelo Island. First, we follow Pulido's (2017) argument that "environmental racism is constituent of racial capitalism," to contend that land dispossession via global sea-level rise is state-sanctioned violence that seems poised to lead to forced displacement if left to contemporary forms of governmental action and inaction. Second, we argue that land loss via heirs' property is directly related to settler colonial modes of capitalist accumulation following Bhandar's (2018) theory of "racial regimes of ownership." While coupled displacement begets loss through harm and violence, in our last section we argue toward strategies for a life-affirming praxis of abolition ecology to "blockade" this double dispossession, and to a degree, even the narrative of loss.

Double Dispossession

Sea-level rise is environmental racism, if not always in its racialized outcomes of disproportionate harms, then always in its racialized production of differential value. We follow Pulido here when she argues that, "theorizing the racialized production of differential value" rather than merely quantifying racialized outcomes is necessary for confronting racial capitalism's need for differential value (2017, 528). Similarly, Gilmore argues that achieving liberation requires abolishing the ongoing systemic "processes of hierarchy, dispossession, and exclusion that congeal in and as group-differentiated vulnerability" (2017, 228). Thus, we argue that to limit the environmental racism of rising seas requires recognition of the racialized production of uneven capital accumulation by dispossession (see Harvey 2003) of a right to a shared, sustainable atmospheric commons – so-called "accumulation by environmental

dispossession” (Latorre, Farrell, and Martínez-Alier 2015). Rising seas primarily benefit white elites under racial capitalism while inflicting racialized violence on communities of color regardless of measurable disproportionate burdens due to associated flood risk. In other words, sea-level rise is environmental racism in its formation, regardless of its outcomes.

Crucially, however, there are often racialized outcomes including existential concerns for Black, Indigenous, and other coastal communities of color including small-island nations in a global context (e.g., Marino and Lazrus 2015). On Sapelo, we calculate that by century’s end nearly half of Hog Hammock faces a 50 percent chance of regular inundation under conservative sea-level rise projections (Figure 1A). Such land dispossession demands political responses that emphasize preventing ongoing racialized outcomes while *simultaneously* dismantling the systems premised on re-producing racialized production of sea-level rise.

To accomplish such simultaneity requires coastal scientists and policymakers to recognize the racial coastal formations of coastal regions everywhere so as not to reproduce historical injustices in coastal adaptation efforts. For example, Barra’s (2021, 279) argument that coastal restoration could mean, “imagining how restoration can be enrolled in the practice of repairing racial and economic inequities beyond a zero-sum game in ... coastal land loss cris[es]” implies to us a call for an abolition ecology. In our use of abolition ecology, we define the concept of ecology to be much more than a discipline. However, applying Barra’s call for recognition in coastal restoration efforts to Walker’s (2005) argument regarding the role of ecology in political ecology, we ask how can disciplines such as ecology do the restorative work of reparations? While we do not answer that question here, we argue that an abolition ecology praxis provides a pathway to answer such a question, in part, via its explicit engagement with abolitionist ideals to “make something” (e.g., “re-earthing” and flood risk mitigation below). Actually listening to

communities will reorient scientific practice. In our case, as M.B. and several Sapelo residents have asked, why care about sea-level rise land loss if the Geechee community will no longer be there due to property losses when inundation occurs? Such a reorientation in sea-level rise research and adaptation praxis could shift the focus off building resilience for existing systems of oppression toward stopping Black land dispossession through state-supported pathways.

One such pathway is delinquent property tax auctions, which are common for heirs' properties. While heirs' property assessment techniques are challenging (Johnson Gaither and Zarnoch 2017), we estimate that at least 14 percent of Black-owned properties in Hog Hammock are heirs' propertyⁱⁱⁱ, but of 48 Hog Hammock properties advertised for auction due to delinquent taxes since 2010, at least 41 percent were likely heirs' properties (GSCCCA 2020). Several properties were delinquent more than once due to a 2011 state-mandated property value reassessment that substantially raised effective tax rates, which we argue reveals the perpetual cycle of violence upon Black landowners. We identified seven of the eight properties that went to auction as heirs' properties (eight acres), 75 percent of which went directly to a registered company at auction and 88 percent of which are now owned by a company (Figure 1B). Such company ownership signifies to us that these are investment properties and exacerbating the process of gentrification on Sapelo. Total unpaid taxes on these eight properties amounted to just over \$32,000, yet the county accumulated \$440,000 from their auctioning. After recovering the back taxes, the county is supposed to pay out the difference to the original property owners, yet in the case of heirs' property this is often too challenging. If not dispersed, the funding is supposed to be given to the state and could eventually become unclaimed property. Such losses are a form of "dignity taking" that act to uphold the violent social relations engineered into a

racialized capitalist system contingent upon unending potential for accumulation (see A. Bledsoe and Wright 2018; Kahrl 2018).

Given the disproportionate occurrence of heirs' property on Sapelo, we contend that heirs' ownership provides an opening for capitalist modes of accumulation premised on racial difference following Bhandar's (2018) "racial regimes of ownership" thesis. Writing on how settler colonial logics persist in property law, Bhandar connects Robinson's (2007) work on "racial regimes" and Harris's (1993) on "whiteness as property" to argue that settler colonist governments justified the process of Indigenous land dispossession via an ideology of improvement, namely lack of cultivation. Due to heirs' property having a tenancy in common legal status, it is challenging to improve or even cultivate such land without risk of investment losses due to conflicts potentially arising with other heirs; thus, it often sits "unimproved." In other words, heirs' property is contingent upon a persistent racial regime of ownership ideology in that current property law frequently interprets heirs' property as needing improvement and not worthy of legal protection. Consequently, Hog Hammock heirs' properties lost via tax auctions over the past decade opened up the predominantly Black community to increased outsider interest, investment, and potential wealth accumulation, i.e., gentrification. Moreover, after one year heir owners may lose their right to redeem the property and after four years the auction winner may obtain prescriptive title. Each of these steps makes it more expensive and legally more challenging for any heirs to recover their property. Thus, the limited legal protections for heir owners who are disproportionately Black, Latinx, and Indigenous is a perpetuation of a racial regime of ownership premised on property defined by whiteness.

Heirs' property then functions as one of many state-sanctioned forms of Black a-spatiality via the logics of racial capitalism. Black a-spatiality does not mean Black people are not present. On the

contrary, on Sapelo Black people and culture define much of the landscape, yet Black people's ability to shape Sapelo is controlled by state institutions that continually erode Black power to do so, rendering them "ungeographic" (see McKittrick 2006; see also A. Bledsoe and Wright 2018). Heirs' property is one such state-backed pathway to dispossession, but disaster aid is another. Hog Hammock is literally written off the map by being classified as an "otherwise protected area" on U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) maps used in disaster relief decisions. Such classification is based on all-or-none development criteria that has rendered Hog Hammock excluded from accessing federal flood insurance on any new or improved buildings since 1991 as well as disaster relief aid. Georgia's four other developed islands are marked as exceptions, including neatly carved out areas of Jekyll Island. Such politico-technical erasure had a real effect as recently as the 2017 flood damages incurred by residents from Hurricane Irma – fueled by sea levels nearly a foot higher than a century ago – by denying access to disaster relief aid until FEMA modified its policy guidelines (see Dickson 2017). Heirs' property only heightens this concern as heirs' property owners would be denied access to disaster relief aid due to their inability to show "clear" title (Pippin, Jones, and Johnson Gaither 2017), clear title being an expectation of a property system designed upon individual private property rights. Thus, increased flood risk due to sea-level rise has racialized outcomes exacerbated by existing Black a-spatiality in property law.

In a way, sea-level rise enacts a failsafe mechanism for white guilt such that, if the racial capitalist process of land dispossession via gentrification fails, inundation kicks in "washing away" the sins of slavery and racial capitalism by submerging the former plantation under the sea; a scene reminiscent of biblical flooding. This image recalls Baldwin's idea of white America's continued desire to avoid seeing "an appallingly oppressive and bloody history,

237 known all over the world... a disastrous, continuing, present condition which menaces them, and
238 for which they bear an inescapable responsibility” (1998, 2:722). In the following section, we
239 work to “blockade” this double dispossession narrative – and realities that embody it – through
240 tilling the soil, tracing the archives, and treading the marsh and ditches with each other, and in
241 solidarity with other Geechee descendants (meaning direct descendants of the formerly enslaved
242 islanders) to work toward achieving Geechee land futures on Sapelo.

243 **Abolition Ecology Blockade**

244 We want to broaden the blockade concept beyond more commonly held definitions of stopping
245 resource flows or physical barricading of roadways and other spaces. In a manner we see better
246 connected with abolitionist politics, we hope to draw on the vision and power of the blockade as
247 it arises from Indigenous and environmental rights activism in order to influence climate justice
248 discourse (see Blomley 1996; Fair 2020).

249 We want to explicitly call attention to the Union Navy’s blockade of the Confederate ports in the
250 U.S. South during the Civil War. Specifically, we take inspiration in mobilizing the story of
251 enslaved Gullah crewman Robert Smalls’ abduction of the Confederate steamer, *Planter*, from
252 Charleston Harbor and its delivery to the Union Navy Blockade off the South Carolina coast in
253 1862 (Quarles 1958). In this case, the blockade both physically obstructed material flows and
254 simultaneously offered hope to enslaved people through its offshore presence, and literal
255 salvation from slavery to Smalls and his crew. Thus, the Union’s blockade worked both
256 symbolically and materially, both goals of an abolition ecology blockade on double
257 dispossession processes.

In the case of Sapelo, an abolition ecology blockade aspires first to dismantle the system of climate adaptation practices that work to recreate systemic violence through the discourse of resilience and in its place build material institutions and solidarity that can symbolically sustain abolitionist visions for the future. While the state is complicit in racial and environmental injustices (Pulido 2017; Kurtz 2009), we argue that working with allied sections of the state and local governments is a necessary concession to achieve our goal to “mobilise an emancipatory politics of land and property and to produce a commons” that heals the multiple histories of racial violence that have made Sapelo what it is today (Heynen 2021, 95). Such concession is, at least partially, due to the state controlling 97 percent of the island and 38 percent of the community (via SIHA). Below, we describe our abolition ecology methodology for working toward Geechee land futures via agricultural revival, property retention, and flood risk mitigation.

Envisioning our goal through abolitionist principles with attention to political ecological relations, we engage an abolition ecology praxis to “re-earth;” another idea that originated with Cornelia Walker Bailey. Together we have been building an agricultural commons in an effort to ensure a long-term connection between Geechee people and the land. In so doing we are re-establishing several heirloom crops to reclaim and re-envision the racist history of these crops for purposes of economic development against cultural genocide. There are some 40 acres accessible for cultivation at the moment on Heritage Authority land (see below) and State of Georgia land in and around Hog Hammock (Figure 1B). The largest cultivation crop is sugarcane, but several other crops are being cultivated including Geechee red peas, sour oranges, indigo, and garlic.

One of the agricultural program’s goals is to physically occupy Heritage Authority land to dissuade and “blockade” outsider investment in the community through geographical Black

281 space-making. This sort of Black space-making and the constant efforts needed to fight erasure
282 create opportunities to revisit, recall, and repurpose all manner of knowledge, including
283 agricultural knowledge. To this end there is something about mobilizing historic knowledge that
284 has been stripped from people and the land on Sapelo through encroachment and development
285 that serves as the engine of blockading the double dispossession narrative. Cultivating crops
286 central to traditional Geechee foodways on Sapelo and insisting they be seen, they be recognized,
287 they be respected, they be read about, and they materially occupy and preserve Geechee space, is
288 in itself the point of the blockade. It is this presence, and the building of the presence, that is in
289 part the abolitionist ideal and the refusal to disappear or be disappeared that is also part of the
290 abolitionist ideal.

291 To build such presence, several Geechee descendants (including M.B.) have insisted that
292 working both with and against the state is a necessary condition to achieve abolition. Through
293 partnering with the state, pathways are opened to directly challenge, contest, counter, and even
294 change negative narratives. Congressman Robert Smalls understood this when he abducted the
295 steamer and made way for the Union Navy Blockade and later ascended to the rank of Captain in
296 the U.S. Navy. However, he later found it necessary to defend himself against charges of election
297 campaign fraud in 1873 as a South Carolina Senator before being elected to U.S. Congress in
298 1875. During his defense Smalls said, “My race needs no special defense, for the past history of
299 them in this country proves them to be equal of any people anywhere. All they need is an equal
300 chance in the battle of life” (South Carolina Constitutional Convention 1895, 476). Here we see
301 the ways that presence is central to the blockade of negative discourse and unjust institutions and
302 central to abolitionist ideals of equality. We imagine the agricultural project and related efforts to
303 be an embodiment of the blockade, both materially in its physical occupation of space, but also

304 in its direct challenges to racist discourses within state institutions. Of course, agricultural revival
305 is paramount to a successful land futures strategy for the former's focus on local job and revenue
306 generation, but so too is property retention.

307 Most of our collective efforts to date have been on agriculture, but in partnership with SICARS'
308 Land Retention Committee we have focused on cataloging the history of property transactions
309 via archival research to document the rate of loss for Geechee descendants as well as other land-
310 related threats to the island. Our objective is to support SICARS by documenting the history of
311 Geechee land loss to be used in seeking funding to establish a community land trust. Tied to
312 heirs' property retention in very specific ways is the Heritage Authority, which holds title to
313 much of the land on which we are growing crops and which was flooded by Irma in 2017.

314 The Heritage Authority's charge is to preserve the community as it is, occupied by descendants
315 of the island's formerly enslaved people. Yet, at times it appears as though the state has
316 contradictory interests in, for example, its insistence in 2011 that McIntosh County reassess
317 property values, which raised effective tax rates on Sapelo and led to the delinquent property tax
318 auctions mentioned above. Despite this, the law establishing the Heritage Authority authorizes it
319 to "acquire, hold, and dispose of in its own name by purchase, gift, lease, or exchange...real and
320 personal property of every kind, character, and description including tenancies in common [i.e.,
321 heirs' property]" in Hog Hammock (GGA 2010). While the Heritage Authority has only ever
322 been funded to purchase land from the last majority island owner's philanthropic organization,
323 we are working with SICARS to motivate the Heritage Authority to fulfill its obligation to
324 preserve the culture of the community through purchasing of heirs' property as well as enacting
325 its capacity to purchase properties with the "right of first refusal" included on the deed, of which
326 there are many in Hog Hammock. This final pathway gives the Heritage Authority the legal

authority to make the first offer when a landowner with such a clause in their deed goes to market. While property retention is the more imminent need to prevent land dispossession, as our paper's thesis suggests, we are also working toward preventing future land dispossession via inundation.

Central to this and why earth and physical geographic science is so central, we are seeking to better understand local hydrology to improve flood risk mitigation strategies. One reason for this is that our preliminary assessments show overprediction of flood risk in the community due to errors in tidal elevation data. Flooding is an issue of increasing concern per our opening story, but such errors may unnecessarily raise fears regarding timing of future inundation. The closest water level gages to Hog Hammock are located two, six, forty-seven, and fifty-three miles away, but none are connected to the winding creek coming into the community; thus, local inundation analyses depend on limited estimation techniques. To collect local data, we have installed ten water level loggers throughout the marsh creeks and drainage ditches in and around Hog Hammock to provide more detailed data for flood risk assessments under future sea-level rise (Figure 1B). We will use the revised flood risk data in decisions to expand the agricultural project in the community, and already we have begun identifying and planting sites at higher elevations through agreements with other state institutions including the University of Georgia Marine Institute. We are also working with SICARS and state collaborators to facilitate conversations with landscape architects, engineers, and hydrologists regarding ways to reduce flood risk associated with rising seas and storm surges while attuned to the racial history of the community. Flood risk mitigation, then, has short- and long-term implications for resisting land dispossession in its potential to affect the agricultural project as well as property holdings.

Conclusion

350 We see the praxis that is central to abolition ecology as life-affirming through its commitment to
351 dismantling racial regimes of ownership beyond property, including such regimes' influence on
352 the agricultural commons as well as atmospheric commons. And while we articulated double
353 dispossession of land due to heirs' property losses and inundation from rising seas, there are
354 historical-geographical connections that run much deeper and broader. We recognize the ways
355 dispossession that occurred through chattel slavery now underpins and allows for dispossession
356 through climate change under racial capitalism. In recognizing the connections between racial
357 capitalism, climate justice, and climate change, Gonzalez argues, "a race-conscious decolonial
358 narrative of climate justice that examines the cradle-to-grave [fossil fuel extraction-to-climate
359 change] impacts of carbon capitalism has the potential to unite diverse and powerful social
360 movements that reject militarism, extractivism, economic inequality and racism" (2021, 22). We
361 believe abolition ecology, as a theoretically engaged praxis, is not only a way to recognize such
362 intersections, but to mobilize abolitionist principles for change for places such as Sapelo Island.

363 The future is not foregone despite what looks like and feels like efforts to enact cultural genocide
364 of Gullah/Geechee people on Sapelo Island. Displacement narratives constructed around heirs'
365 property losses and sea water inundation suggest a hopeless future for Sapelo's Geechee people.
366 Yet, communities of color have been abolishing narratives of loss for decades through, for
367 example, Indigenous futures and Black futures scholarship on counternarratives. Regarding land
368 loss due to sea-level rise in a global context, the Pacific Climate Warriors movement has united
369 under the counternarrative statement of "fighting, not drowning" (Fair 2020), which aligns with
370 Black Geographies arguments of counternarratives to despair that are "predicated on human life"
371 (see McKittrick 2013; Gilmore 2017). Such counternarratives espouse the hope and life present
372 in imagining alternative futures written outside of the global climate narrative of doom and

gloom. And, on Sapelo, the right to exist in a Black geographic space un-inundated. Coastal/cultural erosion narratives may be said to act as spectacles of loss, and in many ways as the precarious “wishful sinking” narratives used to engender doom in order to inspire climate action, but they do so through an “eco-colonial gaze” (Farbotko 2010). However, Saltwater Geechee people’s resistance pierces through this gaze as it has for centuries. Or, as Geechee co-author M.B. put it in our opening quote, “we’re still here.”

Acknowledgements

We thank the special issue editor, Dr. Kendra Strauss, and three anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback. We also thank Jennifer Cassidento for shepherding us through the submission and revision process. Many thanks to Jazz Watts and Ron Johnson of the Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society for their many conversations that informed this work, as well as employees of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, especially Doug Samson and Fred Hay. We thank the University of Georgia Marine Institute for its support of this project through access to its facilities. This is contribution number 2,000 from the University of Georgia Marine Institute. Finally, we thank two graduate research assistants, Dani Aiello and Caroline Keegan, for their efforts digging through the virtual property archives for us.

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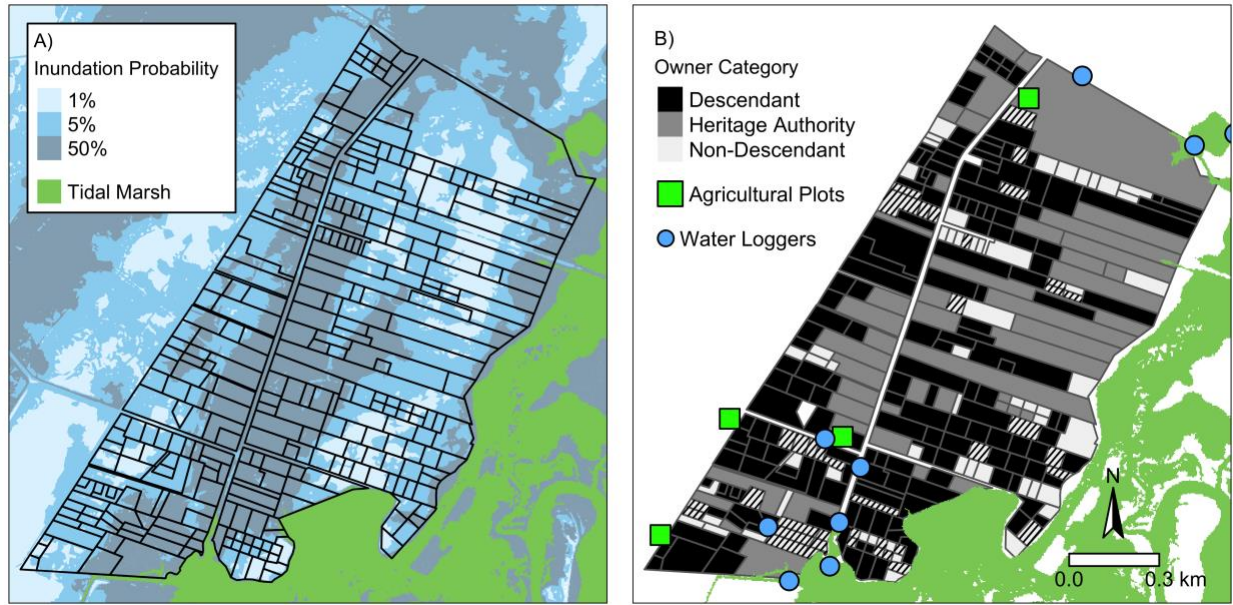


Figure 1. Community of Hog Hammock’s (A) year 2100 sea-level rise inundation probabilities (see Kopp et al. 2014) and (B) property owner categories, agricultural plots, and water level logger sites. Parcel data from McIntosh County tax assessor’s office. Owner groups based on participatory mapping with residents. Companies (hashed parcels) identified using McIntosh County tax assessor data. Descendant means direct descendant of formerly enslaved islander versus non-descendants. See text for Heritage Authority.

ⁱ Geechee people are part of the Gullah/Geechee cultural group of African Americans whose population extends along the coast from Florida to North Carolina.

ⁱⁱ The 1983 Sapelo Island Heritage Authority Act charges the State of Georgia to preserve Hog Hammock “for the benefit of present and future generations” in recognition that “the best and most important use of this area of Greater Sapelo Island is for said community to remain, as it currently exists, a historic community, occupied by the direct descendants of the slaves of Thomas Spalding” (GGA 2010).

ⁱⁱⁱ We used owner descriptors that included phrases such as “et al,” “care of,” or “est” for estate. Our estimate of heirs’ property is conservative. A 1982 estimate shows more properties with undivided interest.