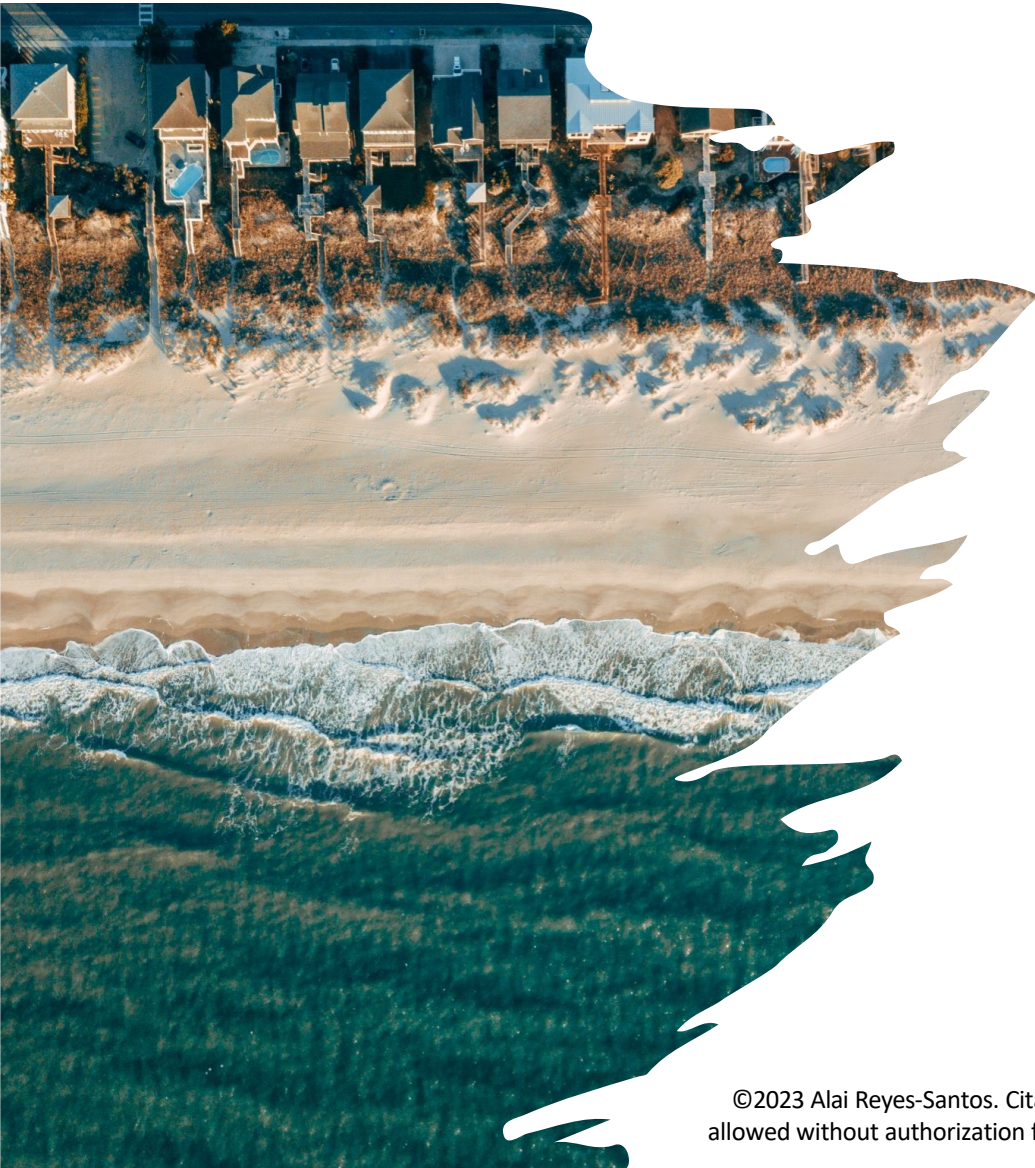


Cimarrona Ways

A Black-Indigenous Compass for Creativity and Life
By Alai Reyes-Santos

©2023 Alai Reyes-Santos. Citations allowed. No derivatives
allowed without authorization from author. alai@uoregon.edu



Inspired by my cimarrona kin, Nadia Ellis, Ana-Maurine Lara, Dayo Mitchell, Michelle Stuckey, Cheyenne Holliday, and so many more with whom solidarity has been built far away from home in the U.S. Pacific coast

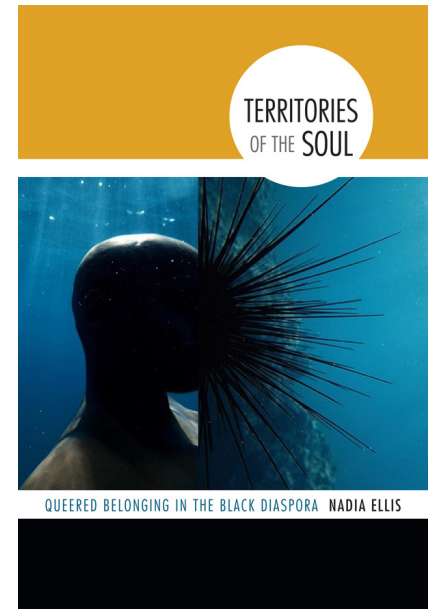
©2023 Alai Reyes-Santos. Citation allowed. No derivatives allowed without authorization from author. alai@uoregon.edu

Cimarrona Ways: A Compass

For those trying to create and sustain life in institutions where our bodies and quests for justice were not meant to exist in the first place.

©2023 Alai Reyes-Santos. Citation allowed. No derivatives allowed without authorization from author. alai@uoregon.edu





©2023 Alai Reyes-Santos. Citation allowed. No derivatives allowed without authorization from author. alai@uoregon.edu

The Story: as told by Alaí, part 2

Our cimarronaje is adaptation, is survival, is creativity that taps into our forbidden desires for justice and solidarity; is knowing to always tap into our ancestral histories as power; is knowing when to engage power structures and negotiate with them, and when not to; is knowing when to harness our kin's strengths in horizontal solidarity; is knowing when the timing is right or not; is knowing who can help or not; is knowing when to scale up or scale back, and still create; is knowing how to sustain joy in struggle.

Cimarronaje, at the end of the day, is about sustaining life: our lives and the lives of all beings in a good way. As our ancestors have taught us for generations, cimarronaje can be mobilized vis á vis institutional powers of all sorts. It emerges from our choices to directly or indirectly engage or not the colony/encomienda/hacienda/plantation, and their legacies in institutions today. It emerges from our choices to keep living and finding joy in the world with one another in the face of all that must be built anew.

The Story: as told by Alai, part 3

In 2010 I met another Caribbean kin, Ana-Maurine Lara. Hailing from the island of Ayti/Quisqueya, Ana brought another dimension to my understanding of cimarronaje. For the past thirteen years, we have been travelling across communities throughout the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Borikén that sustain our Indigenous, Black, and AfroIndigenous knowledge systems and ways of being, prayers, healing, plant and food practices, a capacity to adapt constantly to new conditions and technologies, and a deep commitment to collective solidarity and joy. I have learned from our Caribbean kin how to let power think that you are extinct or disempowered, while still sustaining your own truth, values, and knowledge.



©2023 Alai Reyes Santos. Citation allowed. No derivatives allowed without authorization from author. alai@uoregon.edu

Following cimarrona ways . . .

That is what cimarronaje requires at times; to not be legible to everyone in our survival; to appear to be defeated when what truly matters is still in existence and celebrated in community. Maybe what truly matters to you does not matter to institutional power. And that is okay. What is essential is for us to remember what matters to us. What is essential is to let cimarrona ways be a compass that guides what we create in the world for generations to come. What is essential is to let our sense of self-worth emerge from our deep, healing, engagement with ancestral power and histories; and not let our sense of self-worth be determined by institutions conceptualized from within the colony/encomienda/hacienda/plantation.

We are worthy to live because we are.

Cont.
Following
cimarrona
ways . . .

The justice and solidarity we create with all beings is possible every time we greet a tree, every time we sit to listen to someone; every time we offer a glass of guava juice to a neighbor; whether institutional power sees it or not.

All that matters is sustaining life on Earth and in the ancestors' realm.

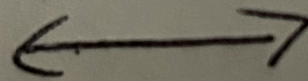
We are worthy to live because we are.

The Story: as told by Alaí, part 5

Ana and I have been theorizing cimarronaje with ourselves and others as we document our experiences with fellow AfroIndigenous healers and ceremonialists in www.healers.uoregon.edu and a series of publications, including one titled “Boricuir Ecologies” (forthcoming in Centro Journal, Spring 2023). We have been sitting with the lessons left for us by the maniel/palenque/quilombo as spaces of cimarronaje where Black and Indigenous ancestral communities created life with one another in the face of shared experiences of slavery and colonization.

Here I share a few excerpts from “Boricuir Ecologies” to ground my further discussion of what I see as a series of considerations deploying cimarrona ways as a compass for survival and creativity require as we face institutions such as higher education.

colonia
hacienda
plantación



maniel
palenque
quilombo

All that
matters is
life,
sustaining
our existence
as kin, with
one another

Our continued existence is rooted in stories about Afro-Indigenous mutual support, love, and kinship in the maniel or palenque.

(In Lara, Reyes-Santos, González Inaru, Cabán Lezcano, Scott and Ortíz, “Boricuir Ecologies,” *Centro*, Forthcoming, Spring 2023)

All that
matters is
kinship to
create
beyond
what seems
possible

To claim Afro-Indigeneity is to identify with cimarronaje, maroonage, *la fuga cimarrona*, (Rolón-Collazo, *En fuga*, Emergente, 2021), the palenque or the maniel (Lara, *Black Sovereignty*, Rutgers 2020); is to embrace transcolonial kinship between Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples that seek “to transform the exploitative and dehumanizing social relations that characterized the European invasion of the Americas, and Eurocentric understandings of history, knowledge, power, citizenship, and humanity (Reyes-Santos 2015, 12);” is to live in an “afuera ontológico” [an ontological outside] that allows to live and imagine worlds that are deemed unimaginable: “la afirmación de un mundo distinto al que nos aflige [the affirmation of a world different from that which wounds us] (Lebrón Ortíz 2021, 165); “que se fuga del mundo euromoderno y sus lógicas como resistencia a la colonialidad del ser” [that escapes the euro-modern world and its logics as a resistance to the coloniality of being] (Lebrón Ortíz 2021, 183).

(In Lara, Reyes-Santos, González Inaru, Cabán Lezcano, Scott and Ortíz, “Boricuir Ecologies,” *Centro Journal*, Forthcoming, Spring 2023)

Cimarrona ways
require tapping
into ancestral
practices, while
adapting to
new conditions

“Los cimarrones establecieron comunidades y las organizaron según las epistemologías y antologías ancestrales, aunque adaptadas a las circunstancias materiales que se les impusieron”

[Maroons established communities and organized them according to ancestral epistemologies and anthologies, although adapted to the material circumstances imposed on them]

(Lebrón Ortíz, *Filosofía del Cimarronaje*, Editorial Emergente, 2021, 183).

(In Lara, Reyes-Santos, González Inaru, Cabán Lezcano, Scott and Ortíz, “Boricuir Ecologies,” *Centro*, Forthcoming, Spring 2023)

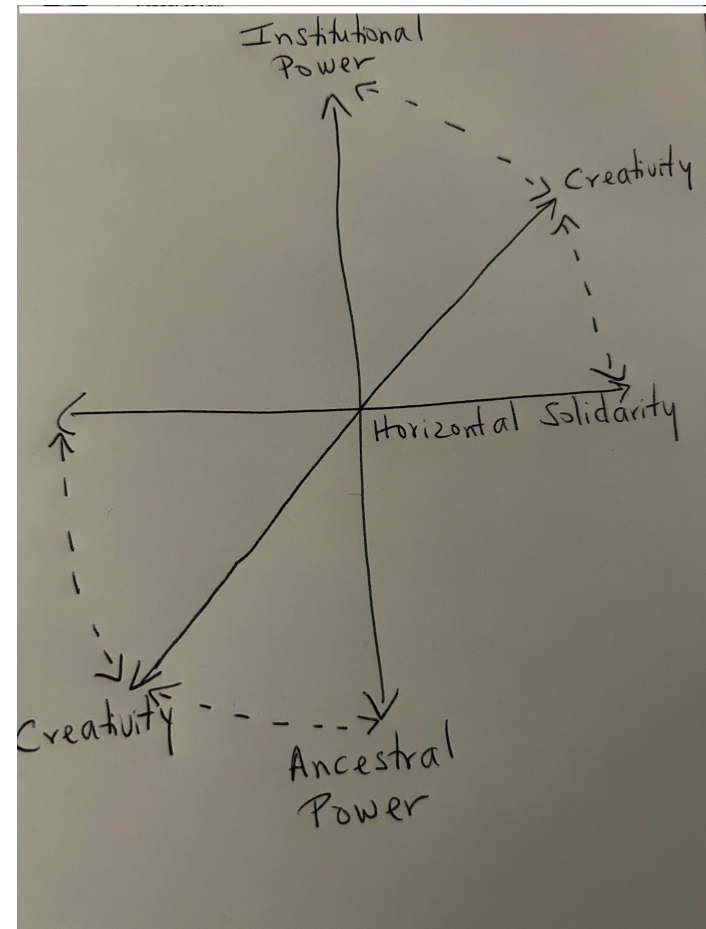
Cimarrona ways
require
forbidden
desires,
realities that at
times must stay
unfixed,
undecipherable

Lissette Rolón-Collazo invites us to embrace “la fuga como acción que resiste ontologías y epistemologías de certidumbre, como homenaje a la fuga cimarrona y a las diásporas en constante fluir, como devenir territorial, de los cuerpos, de los sexos y de los deseos furtivos”

[fugitivity as an action that resists ontologies and epistemologies of certainty, as a tribute to the fugitive maroon and to the diasporas in constant flow, as a process of becoming territorially, of the bodies, of the sexes and of furtive desires](31).

(In Lara, Reyes-Santos, González Inaru, Cabán Lezcano, Scott and Ortíz, “Boricuir Ecologies,” *Centro*, Forthcoming, Spring 2023)

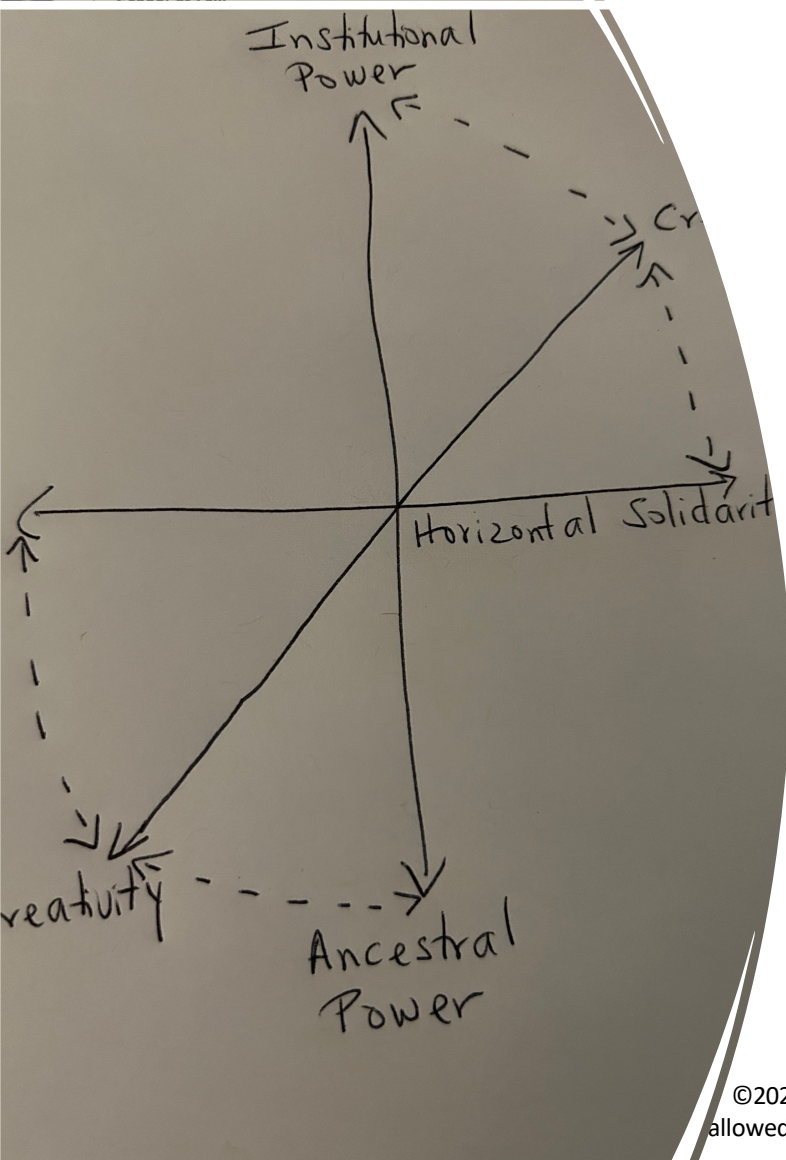
Cimarrona Ways, A Compass



©2023 Alai Reyes-Santos. Citation allowed. No derivatives allowed without authorization from author. alai@uoregon.edu

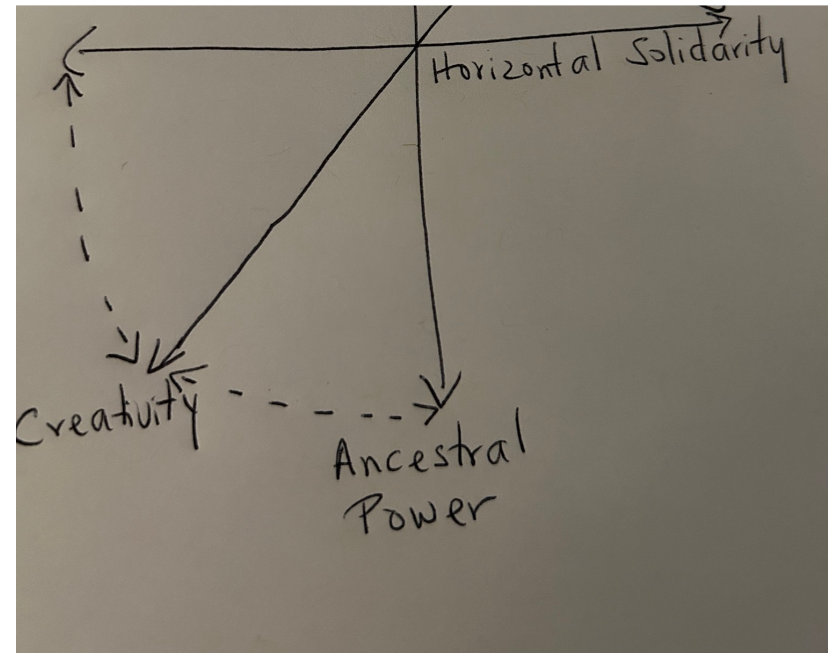
Consideration #1: All doors can be open at once

- We can keep multiple doors, multiple paths of action, open at once
- We can be simultaneously connecting with ancestral knowledge as a source of power, with our kin through webs of horizontal solidarity, and/or those representing and embedded in institutional power structures
- The question is: What is our capacity to go through multiple doors at once? Or do we need to concentrate our energy on one or two paths, to be prepared for the third one? Or maybe what we create only needs one path of action that reverberates on the rest in due time?



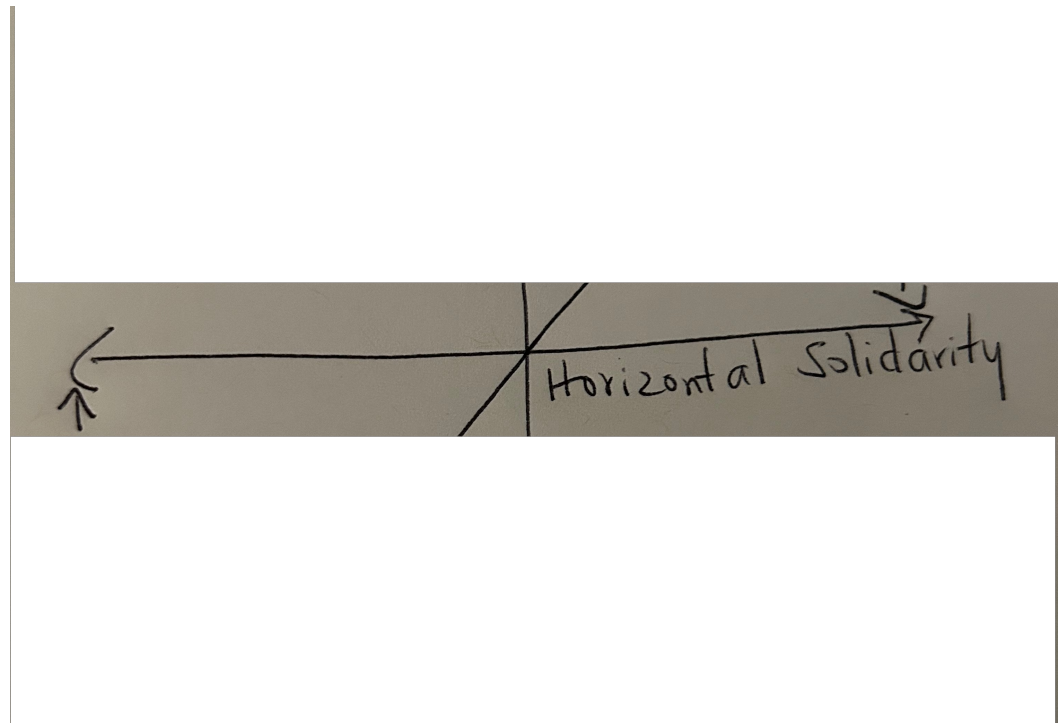
Consideration #1a: Ancestral power is the root

- Grounding on ancestral knowledge as power is always essential; and sometimes it fosters the creative change and solidarity we seek on its own
- Requires going inside, what we learned from those here before us
- Requires going outside, learning from those who were here before us about which path(s) may be the most strategic to pursue at a given time



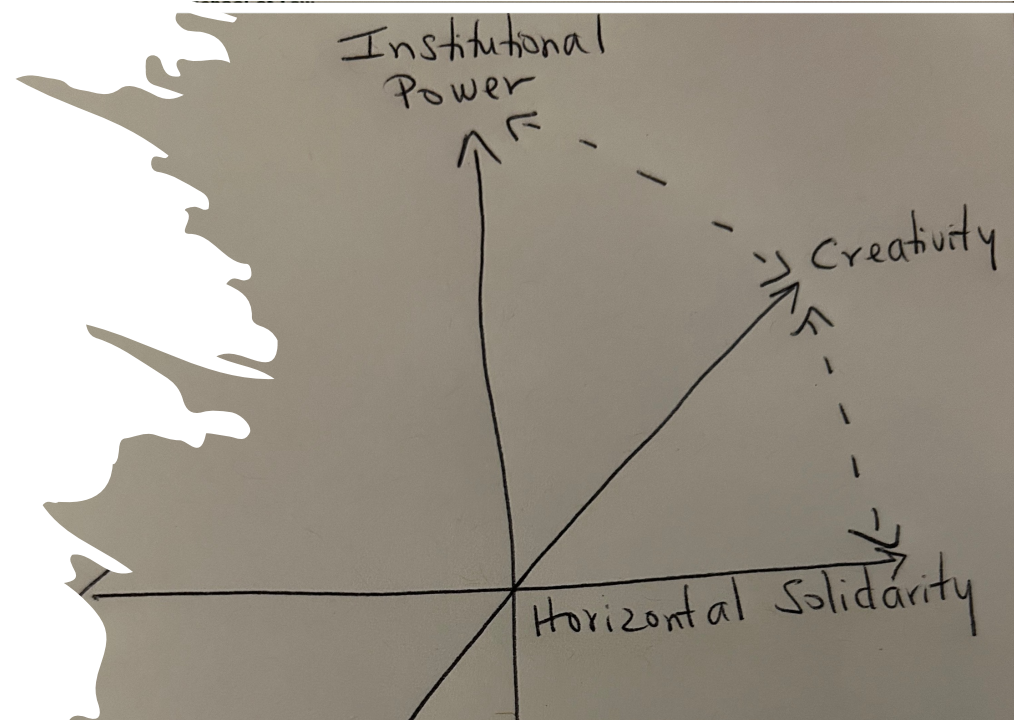
Consideration #1b: Horizontal solidarity is power

- There is power in numbers and in building kinship across difference
- It is ideally grounded on ancestral power
- Oftentimes it fosters the creativity and solidarity we seek on its own; without having to confront institutional power directly
- It is usually essential to create at the level of institutional power and to implement institutional transformation in an effective, equitable, and just manner



Consideration #1c: Institutions can be spaces of creativity

- Rarely, but it may happen, creative change happens at the top of power structures without demands grounded in ancestral power and horizontal solidarity; usually such change is short lived or not far reaching
- We can create vis a vis institutional power by confronting it directly through webs of horizontal solidarity; by creating through horizontal kin relations in spite of institutional obstacles; by grounding ourselves ancestrally in everyday practices that sustain ours and all lives; or combinations of all of the above



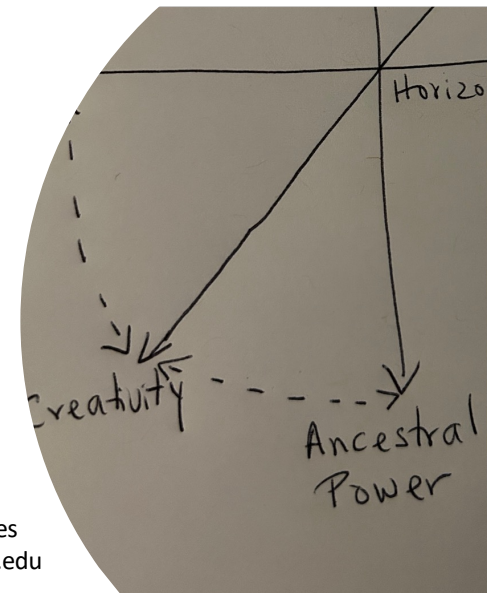
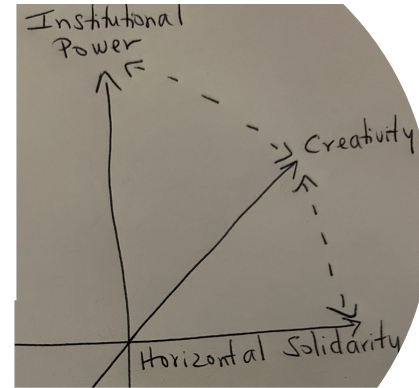
Consideration #2: Dream big and stay pragmatic

- Are the resources needed to foster creativity for the sake of justice easily available? Or do we need to seek them?
 - People
 - Skill sets
 - Commitment
 - Material resources (money or in-kind)
 - Capacity in terms of time
 - Capacity in terms of emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy communities



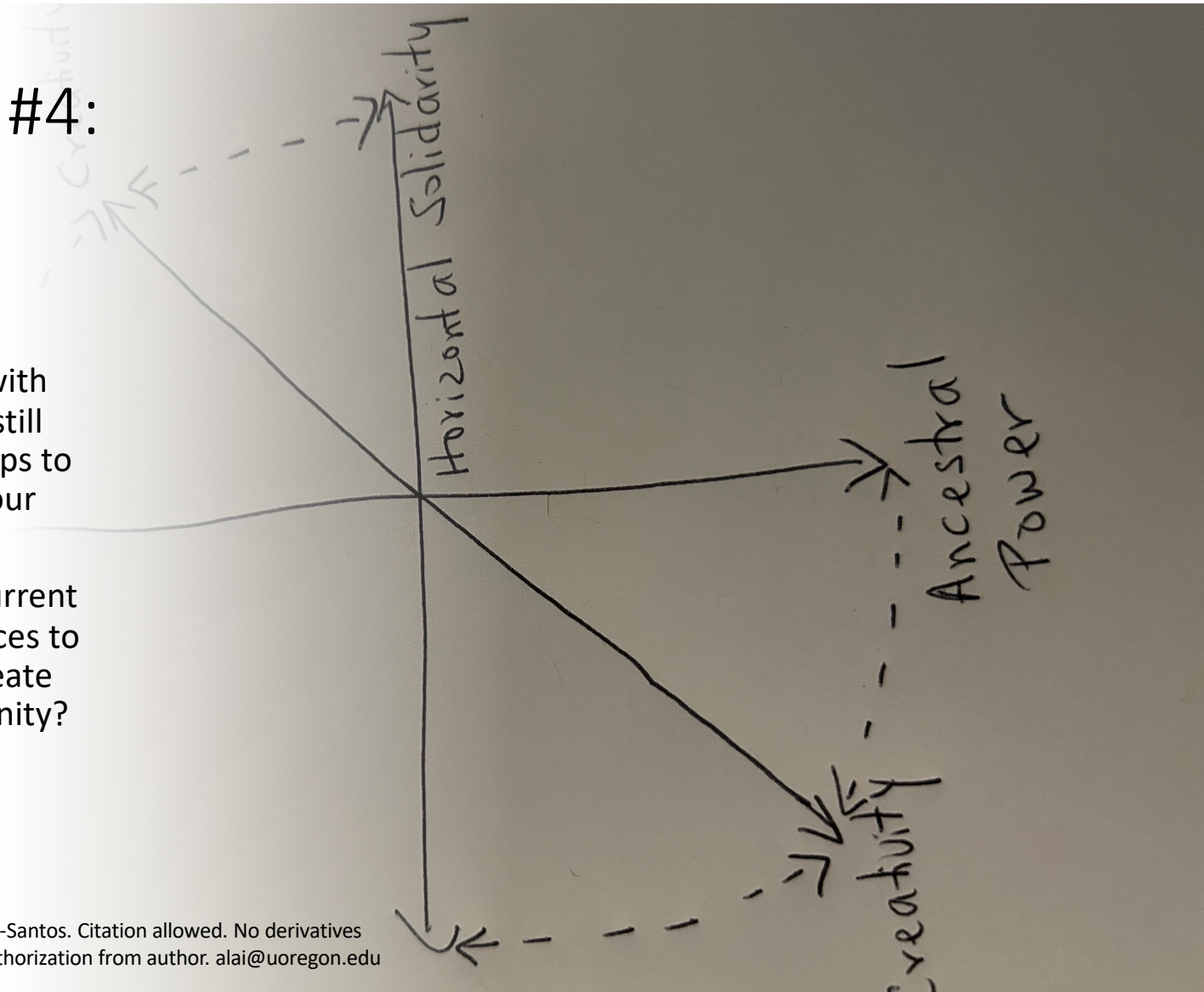
Consideration #3: Move with changing time

- What kind of pace do these resources need?
- Is the time right to engage institutional power?
Have we spent the essential time grounding on ancestral power and nourishing horizontal solidarities?
- Do we need to slow down time?
- Do we need to accelerate time?
- Can we sustain moving slower or faster?
- Do we need to stop time?
- If timing is not right, can we scale back and scale up when the timing enables us to more effectively mobilize community capacity and resources to create the change we seek?



Consideration #4: Adapt for the sake of life

- If resources do not align with sustainable time, can we still create something that helps to sustain and create life in our communities?
- Can we pivot, adapt, to current and emerging circumstances to sustain our capacity to create and sustain life in community?





Consideration #5: Life above all things

- In this world and the worlds beyond it
- All decisions sustaining life on earth, humans and beyond human beings, in kinship with one another
- All decisions honoring our lives and the lives of those gone before us: forging justice they sought or justice they could not imagine was possible



©2023 Alai Reyes-Santos. Citation allowed. No derivatives allowed without authorization from author. alai@uoregon.edu

Thank you

To all those who keep creating with me . . .

And with whom I share memories in all the photos included here:

Nadia Ellis and Ana-Maurine Lara

Environmental Justice students at UO Law School: Oprah, Aimee, Lauren, Bubba, Lesley, Natalie, and Chloe

Oregon Water Futures members: Lynny Brown, Cheyenne Holliday, Roselyn Poton, Michelle Smith, and Adell Amos

Family and friends in Puerto Rico: Zorymar, titi Chiquita, Mama Nydia

ELAW Fellows: Paolo, Felipe, Nadia, and Cari