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**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

Linguistic Anthropology

# Just chronotopes: Embodiment, social justice, and "the somatopic imagination"

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**Abstract**

Drawing on data collected in a global, collaborative ethnography called *The Living Justice Project* (LJP), this paper investigates how formulations of social justice situate speakers' bodies in relation to one another as well as in relation to dominant interpretations of the past, felt experiences in the present, and visions for the (possible) future. It specifically investigates the ways in which body-centered or *somatopic* formulations of social justice afford a creative and often provocative reconfiguration of spatiotemporal scales of difference at the heart of contemporary social justice discourse. Analyses demonstrate how, within a conversation centering the meaning of social justice in relation to embodiment, LJP collaborators (1) rescaled equality as an emergent relational practice enacted within and across bodies in space and time; (2) reconfigured recognition as a continuous and emergent as well as relationally, spatially, and temporally engaged process that disturbs normative distinctions between Self and Other as well as between the past, present, and future; and (3) remapped movement by situating liberation in the possible present as well as the possible future. The analysis responds to calls from interdisciplinary scholars advocating for more diverse and expansive definitions of social justice. It also contributes to the deepening and expansion of chronotope theory in linguistic anthropology and embodiment theory in anthropology generally.

**KEYWORDS**

chronotopes, embodiment, equality, recognition, social action, social justice

**Tiivistelmä**

*Living Justice Project* (LJP) -niminen globaalissa yhteistyössä toteutettu artikkelimme tutkii, miten sosiaalinen oikeudenmukaisuus asemoivat puhujien kehot suhteessa toisiinsa sekä suhteessa menneisyyden vallitseviin tulkintoihin, nykyhetken koettuihin kokemuksiin ja tulevaisuuden (mahdollisiin) visioihin. Etnografiaan pohjautuva tutkimuksemme tarkastelee erityisesti niitä tapoja, joilla kehokeskeiset eli "somatopic" sosiaalisen oikeudenmukaisuuden muotoilut mahdollistavat luovan ja usein provokatiivisen uudelleenmäärittelyn tilallisille ja ajallisille eron asteikkoja, jotka ovat nykyaikaisen sosiaalisen oikeudenmukaisuuden diskurssin ytimessä. Analyysimme osoittaa, että keholliseen kokemukseen liittyvässä sosiaalisen oikeudenmukaisuuden merkitystä käsittelevässä keskustelussa LJP-yhteistyökumppanit (1) skaalasivat uudelleen tasa-arvon ilanteisena relationaalisena käytäntönä, joka toteutuu kehojen sisällä ja välillä tilassa ja ajassa; (2) määrittelivät uudelleen "recognition" jatkuvana ja kehkeytyvänä sekä relationaalisesti, tilallisesti ja ajallisesti rakentuvana prosessina, joka häiritsee normatiivisia erotteluja Itsen ja Toisen, sekä menneisyyden, nykyisyyden ja tulevaisuuden välillä; ja (3) kartoittivat uudelleen liikkeen sijoittamalla vapautumisen mahdolliseen nykyhetkeen sekä mahdolliseen tulevaisuuteen. Tutkimus vastaa viimeaikaisiin keskusteluun, joissa on tuotu esiin tarve monipuolisemmille ja laajemmille sosiaalisen oikeudenmukaisuuden määritelmille. Se myös edistää kronotopiateorian syventämistä ja laajentamista lingvistisessä antropologiassa ja kehollisuusteoriaa antropologiassa yleisesti.

In somatopic narratives, the body is the site that makes meaning and directs the plot. For what happens to the bodies in a somatopic text determines the plot.

Ramona Fernandez

What does embodiment have to do with social justice? What might a body-centered or *somatopic* narrative of social justice consist of, and how might it shift the way we understand the realm of "the social" or the concept of "justice"? To address these questions, this paper draws on Ramona Fernandez's notion of "the somatope" (lit. body-place-time) (Fernandez, 2015) to examine conversations about the meaning of social justice that took shape in the context of a global, collaborative ethnography called the Living Justice Project (LJP) (Pritzker & Living Justice Collaborators, in press).[1] This project, which was conducted over the course of a year 2022, was centered around the question of what it looks, feels, and sounds like to live (toward) justice in everyday life. It adopted a mixed-methods approach and involved the

collaboration of 54 diverse individuals—located across 18 US states, Canada, Germany, Ireland, and England—who had experience studying, teaching, or otherwise contributing to the field of practice that I call, in this paper, *embodied justice*.

Contemporary embodied justice, as described further below, is an interdisciplinary field with roots in contemplative traditions, movement practices, Indigenous relational ontologies, and Black feminist theories (see, e.g., Hicks Peterson & Khouri, 2024; Page & Woodland, 2023). Fueled by questions such as what it means to inhabit a body; what it means to be in relation to other human and non-human bodies; and what it means to belong to a broader "body politic," contemporary embodied justice also involves a critical interrogation of the ways in which social justice—often imagined as being focused "outward" on fighting injustice in the abstract realm of "the social"—benefits from the incorporation of the kinds of "inwardly focused" healing and embodiment practices such as meditation, yoga, ecstatic dance, and somatic psychotherapy. Embodied justice, I suggest, thus offers a particular kind of "ethical affordance" (Keane, 2014) by inviting participants to interrogate how they situate themselves in relation to the dominant *scales of contrast* (Carr & Lempert, 2016) and *chronotopes* (Bakhtin, 1981) through which social justice is normatively imagined.

The concept of the chronotope, was originally developed by Bakhtin (1981) to describe how characters in novels are situated in space and time. Chronotopes such as "the road" or "the parlor" *emplace* characters and provide structure for advancing the plot. As anthropologists have further demonstrated, culturally salient chronotopes—such as "family" or "nation" (Pritzker, 2023, 2024)—similarly afford the situated enactment of specific relational roles and the development of the cultural "plot," so to speak (Agha, 2007; Lempert & Perrino, 2007; Nakassis, 2016; Pritzker & Hu, 2022). Shared chronotopes, this work has demonstrated, mobilize people toward "cohesive value projects and group-centric aspirational trajectories" (Agha, 2015, 404). In social justice, for example, abstract moral ideals like equality or recognition serve as chronotopic frameworks or "anchors" that "ground people in a shared sense of history, compassion and purpose" (Hayes & Kaba, 2023, 36). Research focused on the identification and analysis of chronotopes in social justice, however, has also demonstrated that the core chronotopes informing social justice are often grounded in a socio-spatial mapping of society as a fractal and recursive landscape characterized by "centers of power" in relation to neglected and/or oppressed "peripheries" (D'Arcangelis, 2022; Landau, 2021; Smith, 2023). Such research has likewise shown that ideas about social justice often operate within and reproduce a "colonial chronopolitics" (Borba et al., 2022; see also Klinke, 2012) that associates people and institutions at the center of society with the present and future while people positioned on the margins are perpetually linked to the past and/or the aspirational present (Rosa, 2019). It has consistently shown, finally, that "progress" in social justice is often temporally cast as a linear progression from a desperate present toward an (im)possible future (Atchinson, 2015; Comer, 2023; Silva E Silva, 2022).

Many LJP collaborators, importantly, similarly oriented to the ideals of equality, recognition, and progress. As demonstrated in the following analyses, however, their situated efforts often worked to rescale, re-orient, and re-map such ideals in body-centered or *somatopic* narratives explicitly centered the phenomenological and relational body. As Fernandez notes in the epigraph cited above, somatopic narratives place the body at the center of the story. "What happens to bodies determines the plot" Fernandez writes (2015, 1124), thus opening space for creative investigations of the spatiotemporal limits of the historically situated body (see also Hamilton, 2020). Somatopic formulations of social justice, I suggest, similarly afford a reconfiguration of the chronotopic scales of difference (e.g., inside/outside, self/other, self/world, past/present/future) at the heart of contemporary social justice discourse.

The following analysis, accordingly, focuses on excerpts from conversations in which LJP collaborators responded to a prompt asking them to describe their understanding of social justice in relation to embodiment and healing. I therefore approach these excerpts

not as fixed definitions but as temporally and relationally situated enactments of *scalar intimacy* within which LJP collaborators continually oriented themselves in space and time as well as in relation to the dominant ideologies, institutions, and relational structures in social justice (Pritzker & Perrino, 2020). In initiating their responses, for example, collaborators often began by foregrounding the difficulty of "defining" social justice in succinct terms. They also frequently opened by orienting their reflections vis-a-vis specific ideals commonly associated with social justice as defined by both large, international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and grassroots activists throughout the contemporary global west (Gemignani et al., 2023; Levin, 2020; Moody-Adams, 2022; Shufutinsky et al., 2022; UN, 2006). Yet others began by scaling themselves and their forthcoming definition in relation to the complex indexical significance of the term "social justice" for various interest groups in contemporary society. Many collaborators, here, also cited and expanded perspectives offered by leading embodied justice scholars. In a number of ways, LJP collaborators thus positioned themselves and their responses to the prompt vis-a-vis our emergent conversation as well as their attunement to and position within multiple complex historical and relational "fields" (Fikes, 2021). As they did so, I argue in this paper, LJP collaborators frequently challenged, unsettled, and expanded many of the core chronotopes informing the ways in which both "justice" and "the social" are spatiotemporally imagined in dominant social justice discourse.

My discussion is further grounded in a theoretical framework that understands chronotopes as spatiotemporal, moral, relational frameworks that are often dominant but are never entirely fixed (Wirtz, 2016). Chronotopes are regularly subject, for example, to the kinds of "re-chronotopizations" where "existing chronotopes are 'updated' or changed" (Karimzad, 2020, 294; Karimzad & Catedral, 2021). As collaborators worked to craft temporary, tentative definitions of social justice in relation to the body, in other words, they frequently enacted both scalar intimacy and s*calar inquiry* by interrogating and at least tentatively re-positioning oneself in relation to hegemonic ideologies and culturally salient chronotopes (Pritzker, 2023, 2024). Building on Gal and Irvine's understanding of *ideological work* as "the active making of social life" (2019, 14), this paper investigates how narrative (re)mappings emerged as a form of "chronotopic work" in which collaborators reformulated social justice in somatopic terms that rescaled dominant chronotopes while also contributing to a reformulation of both social justice and healing-centered embodiment work.

## CHRONOTOPES, EMBODIMENT, AND THE "SOMATOPIC IMAGINATION"

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) coined the term "chronotope" to describe the organizing principle driving the plot by situating characters in space and time. Though designed as a literary intervention, the concept of the chronotope has also been incredibly generative in anthropological and sociolinguistic research focused on the emergence of culture in interaction (see, e.g., Agha, 2007; Dick, 2010; Divita, 2019; Lempert & Perrino, 2007; Wirtz, 2016; Woolard, 2013). Asif Agha, for example, examines the multiple ways that "cultural chronotopes" or shared, popular, and/or hegemonic "depictions of place-time-and-personhood" orient human interaction in all types of settings (Agha, 2007, 320). Chronotopes, in this sense, can be described as "frameworks that actively construe and shape the temporal and spatial unfolding of social life, making certain kinds of experiences of time, space, and…personhood possible" (Nakassis, 2016, 334). Grounded in binary, recursive scales of contrast such as order/chaos, public/private, us/them, and so on (Agha, 2007; Divita, 2019; Gal, 2002; Lempert & Perrino, 2007; Perrino, 2007; Pritzker, 2023, 2024), chronotopes have also been engaged as phenomenological *orienting devices* that precede and shape bodies as well as

their experience in and of space and time (see, e.g., Ahmed, 2007; Pritzker & Perrino, 2020; Wirtz, 2016).

The case could thus easily be made that chronotopes are inherently embodied. Indeed, as Fernandez (2015) observes, Bakhtin's original formulation of the concept involves a distinctly bodied perspective on the multiple ways in which chronotopes allow abstract ideas to "take on flesh and blood" as they are embodied by human forms and in human activities (1981, 250–2). Fernandez nevertheless argues that the notion of "the somatope" is necessary to engage the contemporary genre of novels, films, and television shows in which bodies constitute "the fulcrum of the narrative" (2015, 1124). Pointing to medical and forensic dramas (e.g., *House, Bones*), stories revolving around vampires and other supernatural bodies (e.g., *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *True Blood*); and science fiction narratives centered around supernatural or cyborg bodies (e.g., *Avatar*, *Terminator*, *Wild Seed*), Fernandez examines how "somatopic narratives" afford the creative interrogation of the body as a space–time with "multiple, even contradictory meanings" (2015, 1124). Somatopic texts here serve as affordances for (re)theorizing dominant chronotopes of race, gender, and biology as well as relationality (Fernandez, 2015; see also Glynn, 2019; Hamilton, 2020). By putting the body at the center of the narrative, in other words, somatopic texts have the capacity to invite unbounded (or differently bounded) investigations of hegemonic cultural chronotopes.

## SOCIAL JUSTICE CHRONOTOPES

The meaning of "social justice" is broadly contested (Levin, 2020). Nevertheless, established definitions often orient to three overlapping ideals, including *equality*, *recognition*, and *progress* (Gemignani et al., 2023; Levin, 2020; Shufutinsky et al., 2022). Equality, for instance—along with related concepts like *access*, *inclusion*, *fairness*, and *rights*—sits at the heart of most extant definitions of social justice. Indeed, as Levin (2020, 191) observes, equality is often so deeply associated with the core meaning of social justice that it "is sometimes used as a synonym" for social justice. This raises further questions about when, where, and how equality is usually understood and how it is embedded within spatial and temporal mappings of "the social." Here, scholarship has repeatedly shown that discourses of equality often hinge upon chronotopes of in- and exclusion that "locate" people in relation to their proximity to or distance from centers of power (Landau, 2021; Rosa, 2019). Such chronotopic frames are both reflective and generative of a lived spatiotemporal landscape of identity in which people are positioned in relation to one another as well as various rights, opportunities, and conditions based on their real and/or perceived "social location" (Cerulo & Duane, 2021, 1346; see also Kumar & Lalmohan, 2020). While arguably pointing to real divides in the social landscape, this narrative also frequently functions to chronotopically bind practitioners of social justice within a relational landscape in which social locations—and the distances between them—become instilled as inherent, enduring forms of difference and value.

The value of *recognition*—and its entailed value of *responsibility*—"promotes both universal respect for shared humanity and esteem for cultural distinctiveness" (Fraser, 2000, 107), and is often central in normative definitions of social justice. Recognition, here, is often seen as a response to the kind of "passive injustice" described by Shklar (1990), demanding an active, engaged form of witnessing as well as a civic sense of *responsibility* to respond, when one notices injustice, with both empathy and social action. Such discourses, however, have also been critiqued for instantiating what Fraser calls a *politics of recognition* in which identities are fixed and enduring (2000, 107). Recognition, in other words, contributes to an emergent form of *rhematization* wherein bodies (as indexes) are cast as particular icons or "kinds" of racialized, gendered, and classed bodies and linked to iconic representations of particular ideological and geographic realms (Gal & Irvine, 2019). Recognition, in this sense,

is often chronotopically imagined as consisting of a "gaze shift" or "turning toward" that privileges the perspective of citizens positioned at the "center" who are then responsible to "see" and "hear" the injustices disproportionately affecting those on "the periphery" or "margins." In this sense, discourses of recognition and responsibility further perpetuate the mapping of society as a landscape of differences and distances.

The notion of *progress*, finally, animates existing definitions of social justice, formulating it as a future-oriented goal and orienting to hope a kind of forward-facing "Not-Yet Consciousness" (Bloch, 1986, 3). This anticipatory mode, however, frequently depends on configuring the present as miserable and unjust (Atchinson, 2015, 406), making justice "a stifling ideal, a horizon that is always in view, distant and receding" (Montgomery & Bergman, 2017, 183). As such, chronotopes of progress tend to instantiate what Comer describes as "an overly linear, individuated mode of anticipation: a metadiscursive limiting of hope to the just-around-the-corner" (2023, 20; see also Landau, 2021). Such an anticipatory mode, importantly, chronotopically formulates marginalized people as an "emergent population of future significance" (Rosa, 2019, 107–8). As a result, the chronotope of progress actually functions to *restrict* motion within the confines of a "colonial chronopolitics" (Klinke, 2012; Smith, 2023) in which people and institutions at the "center" of society are associated with the present and/or future, while people positioned on the margins are perpetually linked to the past and/or the aspirational present (Borba et al., 2022; Rosa, 2019; see also Klinke, 2012). Chronotopes of progress, here, also tend to dwell in an imagined temporal gap between the unjust present and a just (im)possible future.

Dominant chronotopes governing discourse in social justice are arguably always grounded in the idea of bodies (e.g., healthy bodies, productive bodies, excluded bodies). They also, importantly, work to orient bodies in specific forms of relationality and practice. As discussed above, however, chronotopes of equality, recognition, and progress often perpetuate colonial distinctions (such as center/periphery and past/present) that reduce particular bodies to abstract ideas about their real or perceived ability to enact agency (Moody-Adams, 2022); their real or perceived "identity" (Fraser, 2000); or their real or perceived threat to "the body politic" (Valverde, 2015). It is therefore safe to say—at least generally—that the chronotopic frameworks governing discourse in social justice are not driven *by* the body. They are not, in other words, somatopic narratives. As I discuss below, however, within the field of embodied justice, this is not necessarily the case.

## EMBODIMENT + JUSTICE

The complex, interdisciplinary set of practices and communities that I refer to as "embodied justice" is currently known by various names, including "Embodied Social Justice" (Johnson, 2018), "Healing Justice" (Page & Woodland, 2023), "Somatic Abolitionism" (Menakem, 2022), "Embodied Activism" (Johnson, 2023), or "Social Justice Somatics" (Haines, n.d.). With roots in an ancient and continuous lineage of Indigenous philosophers, Black feminists, and other scholars, artists, and spiritual practitioners who have considered justice in terms of the body, contemporary embodied justice has developed—over the past roughly 25 years—at the intersection of social justice-oriented "movement spaces" and healing-centered "embodiment spaces." This is a conversation that became steadily more urgent in the early 2020s, when a series of events with global impact—including the COVID-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the January 6 attack on the US Capitol (to name just a few)—drew thousands toward the proliferation of texts, podcast, and online workshops focusing on the intersection of embodiment and social justice. Indeed, it was with the support of several organizations offering such

workshops—including both Embody Lab[2] and Transformative Change[3]—that collaborators were invited to participate in the Living Justice project.

Often with upward of 700 participants Zooming in from a broad span of different geographic and "social locations," embodied justice workshops often involve both lectures and discussions as well as small group and individual practices that center the phenomenological, relational body—or "soma"—as the site of as well as the vehicle for enacting social change (brown, 2017; Ginwright, 2022; Haines, 2019; Hemphill, 2024; Johnson, 2023; Menakem, 2017, 2022; Ritchie, 2023; williams et al., 2016). This frequently includes critiques of the ways in which embodiment and relational healing are often absent from movement spaces (Haines, 2019; Johnson, 2018) as well as the fact that embodiment spaces—despite the ideals embraced by most of its practitioners—frequently take shape as exclusive communities catering to white, able-bodied, socioeconomically advantaged participants (Jain, 2020; Lucia, 2020). It also includes explicit discussions about the physical, relational, and psychological as well as social, economic, and political impacts of the kinds of "disembodiment" characterizing all aspects of contemporary society, including social justice (Haines, 2019; Johnson, 2018).

Such discussions, accordingly, provide a foundation for multiple individual and group practices designed to support participants in cultivating their "somatic bandwidth" or their capacity to tolerate challenging emotions, vulnerable conversations, and unjust realities (Johnson, 2023; see also Menakem, 2022). This is often framed, importantly, as a spatiotemporal, relational project of "becoming present" *with* self, others, and world (Hemphill, 2024; see also Pritzker & Living Justice Collaborators, in press). Embodied justice nevertheless also frequently includes an intense engagement with the *past* in exercises that support participants in confronting and healing intergenerational, socio-historically situated trauma as well as connecting to intergenerational wisdom (Menakem, 2017). Many embodied justice practices are thus fine-tuned to helping people become aware of the complex ways in which the unjust "external" systems they seek to dismantle—global racial capitalism, ablesim, patriarchy, to name just a few—must also be dismantled within the body-self.

In addition to highlighting the importance of the phenomenological and relational body, theories in embodied justice are thus consistently formulated around the somatope of the capacious or learning body. The body, here, is often simultaneously understood as a culturally and socially accumulated "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1977) as well as a capacity for becoming *more embodied* (Hemphill, 2024, 4). Workshops in embodied justice thus frequently orient to the kinds of personal healing and self-development work that is often critiqued as the being the kind of "technology of the self" that turns participants' attention away from the social (see, e.g., Foucault, 1988; Rose, 1990; Teo, 2018). The kinds of critiques of therapeutic healing practices focused on the self as (at best) being apolitical and (at worse) perpetuating injustice are a frequent point of discussion in embodied justice workshops. In orienting to the goal of social justice, however, embodied justice practitioners view such healing not as an *alternative* to collective social action, but rather as a complementary and essential component of such work (Johnson, 2018; Ndefo, 2021, 2024).

## SCALAR INTIMACY AND SCALAR INQUIRY

Though chronotopes are often engaged as existing social forms (e.g., nouns) that precede and structure interaction, linguistic anthropologists have also focused on the ways thye are actively co-produced, oriented to, and sometimes challenged in interaction (e.g., as verbs). Within emerging "semiotic ecologies" continually constituted by co-present interlocutors, moreover, the formulation of chronotopes contributes to shaping the "constrained [still] but open-ended" horizons of possibility that unfold within everyday interaction or "co-operative

action" (Goodwin, 2018, 445–446). The enactment of *scalar intimacy*, for example, often involves an emergent, situated, and strategic formulation of chronotopes as speakers variably positioning themselves in space and time as well as in relation to dominant ideologies, institutions, and relational structures (Pritzker & Perrino, 2020). Within the context of a particular interaction, for example, a speaker might draw upon any number of discursive strategies—semantics, grammar, prosody, facial expression, gesture, and so on—to position themselves variably closer to or distant from certain geographical as well as ideological "locations." Scalar intimacy thus often emerges as a relationally situated project of identification oriented toward the goal of creating connection, identifying points of difference, and navigating the thorny question of whether and how interlocutors might (or might not) be able to relate to one another in space and time. Though overlapping with the notions of ideological scale-making (Carr & Lempert, 2016; Gal & Irvine, 2019), as well as stance-taking (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009), scalar intimacy attends, in particular, to the phenomenological experiences and relational opportunities made possible when speakers make chronotopic distinctions—for example, between "here" and "there," "then" and "now"—in the context of interaction. Scalar intimacy, in this sense, thus often constitutes a form of *political subjectivity*, understood here as "a relationally co-emergent understanding of one's affective-relational body-self in relation to real or imagined social, spatial, and temporal trajectories" (Pritzker, 2023, 2).

The enactment of scalar intimacy, multiple researchers have demonstrated, often reproduces and reinforces dominant cultural chronotopes such as "Made in Italy" (Perrino, 2020), "the nice, white ally" (Delfino, 2021), or "the family" (Pritzker, 2024; Wong et al., 2021). People, however, also frequently enact a more tentative and experimental form of scalar intimacy that I have called *scalar inquiry* (Pritzker, 2023, 2024). Scalar inquiry, specifically, involves actively interrogating and at least tentatively re-positioning oneself in relation to hegemonic ideologies and culturally salient chronotopes. Often grounded in a phenomenological mode of uncertainty or subjunctivity that incorporates multiple, often-contradictory perspectives (Good & Good, 1994; Samuels, 2018), scalar inquiry thus often precedes the kinds of formal rechronotopizations through which speakers regularly "update" their understanding of and experience in space and time (Karimzad & Catedral, 2021, 22). The following analysis thus centers the ways in which, in responding to a prompt asking them to define social justice in relation to embodiment, LJP collaborators frequently engaged in nuanced forms of both scalar intimacy and scalar inquiry.

## METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The Living Justice Project, as described briefly above, was centered around the question of what it looks, feels, and sounds like to live (toward) justice in everyday life. It included 54 diverse collaborators between the ages of 22–73 who are located across 18 US states as well as in Canada, Germany, Ireland, and England (see Figures 1 and 2). Collaborators all had a range of experience in embodied justice and worked as academics, artists, restorative justice facilitators, dancers, senior policy advisors, K-12 teachers, meditation and/or yoga teachers, care-practitioners, social workers, and as change-makers in a range of other fields. From the outset, finally, all collaborators were given the opportunity to participate using their own name (51) or anonymously (3).

LJP, importantly, was neither an efficacy study focusing on the "outcomes" of embodied justice nor a study aiming to track what people "actually do" to embody justice. The project, rather, consisted of a kind of *aspirational research* in which we collaboratively engaged the question of what it means to embody justice in everyday life. Methods thus included multiple ethnographic components designed to evoke and provoke further consideration
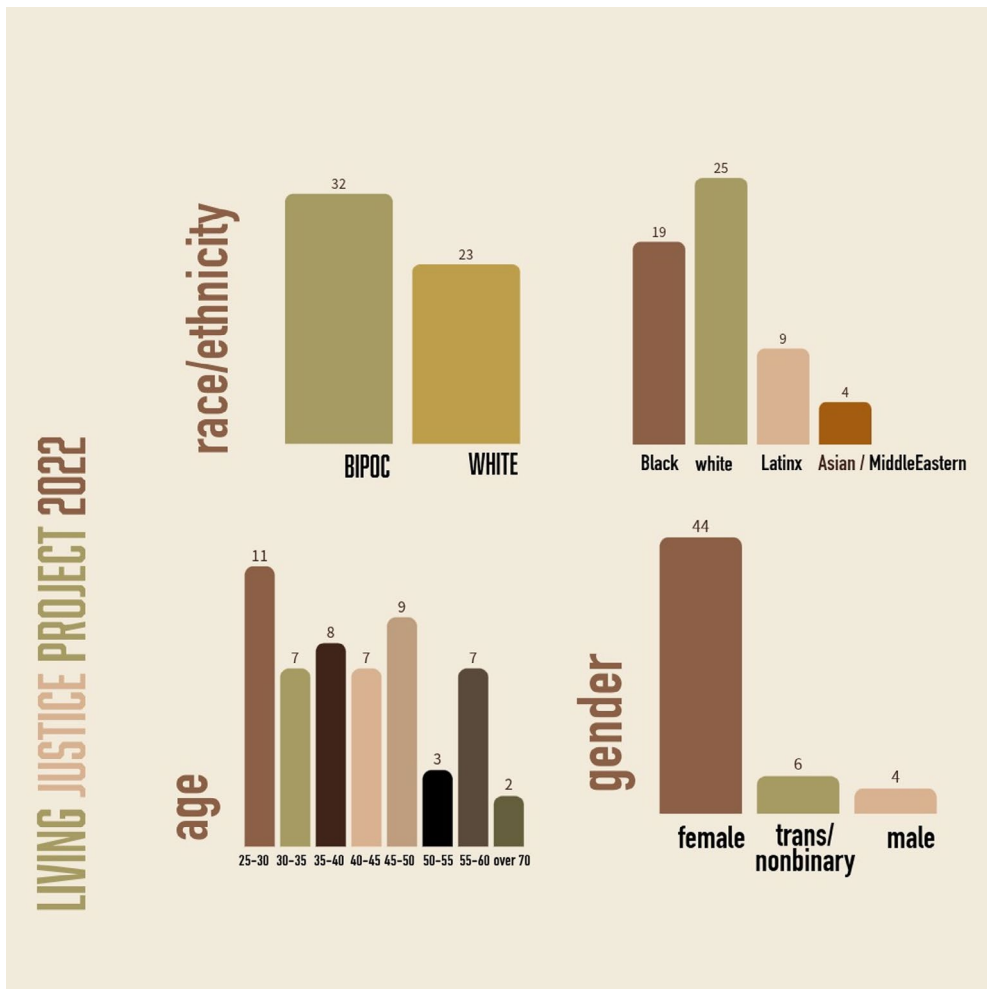
**FIGURE 1** LJP collaborator demographics.

of the practical implications of the theories and practices of embodied justice developed in texts, podcasts, and workshops. The project, specifically, included one individual or group "interview-conversation" with each collaborator. It also included three focused 5-day ethnographic "time capsules," each of which included 15–20 collaborators who were invited to contribute photographs, video- and audio-recordings, and text-based reflections in response to a series of prompts and projects using the mobile ethnography application, EthOS App.[4] Following Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson's framing of "research as ceremony" (2008), we also formulated each time capsule as a collective, community-building experience consisting of both opening and closing circles as well as "daily drop-ins." This commitment to community and co-authorship has continued over the past 2 years in regular all-collaborator "open meetings" where we engage in collaborative analyses of our collective data.

The present paper, importantly, is a direct outcome of this ongoing collaboration and was developed in conversation with multiple collaborators over several open meetings. Though it offers direct quotes from 22 out of 54 collaborators (see Figure 3), it is based on responses to a single question asked of all collaborators: "What does 'social justice' mean to you now, and what role do you think embodiment and/or healing trauma plays in social justice?" This question was crafted to invite impromptu definitions reflecting their understanding at the time

**FIGURE 2**    World map showing locations of LJP collaborators in 2022. Map created with ZeeMaps.

of interview (March–December 2022). All responses should therefore be taken as temporally situated, unscripted formulations rather than fixed "definitions." For brevity, the following sections offer analyses of brief excerpts from longer responses. Captioned video clips and full transcripts of non-anonymous collaborators, however, are publicly available on our website.[5]

## (RE)SCALING EQUALITY

Like most definitions of social justice in both governmental and grass-roots organizations (Gemignani et al., 2023; Levin, 2020; Shufutinsky et al., 2022; UN, 2006), LJP collaborators often foregrounded the core concern and core value of *equality* in their formulations of social justice. Here, they often explicitly engaged with the way the chronotopic landscape of distance and difference characterizing the lived experience of inequality impacted the body. In the process of reformulating the meaning of social justice to include the body, however, LJP collaborators further engaged in a nuanced somatopic (re)working that rescaled equality in as an embodied, relational practice continually emerging within and across body–space–time.

In her initial response to the question of how she defines social justice in relation to embodiment, for example, Paula Moreau-Smith responded quickly with a definition she framed to be close-at-hand: "The first thing that came into my head was equality for all," she said. She immediately continued speaking, however, expressing her felt experience of needing

**FIGURE 3** LJP collaborators cited in the following sections. From left/top: Paula Moreau-Smith (she/her), Leeds, England; Zulma Berenice Gonzalez Velazquez (she/her), Gulf Breeze, FL; Rebbeca Slover (she/her), Dutch Flat, CA; Samuel Leguizamon Grant (he/they/we), Longmont, CO; Morgan Teel (she/her), Austin, TX; Gail Jackson (she/they), Anchorage, AK; Chelvanaya Bayo Gabriel (they/them), Holyoke, MA; Monika Son (she/her), Queens, NY; Michelle Thornhill (she/her), Feasterville-Trevose, PA; Hala Khouri (she/her), Los Angeles, CA; Niralli D'Costa (she/her), Port Hueneme, CA; Gabrielle Geller (she/her), White Salmon, WA; Barbara ("Bob-e") Simpson Epps (no pronouns), Eden Prairie, MN; jylani ma'at (she/her), Los Angeles, CA; Care [Elia Fushi Bekene] (they/them/iel), Berlin, Germany; Corrie Lapinsky (she/her), Apple Valley, MN; Molly Holsen (she/her), Milwaukee, WI; Mara Martinez-Hewitt (they/them), Los Angeles, CA; Mattie M. (she/her), Philadelphia, PA; Niyati Shah (she/her), Washington, DC; Paul du Buf (he/him), Vancouver Island, BC, Canada; Rahshaana Green (she/her), Brooklyn, NY; *project director* Sonya Pritzker (she/they), Tuscaloosa, AL; *graduate research assistant* Baili Gall (she/her), Tuscaloosa, AL. Collage by author.

to further interrogate that definition. "But if feels as if you need to look deeper into that," she said. Chronotopically casting equality as a space needing further investigation, she went on to offer a visual perspective.

> What I see is an an energy just swirling and mixing and moving. I can see colorful swirls of energy…all moving and swirling and mixing. There aren't any lines separating them: they're just merging and entwining and moving.

Continually emphasizing that she was describing an image she sees at a distance as it emerges, Paula's repeated use of distal deictics (e.g., "they/them") scaled social justice quite broadly as a space–time characterized by both *movement* (e.g., swirling, moving) and *relationality* (e.g., merging and entwining). Her description further invokes anf open and fluid space–time within which "colorful swirls of energy" are neither restricted nor contained by "lines" designating where and when they can move, mix, or entwine. Paula then moved quickly into an elaboration that rapidly scaled her vision on increasingly more intimate scales:

> [Social justice] is about us having the right to be in these swirls of movement in our lives and not be limited to being in this one spot. This one spot is, 'You're Black and that's where you should be.' Or, you know, 'You're Chinese and that's where you should be,' or whatever—that I have the ability to move and merge and swirl and entwine and mix with different colors and different tastes and flavors and sensations.

In this part of her response, Paula notably shifted rapidly from distal pronouns (e.g., "they/them") to proximal, inclusive pronouns (e.g., "us/our") to describe social justice in terms of the "rights" that "we" have to occupy and move through space. Invoking a spatiotemporal representation of the ways in which injustice restricts agency and movement, Paula goes on to quote the usually unspoken "voice" of the (white) chronotopic racial and sociomoral logics restricting people to "one spot" in space. Here, she offered two examples of racialized identities (e.g., "Black" and "Chinese")—the first of which corresponds to the designation she has been subject to for her whole life—before adding a "whatever" to imply a potentially endless continuation of imposed identity categories. Immediately following this expansion, however, she adopted first-person pronouns to formulate social justice as a simultaneously personal and relational form of agency that is experienced in qualitative, embodied terms such as *taste*, *flavor*, and *sensation*. Paula proceeded, from here, to close her response by zooming in on the *quality* and purpose of relationships, which she imagines as possibly fleeting but meaningful encounters that can be freely engaged without limitations. By centering the relational body in and across space and time, Paula's formulation remaps equality an embodied connectivity that is nevertheless fluid and flexible as people "merge and swirl and entwine and mix." This, importantly, generates a multi-scalar view on equality not just as a set of "rights" or fair number of opportunities, but *also* as a lived process of movement, connectivity, and agency within and across space and time.

Like Paula, Zulma Berenice Gonzalez Velazquez opened her response by foregrounding popular ideas of social justice as equality, fairness, and accessibility. Speaking implicitly to the ways in which equality is frequently understood in quantitative terms that cast it as "a fair number of opportunities," Zulma began by (re)situating social justice in *temporal* as well as *experiential* terms: "Social justice is when those who are ready," she said, "are able to take the opportunity." This initial response, importantly, chronotopically imagines social justice as a time that is somatically and relationally situated in the lived experience of being "ready" and "able" to take up opportunities. Drawing on her own lived experience living on the margins—as a Latina woman whose working-class parents immigrated to the United States when she was a child—Zulma continued to offer a perspective that zoomed in on the real or potential lived experience of systemically marginalized people:

> It could be internal--maybe the opportunity is there but you are not giving yourself the opportunity. Maybe you don't feel good enough because you've been told you aren't good enough by someone or something that wanted to hold you back. Social justice is when those who are ready are able to take the opportunity. Because there are opportunities that are actually labeled "minority-friendly" or whatnot. But it's more about making the opportunities that are out there really open, accessible, and fair. Regardless of your gender, your color. Where you qualify because of your talent and skill, not anything else. Or or that none of that holds you back.

Beginning with a chronotopic casting of (possibly) "internal" dynamics and casting opportunity is something one gives to *oneself*, Zulma's formulation of social justice here centers the embodied, affective, and relational experience of marginalized people. This provided the ground for her further elaboration of social justice as a *time* as well as an embodied condition of possibility

(e.g., "social justice is *when* those who are ready are able to take the opportunity"). By reframing opportunity as a time as well as an embodied form of agency, Zulma's elaboration here thus upends the normative chronotopic casting of opportunity as something that is offered or given by those at the center to those on the margins. She went on to conclude, however, with a recalibrated, dual perspective that considered both the intentions of opportunity-creators *and* the experiences of those positioned as the targets of such opportunities. Regardless of how opportunities are labeled (e.g., as "minority-friendly), she thus said, social justice obtains in the process of creating opportunities that are genuinely 'open, accessible, and fair'" to individuals who might otherwise be "held back" by their gender, color, talent, or skill. Here indexing her commitment to embodying safety and creating spaces of healing for Latinx communities, Zulma's definition thus offers a both/and somatopic perspective that remapped equality as a set of relational and embodied practices offering a sense of dignity, safety, and belonging such that people are able to act agentively in the world.

Paula's and Zulma's definitions both gesture toward an embodied perspective on equality as *inclusion*, an entailment of equality that was explicitly centered by several other collaborators. Rebecca Slover, for example, described social justice as an agentive process of "honoring *what is* so that everyone is included." Social justice, she clarified here, is "not a top-down process" but rather an "arms-out-to-the-side" experience. In this casting, the meaning of social justice is both temporal (e.g., "honoring what is") and spatial (e.g., in the sense that there is room for everyone to stretch their "arms out to the side"). "The social," by extension, might be envisioned as a large body made up of many bodies with their arms out to their sides. Rebecca's brief formulation, like Paula's and Zulma's, thus productively unsettles and expands the chronotopic configuration of equality (as inclusion or "rights") in abstract, quantitative, or reductive terms.

Dr. Samuel Leguizamon Grant likewise zoomed in on the ways in which equality is potentially enacted across bodies in moments of potential connection. Drawing on the inherently chronotopic notion of "deep democracy"—formally defined as the process of "co-creating conditions in the world that foster the flourishing of all life" (Grant 2023 as cited in Johnson, 2023, 144)—Sam described social justice as a "constant dance" demanding both *fluidity* and *solidness*. He drew, here, upon the notion—common in somatopic formulations in embodied justice—that bodies-in-relation are vehicles for intergenerational and intercultural experience:

> I come from a lineage that has a collective body story, and yet now I'm in a new place with people I haven't been in space with before. So I have to be open enough to recognize that I lay my lineage down here in this circle. It's a gift to the circle. What does the circle experience as it experiences this, this lineage that I represent? Does it welcome all of that? Does it exclude some of that? What can it hear? What can it open itself to? What can I hear? What can I open myself to? Social justice is not something that can be defined as a frozen, rigid construct. It's something that has to remain always open.

In Sam's formulation of social justice, bodies entering any space—chronotopically reimagined here as a "circle"—arrive bearing the lived realities of their "lineage." Simply being in a shared space, especially with unfamiliar others, means "laying that lineage down" within the space. In Sam's formulation, this offering is configured as a "gift" to the circle. Moving into a mode of inquiry, he then asked whether the circle "welcomes" all of the gift, or whether it "excludes" all or some of it. Sam's response thus maps social justice as a relational space–time of relational reciprocity that entails being included, heard, and received as well as being willing to see and open oneself. His formulation grounds (in)equality, in other words, in the real-time (un)willingness of multi-temporal body-selves to "open themselves" to one another. As such, Sam's formulation

thoroughly rejects a framing that configures equality and inclusivity as a simple "leveling of the playing field" for disembodied individuals. Indeed, he concluded by recasting social justice as a temporally emergent, relational process that is indeterminate and unfixed. Sam's formulation of social justice thus underscores the ways in which he and other LJP collaborators (re)formulated equality—in somatopic terms—as a nuanced relational process shifting back and forth between the dignity of particular body-selves and the relational flow of information between and across bodies within particular shared spaces.

Several collaborators, it is worth noting here, also explicitly chronotopically formulated equality as an embodied, relational process of "holding space." Morgan Teel defined social justice a community of people "that hold space for one another…for listening and being heard." For Morgan, such a community affords, enacts, and (co)produces "dignity, respect, and honor" such that they can "penetrate one's very being," on what she framed as a "muscular, skeletal, and cellular level." The idea of "holding space" in Morgan's definition maps equality, in social justice, as an embodied *atmosphere* grounded in relationality. Rather than point to the kinds of "safe spaces" imagined (and critiqued) for being space–times in which no one is challenged, and debate dies on the vine (see, e.g., Flensner & von der Lippe, 2019), however, Morgan and other collaborators often took great care in pointing out how, from a somatopic perspective on equality, holding space must also involve the kind of genuine communication across difference that may not always *feel* safe. Gail Jackson, for example, situated relational social justice in the co-creation of "brave" rather than "safe" spaces. These are spaces, Gail observes, "where people can be open to share if they like to share or to be able, when these injustices happen, to move with it and not against it." This formulation, importantly, chronotopically maps social encounters as spaces subject to somatic and relational *weather patterns* associated with broader structures of injustice brought into the space by, in, and across, bodies.

These examples demonstrate how LJP collaborators frequently engaged in both scalar intimacy and scalar inquiry as they described social justice in relation to embodiment. In doing so, I have shown, they crafted somatopic narratives for social justice that complicated, deepened, and expanded upon abstract chronotopic notions of equality as a redistribution of resources or an opening of pathways from the margin toward the center. Their formulations, specifically, (re)scaled equality as an embodied, relational practice emerging within and across body-space–time. As I discuss further below, this reorientation contributed to the expansion of the purpose and practice of social justice to include novel forms of embodied, relational healing. At the same time, it also contributed to the expansion of the moral meaning of "embodied healing" to include social justice.

# (RE)CONFIGURING RECOGNITION

As LJP collaborators experimented with reconfiguring the meaning of social justice in terms of the relational body, their formulations also frequently engaged somatopic shifts affecting the narrative logics of *recognition* and *responsibility* in normative definitions of social justice. As in such definitions, this involved considerations of what it means, to "see," "hear," or "respond" to injustice in the world. Body-centered considerations of recognition, however, here often worked to destabilize the way that the chronotopic boundaries between "self" and the world of "the social" are normatively imagined. LJP collaborators here worked to craft somatopic narratives of recognition involving *both* an embodied turn toward an "outside" world of as well as an "inward" turn toward the embodied, phenomenological world(s) of sensation, emotion, and relational experience. Specifically, their somatopic (re)formulations expanded the purpose of practice in social justice to include both "movement work" (e.g., collective action, protest, and policy change) *and* the cultivation of one's embodied capacity to not just

see but to become *present with* the world. Recognition and responsibility were thus often reconfigured as a kind of *response-ability* or the cultivated capacity to witness and respond to the world. This afforded the elaboration of two critical variations of the connected body—what I call, here, "body-in-world" and "world-in-body"—that are often central to the purpose and practice of embodied justice.

## Body-in-world

Chelvanaya Gabriel, for example, began by grounding their response in a multi-scalar social field that included the complex indexical significance of the term "social justice" for various interest groups as well as dominant notions of equality and "human rights" in social justice. "Social justice, to some degree, is a catchphrase that means a lot of things to a lot of different people," they said. Proceeding quickly to acknowledge their recognition of how my question asked for *their* definition rather than a general definition, they clarified that the multiplicity of meanings attached to social justice by different people was itself "part of my answer." They continued, however, to frame their own definition of social justice as a relationally situated, embodied capacity to "see the connection of all beings." Pausing to note that social justice is about "more than just human rights," Chelvanaya then expanded the notion of recognition to include "our plant and animal cousins," who they positioned as "just as valid, and worthy of being considered and being listened to." Extending the spatiotemporal boundaries of the relational self to stretch across not just human bodies but all beings, Chelvanaya here notably referred to both plants and animals using kinship terms. This rescaling grounded their formulation of social justice in a somatope that resembles what I have discussed previously as "the extended self" as a body that is permeable to and continuous with other bodies in the world (Pritzker, 2024, 23–24). For Chelvanaya, what I am here engaging as the "body-in-world" somatope further afforded a (re)examination of the demands that this relationally expansive formulation of social justice places on embedded individuals. As a form of embodied recognition, Chelvanaya thus posited, "[social justice] is also about noticing and naming inequities and imbalances—the ways any of those beings that I just named are being harmed or are being devalued." This inherently relational formulation thus somatopically locates social justice as a form of recognition acutely attuned to moments when bodies—as integral parts of the whole—are "pulled apart" from one another. These moments of disconnection must then be identified and "named." Recognition and response-ability, in Chelvanaya's framing, are thus constituted by a multi-part commitment consisting of the reformulation of the boundaries of the self; the cultivation of embodied awareness; and the use of language to give voice to harms, inequities, and imbalances.

Dr. Monika Son similarly invoked the value of recognition in her formulation of social justice as the capacity to "see others" and to "bear witness to their full experience." Here, however, she went on to scale her formulation in explicitly somatopic terms, framing social justice—from a phenomenological, relational perspective—as an enduring "commitment to connection" as well as "a commitment to seeing…the real truth of the conditions of the world and wanting to lean into connecting with that suffering." Monika thus continued to describe the work of social justice, in somatopic terms, as an ongoing form of embodied commitment that she further described as "a space of inquiry" that demands an "analysis of your own location."

> It's a space of inquiry in which you ask Where do I fit into this? What can I do? What am I feeling as I'm seeing this, and sitting with all of this? So it's a analysis of your own location in that, right? …It is a journey that's going to be changing for all of us in our lifetime. But I think it really begins by really witnessing the truth

of the suffering of the world. And asking "where is my location in that? And what can I do with that?"

Monika's formulation notably casts social justice as a situated, continuous process of (scalar inquiry), here framed as an *orientational practice* that involves "finding your location" within and in relation to the world. Recognition, in this framing, demands that individuals work to continually understand the position, location, or role of one's individual body within a broader body politic occurring at multiple, simultaneous scales of micro (e.g., interactional) and macro (e.g., the conditions of the world) body–space–time.

Michelle Thornhill offered a similar interrogation that approached social justice as an embodied capacity to feel injustice and respond accordingly:

> When I think about social justice, what comes to mind for me is the fact that we know injustice. Because we feel it, right? I think that is the beginning: being able to interpret it, to translate it, to know how it feels inside your body. When it comes to embodying social justice, I think that it comes down to being able to speak truth to some of those perceived powers that are out there. And then have it resonate with in yourself and to feel your way through what you are experiencing.

Beginning with a statement of fact following by a question, Michelle's response here casts the relational body as an inherently sensitive compass that be further fine-tuned through interpretation and translation. Recognition, in her framing, emerges as a phenomenological, relationally situated practice of response-ability that constitutes the ground for effective social action. Invoking the somatope of the capacious body, Michelle notably configures social action as a communicative capacity to speak truth to power. Enacting a chronotopic shift from inwardly directed feeling to outwardly directed speech and back again, Michelle's somatopic depiction of social justice thus situates embodiment as the crucial pivot point for social action. She proceeded, here, to formulate recognition as a temporally continuous process of *inquiry* that moves "back and forth" between self and world:

> It's something that happens to us every single day…. It comes down to someone being or feeling oppressed, or feeling how someone else may be experiencing oppression. And then having that resonate in your body. Because the body does send clues. It helps you to be able to be centered also, to be able to say, "Okay, well that twinge just told me something. And can I operate beneath the subconscious level the way that my body is operating? And can I stay in the moment? And can I see it for what it is and then be able to come back to myself?"

Moving from an inclusive, collective pronoun ("us") to the impersonal "you" pronoun to first-person pronouns, Michelle depicted social justice in somatopic terms centering the embodied capacity to read the "clues" sent by the (speaking) body as it responds to injustice in the world. Centering her formulation of social justice as an ongoing, phenomenological form of response-ability, Michelle thus reframed social justice as a temporally situated, relational project that is always anchored to a situated, feeling body. For Michelle, this is a body that is always interacting with structures of power and forces of oppression that register as the kind of embodied "twinges" that demand further interpretation. Centering her formulation of social justice around the somatope of the capacious body, Michelle thus somatopically casts recognition and response-ability as the capacity "stay centered" and present and to "come back" to the self. As in both previous examples, both recognition and responsibility are cast not only as a turn toward others (e.g., away from the self) as in normative discourses of recognition as an outward-facing

form of civic responsibility. Recognition and responsibility are, rather, reconfigured as a simultaneous turn toward the self and the world.

## World-in-body

LJP collaborator's formulations of social justice as recognition as response-ability further often hinged on a chronotopic perspective that situated bodies not just "in the world" but also *as* the world, so to speak. Here, collaborators drew upon the notion that no matter our social location, oppressive systems in both the past and present (e.g., global racial capitalism, white supremacy, ablism, patriarchy) are internalized in our bodies through embodied practice and lived experience over time and that dismantling such systems in the "external" world demands simultaneously dismantling them within the self (Haines, 2019; Hemphill, 2024; Johnson, 2023; Khouri, 2024; Menakem, 2017, 2022). Hala Khouri, for example, framed the "work" of social justice in terms of *detoxing* the body: "If we say we are for social justice, the work has to be embodied," she said, "We have to detox injustice and bias and oppression from our own nervous systems." Niralli D'Costa similarly described social justice as a spatiotemporally situated mandate to "to get friendly with those parts that are really scary to look at, including our own judgment and our own hatred toward others that are harming in the world." Gabrielle Geller likewise centered the critical demand to "acknowledge the ways in which our bodies remember generations and generations of the historical past, which can be deeply lodged in our muscles, our cells." Hala, Niralli, Gabrielle, and many other collaborators thus formulated recognition as constituted by an engaged process of excavation in which we come to see the body as a lived repository containing and sustaining toxic forms of injustice in the world. They crafted somatopic formulations of social justice, in other words, that chronotopically remapped the individual body-self as spatially and temporally continuous with the world at various scales and thus centered a somatope I call "world-in-body."

Like those emphasizing the body-in-world perspective described above, formulations centering the world-in-body chronotope unsettled the spatial boundaries normatively presumed to distinguish self from world. In stretching recognition to include the ways in which historical structures of power have "landed" in the bodies of individual, such formulations also, importantly, often worked to rescale normative boundaries between past and present. For the bulk of LJP collaborators who identified as Black, Latinx, and Indigenous, this often involved discussion about the embodied "burdens" associated with the lived and generationally transmitted trauma of living on the margins. Barbara ("Ms. Bob-e") Simpson Epps, for example, defined embodied social justice as a process that involved "dealing with how I internalize all of the oppressions that come my way, and how they impact me mentally, spiritually, financially and physically. And what do I need to do to take care of myself?" Ms. Bob-e's definition is thus firmly situated in a first-person perspective that recognizes the ways in which she, as a Black woman, is presently affected as well as intimately shaped by forces of oppression. Ms. Bob-e notably turned to the past here, however, reflecting her embodied experience of difference as a child:

> When I was young, there was a knowledge that I was different, that I was set apart because of the color of my skin, There were times when my body was stiffened with fear. My body felt like it was panting. Even when I wasn't showing visible signs, internally my body was panting.

Recognition, for Ms. Bob-e, means coming to understand and reflect upon how her body served as the medium by which the world outside her in essence *became* her in particular interactions across time.

The work of recognizing world-in-body was also frequently understood, however, as an embodied process of learning to attune to the embodied "gifts" offered by the recognition of potent forms of ancestral experience and wisdom that are continued in our own bodies. As Ms. Bob-e put it: "As much as I was panting, I felt inside me a kind of strength and encouragement. My body felt like my ancestors were holding me up: I felt the support of my parents and their parents and all the elders around me." For Ms. Bob-e, recognition thus consists of a simultaneous positioning of the body as a receptacle for injustice in the world as well as a storehouse of resistance and dignity that continually fuels a somatopic understanding of and commitment to the work of social justice. Response-ability, in this sense, consists of an agentive enactment of self-knowledge and self-care as well as an inherent, embodied, and ongoing lineage of *survivance* (Vizenor, 1999) stretching into the past as well as the possible future. Indeed, as jylani ma'at put it, "I feel like I was born into embodied social justice. When has there ever been a time that a Black-bodied person was not embodied in social justice?" Response-ability, here, might be agentive but is not necessarily a "choice." In their formulation of social justice, for example Care thus pondered what they might be doing if they were born into a White body: "Would I maybe just be a baker?" they ask, going on to observe that "I wish that embodied social justice was a choice for me, but I don't think it was. I think it was mostly out of survival."

Many white collaborators, on the other hand, observed how—within a society characterized by disembodied forms of capitalism, white supremacy, ableism, and cis-heteronormativity (to name just a few)—the carving out of space to engage in the work of cultivating the capacious body is especially necessary for people who are normally accustomed to privilege. Their formulations thus cast proximity to power as a different but equally oppressive kind of embodied burden. Citing Resmaa Menakem's astute observation that white-bodied people involved social justice often seem to be caught up in an anxiety born of the tension between simultaneous feelings of "urgency" and "stuckness," for example, Corrie Lapinsky observed how embodied healing practices have allowed her to shift from a frantic search for "how to help" to a focus on the so-called "internal work" that she framed as offering a better foundation for effective social justice work. Defining social justice as a need to address systemic issues through embodied action, Molly Holsen similarly issued an explicit caveat targeted at white people, including herself: "Especially for white people," she said, "for centuries we have become more and more disconnected from our bodies. Because of systems, because of religion, because of society in general…the body has been treated as an object, rather than as a personal thing that deserves to be honored." Recognition of the ways in which oppressive systems have settled as particular forms of *dis*embodiment in white bodies, for Molly, demands a specific kind of learning: "I think, for white people, we need to start listening to our bodies," she said, going on to clarify that such learning often requires a kind of stepping back and slowing down in order to cultivate the capacity for connection as the basis for social action.

Recognition and response-ability in collaborators' somatopic reformulations of social justice centered around the world-in-body somatope were thus acutely attuned to the divergent ways that injustice relates to social location. They also grappled, however, with the possibility that the body constitutes a basis for the kind of recognition and response-ability that travels across difference, so to speak. Mapping liberation as a space–time that we must learn how to "live into," for example, Hala Khouri (cited above) added the observation that "we have to live into liberation together." Implicitly invoking the kinds of "affinity spaces" that are common and often necessary due to the harmful ways in which recognition-work has the capacity to trigger intense responses in multi-racial spaces (DiAngelo, 2018), Hala's formulation here further mapped social justice as an inherently relational process in which the spatiotemporal boundaries separating people based on race can—indeed, *must*—be made permeable. As I

discuss in the following section, both recognition and response-ability, from this perspective, constitute a relational, body-centered pathway to "practicing liberation" in the present.

# (RE)ORIENTING PROGRESS

The chronotope of "progress" in social justice, as discussed above, is often oriented toward an imagined future in which justice prevails. This imaginary contributes to the formulation and enactment of social justice as aspirational project that is continually fueled by and, indeed, even *requires* suffering in the present (Atchinson, 2015). As Hala Khouri's formulation of "living into liberation" suggests, however, LJP collaborators also frequently somatopically cast social justice as an embodied, relational process of creating a just possible *present*. In crafting a her definition of social justice in relation to the body, for example, Mara Martinez-Hewitt initially defined social justice as "a vision and a hope for the future." They proceeded, however, to describe it as also being "a space that we can tap into" in the present. Formulations of social justice thus frequently reoriented the value of progress through the lens of a both/and perspective that somatopically (re)framed movement toward the future as a relational and embodied capacity that is available in the here-and-now.

Mattie M., for example, initially described social justice as "a vision for the future." She went on, however, to reformulate her response in distinctly multi-scalar terms:

> We think about it on these huge levels, but really it just comes down to the ways that we interact with each other on a daily basis, and how we can hold space for one another in important moments— and also in not important moments.

The possible future, in Mattie's formulation, simultaneously exists as a possible present that is brought to life *in* and *through* the relational body *across* particular space-times.

In centering their formulations social justice around the somatope of the capacious body, LJP collaborators here frequently engaged in a nuanced form of scalar inquiry in which they sometimes interrogated the spatial placement of justice and/or liberation as a distant destination situated in the future. Niyati Shah, for example, initially defined social justice as "agitating for change and liberation and freedom." She went on, here, to formulate embodiment as the medium for "sustain[ing] movement" as well as the means for "getting to freedom and liberation." When I questioned her about where she envisioned "getting to," however, Niyati noted that "I don't think we're necessarily just [going] *toward* liberation: I believe it's already in us, and I think it's always been in us. It's part of our true nature." In (re)situating liberation as "already in us," Niyati thus engaged a critical chronotopic shift that placed liberation not in the far-away (im)possible future but, rather, in the somatopic present. Liberation, in this mapping, is both *here* and *now* as well as *within*. The spatiotemporal gap often depicted as existing between the miserable present and the just possible future in normative definitions of social justice, in other words, is transformed into a gap between practices that reproduce oppressive ideologies and practices that enact liberation in the present. It also, importantly, becomes a gap between people's lived experience and their so-called "true nature" that can only be crossed through embodied and relational healing. "Part of the beauty around embodied healing," Niyati continued, "is that it allows us to connect to that and to expand that so that we are part of the solution that we seek. Because it is already within us." To recall Mara's formulation, social justice here becomes something we can learn to *tap into* as we "unlearn" (in Niyati's terms) habitual patterns of behaving, reacting, and relating.

The line between the temporal present and the embodied, relational notion of "presence" here was notably blurred in many collaborators' formulations of social justice. Paul du Buf, for example, defined social justice as "an inherent, unquestionable connectedness" that

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we can learn to embody and "stay with" as a "felt truth" in the present. Rahshaana Green similarly observed that social justice demands *presence*, which she defined a temporally situated embodied capacity "to be present with what is: not what has been, or what could be, or what could possibly be, but what's actually happening in front of us." Presence emerges as an affordance, in Rahshaana's definition, that "allows us to see things for what they are and make wise skilled choices and [come to know] how to move toward equity [in the future]." Like many other collaborators, both Paul and Rahshaana thus offered a somatopically recalibrated formulation of social justice that repositioned it as something to move toward in the future as well as something that, pending cultivation of the relational body, can also be brought to life in the present.

## DISCUSSION

Throughout this paper, I have attended to the ways in which diverse collaborators in the Living Justice Project formulated social justice in explicitly body-centered or *somatopic* terms. My analysis has emphasized how such formulations took shape as an intimate scaling project involving multiple forms of interrogation or *scalar inquiry* in the context of a temporally and relationally situated interaction. Within our conversations, collaborators thus continually worked to craft novel formulations of social justice in relation to dominant ideologies and practices as well as in relation to their lived experience in space and time. This, importantly, often included lengthy considerations of practices and theories put forth by leading authors in embodied justice. Given that several collaborators were themselves leading figures in the field and others had attended one or more summits, retreats, or certificate programs, this should hardly come as a surprise. Within a theoretical framework attending to scalar intimacy and scalar inquiry, however, it is also important to center how the particular conversational context here—including its timing, its framing as collaborative ethnographic "research," and its open-ended format—afforded a generative kind of subjunctivity that invited collaborators to consider and reconcile multiple possible meanings of social justice in relation to embodiment. These conversations, it is further worth mentioning, also afforded a distinct form of *specificity* that asked collaborators to experiment with crafting their own tentative definitions of the term "social justice" and its indexical entailments—including *equality, recognition*, and *progress*. As they did, I showed, they frequently offered analyses that were more detailed and specific in terms of their explicit consideration of the meaning of social justice in embodied or somatopic terms.

In crafting somatopic interpretations of social justice, I showed, LJP collaborators consistently interrogated and rescaled several of the core chronotopic ideals informing the way social justice—at least in the global west—is normatively understood and enacted. Their impromptu narratives of social justice, specifically, were consistently centered around a series of novel somatopes, including *the phenomenological body, the relational body*, and *the capacious body*. Here, somatopes of the phenomenological body and the relational body afforded a reconsideration of social justice in terms of simultaneously "internal" embodied experience and "external" relationality. This afforded formulations of equality that complicated the seemingly fixed spatiotemporal boundaries regulating and restricting embodied agency within the realm of "the social." They further invoked bodies whose relationality extended far beyond the self as well as both forward and backward in time. This generated castings of recognition as an embodied, relational practice of "response-ability" that consistently unsettled the binary separations of self/world and past/present often presumed by existing definitions of social justice. It further afforded an expanded perspective on the "direction" of social justice that, in addition to embracing an alignment toward justice as a future possibility, remapped "progress" by orienting to the relational and embodied demands of a just possible present.

In somatopic narratives, previous scholars have suggested, "bodies can be made to carry multiple, even contradictory meanings" (Fernandez, 2015, 1124). Indeed, rather than orienting solely within the landscape of difference and distance so often imagined by social justice, LJP collaborators' somatopic (re)formulations frequently expanded normative definitions of social justice by situating the phenomenological, relational, and capacious body as a vehicle for movement that invokes not just one but, indeed, "multiple pathways forward" (Ballard, 2024, 103). Collaborators thus consistently centered their elaborations on around the somatope of the capacious body, a move that contributed to the (re)imagining of social justice as a possibility grounded in the continual refinement and expansion of embodied capacity or "somatic bandwidth" (Johnson, 2023). Embodiment, from this perspective, is something that must be cultivated and healed in order to support justice. Without dismissing the kinds work usually associated with social justice (e.g., protests, community activism, and policy), somatopic readings of social justice here recenter and redirect the work of social justice, guiding participants to engage the often painful work of confronting past and present forms of injustice in one's own body as well as in "the space between us" (Zigon, 2024) as an essential part of social justice. Indeed, in configuring the intergenerational, historical, and relational body as a capacity that can be cultivated in order to enact justice in the present, the somatopic formulations of social justice examined here arguably *demand* this difficult and demanding work.

In closing, it is critical to come back to the temporally situated nature of LJP collaborators' 2022 formulations of social justice, many of which may have considerably changed since that time. In conclusion, however, I want to dwell for a moment on some of the implications of this analysis. From a broader theoretical perspective, specifically, my analysis—centered around the concept of "the somatope"—contributes to linguistic anthropological engagements with the concepts of the chronotope. In particular, it expands upon the notions of scalar intimacy and scalar inquiry as situated projects involving the emplacement of the body in space and time along with the interrogation of normative chronotopic mappings of space and time. In doing so, they further open up space for considering how somatopic (re)formulations of other core theories in linguistic anthropology—theories centering language ideologies, language socialization, or "the total semiotic fact" (Nakassis, 2016; Pennycook, 2023), for example—might be generative for scholars seeking to incorporate the phenomenological, relational body more deeply into their analyses. Turning to theories of the body in psychological and medical anthropology, moreover, my analysis of LJP collaborators' formulations of social justice further unsettles ideological formulations of embodiment "as a kind of phenomenological level playing field upon which shared subjectivities are enacted" (McClure, 2020, 8). Embodiment, in these formulations, demands constant reckoning with the ways in which our social location—especially in terms of race, gender, and ability—has become intersectionally entrenched in our bodies. More specifically, the present analysis responds to calls from interdisciplinary scholars advocating for more diverse and expansive definitions of social justice (Fraser, 2000; Gemignani et al., 2023; Moody-Adams, 2022; Shklar, 1990; Shufutinsky et al., 2022). Indeed, the somatopic explanations of social justice offered by both leaders in embodied justice as well as LJP collaborators here contribute to a reading of social justice that is both expansive and inclusive and that "engages and empowers every member of society to create meaningful social change in their own lives and affirms their capacity for leadership on the issues that matter to them" (Johnson, 2023, 8). My sincere hope is that this further serves as a provocation to consider social justice as an embodied, relational practice that is oriented not only toward the abstract realm of "the social" but also toward the everyday relational space-times in academia and beyond.

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## ENDNOTES

[1] https://livingjusticeproject.com.

[2] https://www.theembodylab.com.

[3] https://www.transformativechange.org.

[4] https://ethosapp.com.

[5] See https://livingjusticeproject.com/defining-embodied-social-justice/.

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