

GOOTHing with AROMA in Atlanta

Paul Donnelly, Division Co-Chair, Dublin Institute of Technology

Banu Özkazanç-Pan, Division Co-Chair, University of Massachusetts Boston

Arturo E. Osorio, Division Treasurer, Rutgers University Newark

Sinéad Ruane, Central Connecticut State University

Sharon Feeney, Dublin Institute of Technology

Rafael Burgos-Mirabal, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Following a three-year hiatus, Atlanta saw us revive what had been a well-received and well-attended staple on the Division's PDW Program for a number of years. Started by Past Division Chair, Sarah Stookey, at the 2009 AOM in Chicago, Getting out of the Hotels —GOOTH for short— represented an opportunity to connect with the local community in some small, yet meaningful way.

Altogether, 28 of us made our way to Atlanta's [Little 5 Points Center for Arts & Community](#) to meet with [Activist Recruitment, Organizing and Mentoring in Atlanta \(AROMA\)](#), a relatively newly formed community group dedicated to recruiting, training and supporting local activism, and some of the local activists and organizers they support.

[AROMA emerged in the wake of Occupy](#), with co-founders Misty Novitch

and Guled Abdilahi seeing the need for a resource for both Atlanta area activists and activist organizations so as to create sustainable activism across local area movements.

As a resource for Atlanta area activists, AROMA provides a gateway to connect potential activists with activist organizations and movements through maintaining a directory and monthly meet-and-greets, along with supporting

Continued on following page...



Breakout discussions.



Breakout discussions.



Misty Novitch and Guled Abdilahi (AROMA co-founders) facilitating introductions.



Abiodun (Abbey) Henderson, founder of "The Come Up Project" and "Gangstas to Growers".

the learning and development of potential activists to engage in activism.

As a resource for activist organizations and movements, AROMA seeks to promote best practice and positions itself as a 'recruitment agency' where they can find trained, committed activists who have been through AROMA's mentoring program, and where they can also send their own activists for training.

Following a brief introduction to AROMA, we then heard from 16 organizers and activists who gave of their time to join us for a conversation. For example, we heard from Abbey (Abiodun Henderson), a former restaurant worker, whose social enterprise, "The Come Up Project", helps Atlanta's formerly incarcerated with a second chance to heal their mind, body, and soul through paid entrepreneurial internships and participation in the legitimate economy.

One of the programs Abbey runs, "[Gangstas to Growers](#)", focuses on empowering at-risk youth, former gang members and formerly incarcerated individuals through agriculture, employment and entrepreneurship. The program provides participants with mentoring from local farmers to plant, harvest, and sell produce to local restaurants and at a



Ife Folami: "Organizing and activism is not like a job; it's a way of life. It's just who we are and what we do."

street side farmer's market. In addition to business and financial literacy courses, the program provides group therapy, yoga, political education, environmental sustainability, and health, nutrition and cooking classes. Already, the program has generated its first workers cooperative, which is producing a hot sauce from locally grown ingredients.

Other organizers and activists spoke about their involvement with such movements as [Hello Racism](#), the [Southern Movement Assembly](#), the [Georgia Safe Schools Coalition](#), [Netroots Nation](#), the [Heroes Alliance](#), [Raksha](#), [UBiG](#), [RESULTS](#), the [National Congress of Black Women](#), [Georgia WAND](#), [Brand New Congress](#), and the [Pittsburgh Community Neighborhood Association](#).

Having learned something about the activists and the work they do, we then broke out into smaller groups for three

rounds of more focused conversations, which offered participants the opportunity to ask questions and learn yet more.

In terms of takeaways, the people we met were clear that activism is a way of life for them. As one of the activists, Ife, put it, "Organizing and activism is not like a job; it's a way of life. It's just who we are and what we do." Ife also equated her activism with survival: "We are activists not by choice but by need. If we do not fight and advocate, us and our kids will have no today or tomorrow."

The organizers and activists we met are very committed to what they do, but they recognize that the organizations and movements with which they are involved are lacking in both capacity and resources. Rounding out the conversation, they shared with us what they felt we, as academics, could do to support them in what they do. Perhaps the best

contribution we can make, they said, is through doing research that assists them in developing and strengthening their arguments.

However, they also commented that we need to communicate our research in ways that are accessible in terms of both the language used and where we pub-

lish. As Stacey, a seasoned activist put it: “As academics, you offer us credibility and legitimacy through the work you do. But, we need you to write in a way that is easily accessible, in a way that ordinary folk can understand”.

Thanks to the participants, we were able to provide AROMA and the organi-

zations they support with a donation of almost US\$700 as a token of our appreciation.

We now turn our focus to AOM 2018, and organizing GOOTH in Chicago. If you have any ideas, please feel free to share them with us.



Farewells – organizers, activists and CMS participants